

Safe and Supportive Schools Commission - Second Annual Report

This report is submitted pursuant to Chapter 284 of the Acts of 2014, An Act Relative to the Reduction of Gun Violence. This Act was signed into law by the Governor on August 13, 2014 (House Bill 4376). Provisions within this Act relating to safe and supportive schools are codified as Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 69, Section 1P (G.L. c. 69, § 1P).
December 2016

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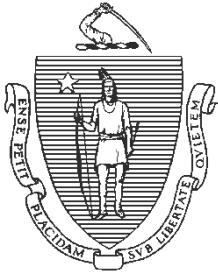
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Mitchell D. Chester, Ed.D.
Commissioner

December 31, 2016

Dear Members of the General Court:

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

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

Creating and maintaining safe and supportive schools is an increasingly important focal point for communities across the Commonwealth, beyond an essential focus on academic success. Preparing all students for success in school, the workplace, and civic life includes developing students’ social emotional competencies and attending to their health and wellbeing. Moreover, academic skills and social emotional competencies are mutually reinforcing.

To effectively serve all students, schools and districts need to foster safe, positive, healthy, and inclusive learning environments that enable students to develop positive relationships, self-regulation skills, health and well-being, and achieve both academic and non-academic success in school. To be most successful, schools must also intentionally integrate services and align initiatives.

One of the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education’s (Department) strategic priorities is to support students’ social-emotional learning, health and safety. Explicitly aligned with the focus of the Safe and Supportive Schools Commission, the Department’s goal within this strategy is to promote systems and strategies that foster safe, positive, healthy, and inclusive learning environments and that help address students’ varied needs in order to improve educational outcomes for all students. Furthermore, the Department’s Conditions for School Effectiveness articulates that, in order to educate students well, schools create a safe school environment and make use of a system for addressing the social, emotional, and health needs of its students that reflects the Behavioral

Health and Public Schools (BHPS) Framework. This BHPS Framework provides the foundation for the Commission's work, as described in this report.

A major theme throughout most of the recommendations outlined in this second report is to continue to increase the state's capacity to provide schools and districts with updated and improved resources, guidance, and information that helps them to create and implement safe and supportive schools and to incorporate this work more effectively into local priorities. More specifically, the Commission's recommendations relate to the following:

1. Continued funding for the Safe and Supportive Schools line item ([7061-9612](#));
2. State options for providing a sustainable source of funding to enable all schools to create and implement safe and supportive schools;
3. A public educational campaign that reaches out to educators, parents, and students throughout the Commonwealth emphasizing the importance of safe and supportive school cultures.
4. Additional Department guidance documents regarding the safe and supportive schools framework and self-assessment tool to schools and districts, including examples of ways schools and districts can incorporate safe and supportive school goals into their school and district improvement plans;
5. An ongoing effort to gather information from stakeholders which will inform future recommendations, conducted with assistance from the Department; and
6. Inclusion by the Department of positive school climate into the Accountability system as part of the newly required ESSA School Quality and Student Success Indicator, and the exploration of potential federal funding sources to further this work, such as through ESSA.

In its second year, the Commission met seven times between January and December 2016. The three primary areas of focus during 2016 included 1) creating a first draft of the updated safe and supportive schools framework, 2) further investigating ways to better integrate safe and supportive schools action planning with other school improvement planning processes, and 3) communication and exploration of federal funding sources.

This past spring and fall (2016), the Department competitively awarded Safe and Supportive Schools Grants through Fund Code 335. More details can be found in this report, and the efforts of these grantees will help to further inform Department and Commission work related to effective processes for developing as well as implementing safe and supportive school action plans.

In this upcoming year, the Commission will further engage with stakeholders to inform subsequent recommendations to the Board, Governor, and Legislature. Additionally, the Commission aims to present recommendations to the Board during 2017, with the goal of having the Department post a revised safe and supportive schools framework and self-assessment tool for schools to use during the 2017-2018 school year.

This work is of great importance to the success of students in the Commonwealth, and I continue to encourage collaboration where helpful and feasible between stakeholders

interested in safe and supportive schools, because aligned and integrated efforts often offer the best chance for our collective success.

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

Sincerely,

Mitchell D. Chester, Ed.D.
Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education

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Purpose and Context

The Safe and Supportive Schools Commission (Commission) was created by [An Act Relative to the Reduction of Gun Violence](#). The Commission respectfully submits this Report to the Governor and Legislature: *Safe and Supportive Schools Commission Second 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 (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), the [Safe and Supportive Schools Framework](#) law.

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

Many important educational reform goals, including diminishing the use of suspension and expulsion as an approach to discipline, preventing bullying, preventing substance use and providing support for addiction recovery, closing the achievement gap, and halting the school to jail pipeline require safe and supportive school-wide environments where all students can learn, behave appropriately, and form positive relationships with adults and peers. In passing the Safe and Supportive Schools Framework law, the Legislature recognized that addressing these needs together with actions to make schools physically safe were also integral to avoiding acts of violence that have devastated other school communities.²

Massachusetts G.L. c. 69, § 1P, in subsection (a) defines safe and supportive schools as schools that foster safe, positive, healthy, and inclusive whole-school learning environments that recognize the connections between academic success and students feeling safe enough to make friends, form strong relationships with adults, and take risks in the classroom (e.g., speaking up) in order to succeed. Safe and supportive schools teach students to regulate their emotions, behaviors, and attention so that it is possible for them to focus, behave appropriately and learn. Such schools strive to address physical and mental health needs that may interfere with learning.³ However, creating such environments while addressing the needs of individual children is not

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

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

³ The law 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 (*footnote continued at bottom of next page*)

easy. Many children come to school having experienced significant adversity. In addition, schools are often challenged because important policies and laws designed to create positive school cultures can be narrowly focused (for example some efforts aimed at bullying prevention, truancy reduction, and behavioral health supports), such that the common skills and approaches that underlie all such initiatives are not integrated and do not necessarily work together to provide a solid foundation for safety and learning. Massachusetts G.L. c. 69, § 1P therefore requires in part (ii) of the definition, that safe and supportive schools are also ones that align initiatives in an effective, efficient, and holistic way.⁴ It also requires the Commission to investigate and make recommendations with respect to the capacity that is needed in schools to implement a safe and supportive schools framework.

Safe and Supportive Schools Framework: To assist schools to align and integrate initiatives, the law calls 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 elements of the safe and supportive schools framework are to be consistent with the Behavioral Health and Public Schools (BHPS) framework⁵ (created by the BHPS Taskforce in collaboration with the Department pursuant to Chapter 321 of the Acts of 2008), and organized according to the following areas of school operations:

- leadership;
- professional development;
- access to resources and services;
- academic and non-academic activities;
- policies, procedures, and protocols; and
- collaboration with families.

The law establishes the Commission to investigate and make recommendations to the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (Board) on updating, refining, and improving the original framework and self-assessment tool, with the knowledge that has developed since the original BHPS Task Force drafted the framework and tool between 2008-2011.⁶ Information about a timeline for the Commission's plans to make recommendations to the Commissioner and Board regarding updates to the framework are included in this report.

(footnote continued from bottom of previous page) students to develop positive relationships with adults and peers, regulate their emotions and behavior, achieve academic and non-academic success in school and maintain physical and psychological health and well-being." (See footnote 4 for the second part of the definition.)

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

⁵ The BHPS framework and self-assessment tool are available online through <http://BHPS321.org>.

⁶ Since the creation of the BHPS framework, reference to it has been inserted into numerous state laws and Department guidance documents, including but not limited to G.L., c. 71, § 370 (An Act Relative to Bullying in Schools); G.L., c. 240, (An Act Regarding Families and Children Engaged in Services); and G.L., c. 69, § 1P the Act Relative to the Reduction of Gun Violence that created this Commission); as well as the Department's [District](#)

Safe and Supportive Schools Self-Assessment Tool: Massachusetts G.L. c. 69, § 1P recognizes that this 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 provides for the Department to create a safe and supportive schools self-assessment tool organized according to the elements of the framework (and also consistent with the one created by the BHPS Task Force) that can spark a collaborative process at each school to identify and address urgent local, district, and/or school-wide priorities related to creating a safe and supportive school culture.⁷ In consultation with the Commission, the Board will develop procedures for updating, improving, or refining both the safe and supportive schools framework and self-assessment tool. The BHPS self-assessment tool, accessible through the Department's website, has been used by approximately 125 schools in 70 districts, including the fiscal year 2013-2014 (FY14) and FY16 Safe and Supportive Schools grantees, approximately one-third of the Gateway Cities districts,⁸ five demonstration schools that work on trauma sensitivity through the Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative,⁹ and others.

The Commission has been tasked with learning from the work of schools that have utilized the self-assessment tool by reviewing data and feedback and using this information to inform recommendations on revisions to the framework and self-assessment tool, and on the feasibility of statewide implementation of the framework. To date, anecdotal feedback from many schools has been that the content of the framework and self-assessment tool is strong, though in need of updating and filling in gaps as well as streamlining, and that providing time for educators and others to sit around a table to analyze their school culture and tailor local solutions is an excellent and empowering approach. However, there is a call to make the self-assessment tool itself technologically easier to use, and provide more guidance for schools that are creating and implementing action plans on effective and flexible ways to best meet their local needs.

The Commission presented its initial recommendations to Department senior staff regarding updating the framework in mid-November 2016, for feedback and guidance on the content before a revised version is presented to the Board in 2017. Additionally, feedback from a survey of tool users conducted by the Commission in collaboration with the Department informed some initial improvements made to the self assessment tool in November. These changes were

[Standards & Indicators, Conditions for School Effectiveness, Model Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan, Suicide Awareness and Prevention Training Guidance, Guidelines for the Implementation of Social and Emotional Learning Curricula K-12, and Policies and Protocols for Truancy Prevention Programs.](#)

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

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

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

primarily to the layout of some of the pages, designed to make the presentation of the information more clear. The Commission plans to delve further into substantive recommendations on framework and tool improvements in 2017, and make a combined proposal to the Board, after review and comment by Department staff. More details are included in subsequent sections of this report regarding Commission recommendations, 2016 work, and 2017 plans. For the full text regarding Commission responsibilities, and a list of Commission members, see Appendices A and B.

Recommendations

Through this annual report, the Commission offers six key recommendations, which are set forth below. In the first recommendation, the Commission requests that the Safe and Supportive Schools line item (7061-9612) continue to be funded in FY 18 in order to ensure that the Department, schools, and the Commission have the resources to help foster throughout the Commonwealth implementation of the cost-efficient approaches envisioned in the statute for creating safe and supportive school cultures. It asks in the second recommendation that policymakers consider how to fund and sustain this work over the long-term. As described in the third recommendation, the Commission proposes a public education campaign to provide momentum and understanding of the need for safe and supportive school cultures, and that as part of this the Department inform schools about the safe and supportive schools framework and self-assessment tool once they are updated and available online. The fourth recommendation refers to increased Department guidance related to creating and maintaining safe and supportive schools, and ways to integrate this work effectively into school and district improvement planning processes. The fifth recommendation outlines the necessity of holding stakeholder engagement sessions, with assistance from the Department, which will inform the Commission's 2017 recommendations to the Governor, Legislature, and Board. The Commission believes that the important recommendations called for in the statute¹⁰ must be based wherever possible on research, on-the-ground experience of schools and educators using the framework and self-assessment tool, extensive expertise that exists within the Commonwealth, and consensus of key education stakeholders. Finally, in the sixth recommendation, the Commission recommends that the Department incorporate positive school climate into the accountability system as part of the newly required School Quality and Student Success Indicator, and also that the Department explore potential federal funding sources to further this work, such as through the reauthorized Elementary and Secondary Education Act - the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

¹⁰ The Commission is asked to include in the first three annual reports 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. Additional topics the Commission is asked to address over time include developing recommendations on best practices for collaboration with families, including families of children with behavioral health needs; and examining and recommending model approaches for integrating school action plans (related to the framework and self-assessment tool) with school improvement plans and for using the framework to organize other school and district improvement processes. The Commission will be consulting on and considering recommendations on all of the above topics over the upcoming year and on an ongoing basis.

Recommendation 1: The Commission recommends funding for the Safe and Supportive Schools line item (7061-9612)¹¹ during FY18.

The Commission recommends that the Legislature continues to fund the Safe and Supportive Schools line item 7061-9612. The Commission is grateful that both Governor Baker and the Legislature supported the work of this line item in the current fiscal year (FY17). The current line item addressed several key recommendations made in the Commission’s first annual report (December 2015), including by providing funding for full-time staffing to increase the capacity of the Department to carry out its duties set forth in the law [G.L. c. 69, § 1P(f)].¹² These responsibilities are extensive and include coordinating the safe and supportive schools grant program; hosting regional trainings; updating the online framework and self-assessment tool; providing technical assistance and developing and disseminating model practices related to coordinating with community service providers and implementing the framework, tool, and action plans; and providing administrative support to the Commission. Specifically related to the Commission, this year’s FY17 line item enables the Department to convene information sessions and focus groups with stakeholders including students and families as well as educators, school support staff, and other school administrators and personnel. This vital information gathering will be used to inform the Commission’s future recommendations on topics required by the statute, including but not limited to the feasibility of statewide implementation of the framework.

In addition, the FY17 line item is providing increased technological capacity in the Department to help update and refine the framework and self-assessment tool; funding for the Department to host regional conferences where grantees can present their work; funding for the Department’s evaluation of the grant program; and perhaps most importantly grant funding that is being leveraged by schools to conduct self-reflection in teams, use the self-assessment tool to create action plans based on the framework, and implement action plans that help further the degree to which schools are safe and supportive for all students. The Commission is grateful for the current line item support and requests continued funding for the above described purposes.

Recommendation 2: The Commission recommends that the Commonwealth explore options for providing a sustainable source of funding to enable all schools to create and implement safe and supportive schools Action Plans as specified in G.L. c. 69, § 1P.

The Commission recommends that the Governor, Legislature, Secretary of Education, and Department consult with the Commission to explore opportunities for sustainable funding for these initiatives. As noted in the first annual report, the Commission supports the recommendations in the October 2015 report of the Foundation Budget Review Commission (FBRC).¹³ The Commission concurs with the FBRC that the Commonwealth’s school funding formula should be revisited to ensure that districts and schools are able to meet the educational, mental health, social, emotional, and other needs of all students. The Commission further agrees with the FBRC that the needs of these students—and all students—can best be met by ensuring that new funds are spent by schools and districts in the most effective and efficient ways possible to address the needs of students, as we believe that prudent investment even during times of

¹¹ FY17 line item language: http://www.mass.gov/bb/gaa/fy2017/app_17/act_17/h70619612.htm.

¹² 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).”

¹³ FBRC Final Report (October 2015): <http://www.mass.gov/legis/journal/desktop/2015/fbrc.pdf>.

challenging fiscal constraint will lead to significant cost-savings in the future. The FBRC has outlined the potential for the use of expanded foundation education funding, and the work of the Department in consultation with the Commission can play an essential role in providing a safe and supportive schools framework and self-assessment tool as described in G.L. c. 69, § 1P that can help educators and communities to implement the FBRC's vision.

Recommendation 3: The Commission recommends that a public educational campaign be undertaken by the highest levels of government and educational leaders to reach out to educators, parents, and students throughout the Commonwealth emphasizing the importance of safe and supportive school cultures.

The Commission also recommends a public educational campaign. The vision for this public education campaign involves media and other visible means reaching out to educators, parents, and students throughout the Commonwealth to share the G.L. c. 69, § 1P definition of a safe and supportive school, to inform the public at the appropriate time of the release of the safe and supportive schools framework and self-assessment tool and to inform the public that the highest levels of governmental leadership are supporting these goals and recognizing the connections between safe and supportive school cultures and success in school. Methods to reach out to the public and the media could include, but are not limited to, public service announcements, press conferences, radio and television opportunities, and social media. This campaign could help to incorporate this agenda more effectively into local priorities for schools and bring about consensus on the appropriate recommendations to be made to the Legislature. A public education campaign would also enhance the Commission's ability to gather information in order to make legislative recommendations as set forth in the law. Additionally, in line with the safe and supportive schools mandate to help schools align initiatives to create a solid foundation for learning, this educational campaign for safe and supportive schools should collaborate and be aligned with education campaigns already in process. For example, it could be aligned with other efforts that direct attention and resources to areas focused on supports for all students, particularly students who are at risk due to bias-based mistreatment related to race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, immigrant status, disability status, or other group that represents a part of a person's identity or is perceived as such. The focus could encompass efforts such as violence prevention, bullying prevention, substance use prevention and recovery efforts for both youth and parents, dropout prevention, student achievement, social and emotional learning, equity, mental health and wellness, and more.

Recommendation 4: The Commission recommends that the Department provide guidance documents regarding the safe and supportive schools framework and self-assessment tool to schools and districts, including examples of ways schools and districts can incorporate safe and supportive school goals into their school and district improvement plans.

The Commission proposes that the Department work in consultation with the Commission to inform schools about the safe and supportive schools framework and self-assessment tool once they are available for use across the Commonwealth during the 2017-2018 school year. As part of this effort, the Commission recommends the Department work in consultation with the Commission to draw and expand upon the work of the Department's Planning for Success¹⁴ model to provide additional information about ways the safe and supportive schools framework

¹⁴ "Planning for Success" model information: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/research/success/>.

and self-assessment tool can effectively be used in developing their school and district improvement plans. The Commission envisions that school and district goals will be determined by their self-identified urgent priorities through a locally tailored process where the framework and self-assessment tools play a helpful role in informing school-wide approaches to change.

Recommendation 5: The Commission recommends an ongoing effort to gather information from stakeholders which will inform future recommendations, with assistance from the Department.

The Commission plans to gather information in 2017 to inform the Commission's future recommendations to the Governor and Legislature, and to the Board and Department, in line with the Commission's goals and statutory responsibilities. The Commission recommends that the Department help with this information gathering by supporting the following efforts (e.g., by assisting with organizing, facilitating, note-taking, and/or summarizing highlights, etc.):

- public information-gathering sessions;
- focus groups and/or surveys, organized by the associations represented on the Commission to gather information from their constituents;
- engaging other stakeholders with whom the Department works in the information-gathering process where appropriate; and
- consulting with and gathering relevant information and data from other state agencies.

Additionally, the Commission recommends considering ways to integrate efforts into the Department's stakeholder engagement efforts related to the state's plan relative to the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), as well as into other efforts that will inform the Department's strategic priority focused on supporting the social, emotional, and health needs of students and families.

Recommendation 6: The Commission recommends that the Department include positive school climate into the Accountability system as part of the newly required ESSA School Quality and Student Success Indicator, and explore potential federal funding sources to further this work, such as through ESSA, and other opportunities that become available.

The Commission recommends that the Department and schools, districts, and collaboratives consider ways to use ESSA funding and associated policies to help create and maintain safe and supportive schools as defined by G.L. c. 69, § 1P. For example, the Department is encouraged to consider ways the ESSA state plan can detail effective and integrated ways to promote student success in safe and supportive learning environments as defined by G.L. c. 69, § 1P, at both state and local levels.

Additionally, the Commission recommends that the Department incorporate positive school climate measures into the Accountability system as part of the newly required ESSA School Quality and Student Success Indicator. Recognizing the complexity of measuring school climate and the scarcity of tools available, the Commission requests that the Department provide measures that are effective in informing schools, districts, and the state of their strengths and areas for growth, and that the Department incentivizes schools and districts to address school climate challenges as a local priority.

Furthermore, the Department is urged to consider ways specific ESSA funding streams, including but not limited to Title IV Part A, Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants (SSAE), can be used to promote guidance, best practices, and resources that foster safe and supportive schools as set forth in G.L. c. 69, § 1P in ways that are integrated and aligned with work supported by other funding streams.

Next steps for 2017

The Commission sets forth an ambitious agenda described below. Elements include making further progress towards a draft safe and supportive schools framework that will be ready to be presented to the Department and then the Board during 2017; collaboration with the Department to inform guidance that can be shared with schools and districts related to effectively integrating safe and supportive schools' goals into school and district improvement plans; and gathering information from additional stakeholders to inform future recommendations called for in the Safe and Supportive Schools statute (G.L. c. 69, § 1P). The Commission reached consensus on the direction of these next steps described below, and agreed that more details will be confirmed early in 2017:

- 1. Further develop and refine a second draft of the safe and supportive schools framework, to share with the Department for feedback, then recommend to the Board in 2017. The goal is for the Department to make the revised framework available for use during the 2017-2018 school year. An associated goal is to have the self-assessment tool updated to correspond to the new framework, and also for there to be progress on making it more user-friendly.**

Statutory Charge to the Commission in G.L. c. 69, § 1P (g), second paragraph, (i):

“investigate and make recommendations to the board on updating, improving and refining the framework and the self-assessment tool as appropriate;...”

During 2017, the Commission will consult with the Department on potential edits to the first draft of the safe and supportive schools framework that was presented to Department senior staff mid-November 2016 for feedback, and that was informed by interviews with people with expertise in the topics of social and emotional learning, trauma sensitive practices, and positive discipline approaches. Subsequently, the Commission will continue to refine and update the draft revised framework, informed by interviews related to additional topic areas listed in the law's definition of safe and supportive schools (i.e., bullying prevention, dropout prevention, truancy reduction, children's mental health, foster care and homeless youth education, and inclusion of students with disabilities) as well as by additional related lenses selected by the Commission such as equity, cultural competency, and substance abuse. Finally, the Commission will consult with the Department and technology experts to inform updates and improvements to the safe and supportive schools self-assessment tool.

2. Further explore model approaches for integrating action plans developed through the safe and supportive schools framework and self-assessment tool with school improvement plans.

Statutory Charge to the Commission in G.L. c. 69, § 1P (g), second paragraph, (vii):

“examine and recommend model approaches for integrating school action plan, required under subsection (e) with school improvement plans and for using the framework to organize other school and district improvement processes.”

The Commission will continue consulting with the Department on recommendations for ways to integrate the framework and self-assessment tool with school and district improvement processes. The Department and the Commission are exploring ways to expand upon the work of the Department’s Planning for Success model, to provide schools and districts with additional guidance and examples of ways goals focused on safe and supportive schools can be effectively incorporated into school and district improvement plans, and ways the safe and supportive schools framework and self-assessment tool resources can inform this work.

The Commission will also propose ways to incorporate the many laws and legal reporting requirements into the framework and self-assessment tool, in order to make reporting by schools more streamlined and integrated with the many other initiatives it must carry out.

3. With assistance from the Department, gather information through listening sessions, surveys, and focus groups among the stakeholder groups represented on the Commission, and to be informed by existing research where available as well. The purpose is to gather additional information from stakeholders that will help inform future recommendations to the Legislature and Governor and the Board.

The Commission anticipates this work will inform the following Commission charges:

a. Statutory charge to the Commission in G.L. c. 69, § 1P (g), second paragraph, (ii):

“identify strategies for increasing schools’ capacity to carry out the administrative functions identified by the behavioral health and public schools task force;...”

Questions likely to be addressed: The statute directs the Commission to report on the following questions set forth in the BHPS Task Force Final Report (2011):

- Which administrative functions [with regard to implementing the framework] are more appropriately allocated to the district level and which are more appropriately allocated to the school level?
- What is an effective staffing level for carrying out these functions, and what professional qualifications should be required?
- How should this position differ in different contexts—e.g. in rural and urban districts, small and large districts, elementary schools and high schools?

- When does this require the establishment of a brand new position, when can these functions be satisfied by reallocating responsibilities among existing positions?
 - What role can/should educational collaboratives play in ensuring these functions take place in schools and districts?
 - What are the funding implications, and what creative cost-effective funding mechanisms can be developed?
- b. Statutory charges to the Commission in G.L. c. 69, § 1P (g), second paragraph, (iii) and (vi), respectively:

“propose steps for improving schools’ access to clinically, culturally, and linguistically appropriate services;...”

“develop recommendations on best practices for collaboration with families, including families of children with behavioral health needs;...”

Questions likely to be addressed: Stakeholders, including parents, students, educators, and administrators, will be asked to answer both broad questions (such as what does it take for a school to be safe and supportive), as well as specific questions such as:

- Is there a way for school stakeholders to come together as a group to identify and solve problems related to the school culture?
- Do families feel engaged and listened to in the school? How does the school collaborate with parents? What do they think is needed?
- Does the school have access to adequate clinically, culturally, and linguistically appropriate services for all students? What are the barriers to access (e.g., transportation, distance, lack of quantity and/or quality of services)?
- Do students have a meaningful opportunity to share their voices? What would make it better?

- c. Statutory charge to the Commission in G.L. c. 69, § 1P (g), second paragraph, (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;...”

Questions likely to be addressed: Stakeholders, including educators, universities that provide course work on whole school approaches to school climate and culture, and those who provide training directly to educators on whole school culture change, will be asked for their perspective on information that educators need to know in order to implement the framework and achieve positive outcomes for students.

4. Presenting annual recommendations to the Governor and Legislature on areas set forth in the statute.

The Commission will reflect upon the information gathered through the steps described above, and will develop a draft summary from the information gathering. As the information is

assessed and synthesized, the Commission will deliberate upon appropriate recommendations related to topics the Commission is asked to address. Agreed upon recommendations will be included in the third annual report (December 2017).

5. Outreach to Commission Members' represented organizations, and participation in public relations campaign.

Commission members will solicit, from the organizations they represent, input for and/or feedback on the Commission's recommendations to the Board and/or Legislature. Also members will support any public information campaign work undertaken by statewide leadership, where appropriate (see the Recommendations section for more information about this proposed campaign).

Commission Activities Undertaken in 2016

Commission areas of focus in 2016 included identifying and moving forward three strategic priorities for the year. The top priority for the year was a focus on creating a first draft of proposed changes to the BHPS framework, based on three lenses listed in the law that need to be effectively integrated into the framework: social and emotional learning, trauma-sensitivity, and positive behavioral approaches that reduce suspensions and expulsions. Below is a brief summary of activities conducted during this second year of the Commission.

- Maintained the Commission website,¹⁵ with information on responsibilities, members, meetings, and contact information.
- Convened seven full Commission meetings in 2016, including a full day summer retreat. Meeting dates and locations were as follows: January 20 (Reading Public Schools), March 15 (Worcester Public Library), May 11 (Department in Malden), June 15 (Worcester Technical High School), August 10 (retreat, Harvard Law School in Cambridge), October 5 (the Worcester Public Library), and November 14 (Newton Public Schools).
- Agreed to extend the current Co-Chair's position for six months, and to next select a member for the position of Co-Chair (a two-year position), at the end of the 2016-2017 school year. The Co-Chair is selected from the Commission membership to serve alongside the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education (or designee).
- Agreed upon three strategic objectives for the year: 1) *updating, refining and improving the safe and supportive schools framework*; 2) *integrating initiatives, including how the framework and self-assessment tool can be part of the school improvement process*; and 3) *communication, gathering feedback on legislative recommendations, and exploration of federal funding sources*. Agreed to have workgroups for objectives one and two. The workgroups met numerous times over the course of the year. Designated point people brought ideas and drafts to the plenary meetings for feedback. Highlights on work for the three objectives are included below.

1. Strategic objective one focused on "(i)" in the second paragraph of G.L. c. 69, § IP, which requires the Commission to "*investigate and make recommendations to the board on updating,*

¹⁵ Commission website: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/ssce/safety.html?section=commission>.

improving, and refining the framework and the self-assessment tool as appropriate.” Work in 2016 included the following:

- Finalized a survey that the Department sent to all prior tool users to ask for feedback on ways the tool was helpful and could be improved; 16 responded (approximately 15 percent). A summary report was provided to Commission members and is available upon request.
- Planned protocols and interviewed a dozen people with insights and expertise in the three lens areas selected. As noted above, these lenses included social and emotional learning, trauma-sensitivity, and positive discipline. Interviews were conducted by Commission members and volunteers, and informed discussion and proposed revisions to the framework. The Commission is grateful to all who agreed to be interviewed.¹⁶
- Developed a first draft of a revised framework, starting with the BHPS framework and making improvements informed largely by a focus on the three aforementioned lenses. After incorporating feedback from the full Commission, the draft was submitted to Department senior staff for review and feedback.
- Identified an updated timeline for the Commission to propose to the Board recommendations to “update, improve, and refine” the framework and self-assessment tool; the initial target winter/spring moved to fall 2016 to present initial recommendations for Department senior staff review, and to have feedback from that review inform a subsequent second draft to be presented to the Department, then the Board in 2017.
- Reflected on and confirmed with the Commission the purpose of the self assessment tool and framework, as follows:

The purpose of the self-assessment tool is to (1) assess their capacity to create and sustain safe and supportive school environments for all students; (2) identify areas where additional school-based action, efforts, guidance and support are needed to create and maintain safe and supportive school environments; and (3) create action plans to address the areas of need identified by the assessment.

The purpose of the safe and supportive schools framework is to help schools understand what a safe and supportive school is and to provide guidance and best practices for establishing safe and supportive schools in Massachusetts that realize safe and supportive schools as defined in G.L. c. 69, § IP. In conformance with the law, the safe and supportive schools framework is organized according to six core elements of school operation.

2. Strategic objective two focused on “(vii)” in the second paragraph of G.L. c. 69, § IP, which requires the Commission to: *“examine and recommend model approaches for integrating school action plans...with school improvement plans and for using the framework to*

¹⁶ People interviewed during 2016 (on the first three lenses to inform work on the first draft of the framework, and on subsequent lenses to inform work on the second draft) included the following: members of the Education Law Task Force; staff and teachers associated with the Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative; Linda Dusenbury (CASEL); Michael Krezmien (UMass Amherst); Stephen Mahoney (Harvard Graduate School of Education); George Sugai (PBIS Center); Jane Harrison (Engaging Schools); Shirley Fan Chan (MA Department of Children and Families); and Donna L. Harlon, Anne Gilligan, and Lisa Harney (Department).

organize other school and district improvement processes.” Work in 2016 included the following:

- Developed a legislative landscape document to include the laws and reporting requirements related to safe and supportive schools, with hyperlinks and brief details regarding the requirements. It will continue to be updated to inform the framework and self-assessment tool, incorporating hyperlinks to these requirements and model plans so that completing the self- assessment tool will both help schools better align and integrate initiatives and more easily enable them to meet aligned reporting requirements.
 - Worked closely with the Department to identify ways that the Planning for Success model can work synergistically with the framework and self- assessment tool to have school and district improvements planning processes help communities create and maintain safe and supportive schools that improve educational outcomes for all students.
 - Proposed a draft letter, agreed upon by the Commission and presented to the Commissioner, that could help inform districts about the framework and self-assessment tool and encourage them to develop action plans that can be incorporated into school and district improvement plans.
3. Strategic objective three focused on communications and potential funding sources, related in part to “(v)” in the second paragraph of G.L. c. 69, § 1P, *“identify federal funding sources that can be leveraged to support statewide implementation of the framework.”* Work in 2016 included the following:
- Drafted talking points that will continue to evolve and can be used to inform the public about the purpose and goals of the framework and self- assessment tool.
 - Facilitated reaching consensus within the Commission on a proposal for gathering information in 2017 to investigate four statutorily required areas.¹⁷
 - Presented for consideration information related to federal funding sources such as ESSA that could potentially support implementation of the framework.

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

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

“(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

¹⁷ These four areas are noted above, in number three of the Next Steps in 2017 section of the report.

grantees shall pilot and share with other schools an effective process for developing and implementing school action plans; (iv) update its website to include the framework, the self-assessment tool, best practices and other information related to the implementation of the framework; (v) host regional trainings for schools and districts; and (vi) provide administrative support to the safe and supportive schools commission established under subsection (e). Nothing in this section shall be construed as limiting the ability of the department to contract with individuals, external partners or other entities to support the functions established under this section; provided, however, that the department shall consider opportunities for education collaboratives or other regional service organizations to coordinate and disseminate training, technical assistance and information to school districts on the implementation of the framework.”

Safe and Supportive Schools Grant Program: In September 2016, the Department posted a competitive grant funding opportunity for FY17 Safe and Supportive Schools Grants through Fund Code 335, with applications due September 30, 2016. Information about this opportunity was also included in the September 2, 2016 Commissioner’s Weekly Update.¹⁸ The Safe and Supportive Schools Grant (Competitive)¹⁹ offered districts up to \$10,000 per selected school 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 recipient²⁰ districts will create action plans based on all the elements of the online BHPS framework and self-assessment tool. Grantee districts will also create district action plans that support the selected schools. A total of 60 districts submitted intents to apply, dozens of individuals participated in the three conference call information sessions, and 47 applications were received. Just over \$260,000 from line item 7061-9612 will be leveraged by grantees through this grant program to develop and implement action plans that will help create and maintain safe and supportive learning environments.

Earlier in 2016, the Department awarded fiscal year 2015-2016 Fund Code 335 grants to 10 districts²¹ to support use of the self-assessment tool in 40 schools. In June, the Department convened grantees for a full-day session during which participants shared with each other ways that their schools had used the tool for reflection and action planning that helped further local work related to creating and maintaining safe and supportive schools.

Additional safe and supportive schools related work: The Department plans to use the balance of close to \$140,000 of the \$400,000 available in line item 7061-9612 towards an independent evaluation of the Safe and Supportive Schools Grant program; towards conferences held by the Department; towards tool improvements (an initial phase of which were made live in November 2016), and towards full-time staffing who can provide technical assistance and training to school districts, policy development and dissemination, project planning and implementation, grants and contract management, inter-agency collaboration, coordination of and participation in information gathering efforts, and research and evaluation activities.

¹⁸ Weekly Update with grant information: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/commissioner/?update=9/2/2016>.

¹⁹ FY17 Safe and Supportive Schools Grant (Competitive) details: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/grants/2017/335/>.

²⁰ FY17 Safe and Supportive Schools Grant recipients: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/grants/2017/awards/335.html>.

²¹ FY16 Safe and Supportive Schools Grant recipients: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/grants/2016/awards/335.html>.

APPENDIX A: Safe and Supportive Schools Commission Members

Name (Last, First)		District / Agency Represented	Title
Amador	Andria	MA School Psychologists Association (MSPA)	MSPA Immediate Past President; Boston Public Schools - Assistant Dir., Special Education & Related Services - Comprehensive Student Support Services
Bennett	Rachelle Engler	MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE)	Commission Co-Chair (ESE Designee); ESE Associate Commissioner, Student and Family Support
Brown	Donna M.	MA School Counselors Association (MASCA)	MASCA Executive Secretary
Burd	Sara	Reading Public Schools, Practitioner of the Framework	Reading Public Schools Director of Social Emotional Learning
Camacho	Kristine	MA School Psychologists Association (MSPA)	MSPA President; Tantasqua Sr. High, Special Education Coordinator
Cole	Susan	MA Advocates for Children (MAC)	Commission Co-Chair (Selected by Commission Members); MAC Senior Project Director, Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative
Cristiani	Angela	American Federation of Teacher-Massachusetts	AFT; Boston Teachers Union (BTU) Political Director
Diehl	William	MA Organization of Education Collaboratives (MOEC)	MOEC Board of Directors Regional Representative; Collaborative for Educational Services Executive Director
Doherty	John	MA Association of School Superintendents (MASS)	Superintendent, Reading Public Schools
Holmes	Ellen	MA Association of School Committees (MASC)	MASC Regional School Committee Chair; Ashburnham-Westminster Reg. School Committee Member
Kelly	Amy	MA Elementary School Principals Association (MESPA)	Newton Public Schools District Leader of Social and Emotional Learning
Kohler	Tara	MA Secondary School Administrators Association (MSSAA)	Principal, Fairhaven HS
Lipinski	Michelle	Representative of Mass. Recovery High Schools with expertise in adolescent substance use disorders	Principal, Northshore Recovery High School
Lipper	Katherine	Secretary of Education (EOE Designee)	General Counsel, MA Executive Office of Education
Pearrow	Melissa	University of MA - Boston, Former BHPS Taskforce Member and Tool Developer/Evaluator	Associate Professor of Counseling and School Psychology, College of Education and Human Development
Perillo	Julie	MA Teachers Association (MTA)	Teacher, Grade 5, Louis F. Angelo School, Brockton PS
Silver	Anne	Parent/Professional Advocacy League (PPAL)	PPAL Director of Operations
Styer	Judith	MA School Nurse Organization (MSNO)	MSNO President; Framingham Public Schools Director of Health and Wellness
Whitehead	Richard	MA Administrators for Special Education (ASE)	Dracut Public Schools Director of Student Services

APPENDIX B: Legislative Charge for the Commission

Massachusetts General Laws, c. 69, § 1P(g): There shall be a safe and supportive schools commission to collaborate with and advise the department on the feasibility of state-wide implementation of the framework. The commission shall consist of 18 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; and 1 of whom shall be a representative from a community-based organization that provides services as part of the children's behavioral health initiative and that provides mental health services in schools. The commission shall select a co-chair from among its appointees.

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

improvement plans and for using the framework to organize other school and district improvement processes.

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

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

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

NOTE: The full text of the [Safe and Supportive Schools Framework Law](#) (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>.