



Safe and Supportive Schools Commission - First 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 2015

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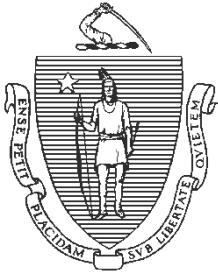
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Mitchell D. Chester, Ed.D.
Commissioner

December 17, 2015

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 - First Annual Report* pursuant to Section 6 of Chapter 284 of the Acts of 2014 (the Act), subsection 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.

Safe and Supportive Schools is a topic that is important for schools in all communities. Far too many students and their families are facing challenges related to violence, addictive disorders and substance abuse, mental and behavioral health issues, traumatic events, and more. Schools cannot simply ignore these challenges and be effective. A focus on academic learning is essential, but the mission of education and schools extends beyond academics. Furthermore, a focus on academics without any attention paid to social, emotional, and other health needs will almost certainly yield discouraging results.

To effectively serve students, schools and districts must aim to foster safe, positive, healthy, and inclusive whole-school 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.

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's (Department) Conditions for School Effectiveness articulates that, in order to educate students well, schools create a safe school environment. The system for addressing the social, emotional, and health needs of its students reflects the Behavioral Health and Public Schools (BHPS) Framework. This BHPS Framework lays the foundation for the Commission's work, as described in this report.

Recommendations outlined in this first report focus primarily on continued support for the safe and supportive schools grant program; on a sustainable source of funding for this work in all

schools; on Department capacity to help schools and districts create and implement safe and supportive schools; on technological assistance for upgrading the tool; and on a public education campaign emphasizing the importance of safe and supportive school cultures that helps communities incorporate this work more effectively into local priorities.

In its first year, the Commission met six times between December 2014 and November 2015. The first member appointments were made; an organizational structure was created; members increased their awareness and understanding of the framework and self-assessment tool; members discussed areas of strength and areas for improvement related to the framework and tool; and a consensus process was used to agree upon recommendations to include in this first annual report.

This fall, the Department posted and received applications currently under review for a competitive grant funding opportunity for fiscal year 2015-2016 Safe and Supportive Schools Grants through Fund Code 335. More details can be found in this report, but the work of these grantees will help inform Department and Commission work related to effective processes for developing as well as implementing safe and supportive school action plans.

The Commission will continue its work with a focus on gathering additional information from stakeholders to inform subsequent recommendations to the Board, Governor, and Legislature on the aforementioned topics. This work is of great importance to the Commonwealth, and I encourage collaboration where helpful and feasible between stakeholders interested in Safe and Supportive Schools, as 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 our Commonwealth's students.

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 First 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 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

The overarching goal of these statutory provisions is to develop a statewide safe and supportive schools framework based on the framework previously developed by the Behavioral Health and Public Schools Task Force (pursuant to Chapter 321 of the Acts of 2008), that the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (Department) and districts can use to assist schools in efforts to foster safe and supportive learning environments. Upon refining, updating, and improving this framework, the Commission is to make recommendations on the feasibility of implementing this framework statewide.

Many important educational reform goals, including putting a stop to the overuse of suspension and expulsion as an approach to discipline, preventing bullying, 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 relationships with adults and peers. In passing this law, the Legislature and the Governor 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 General Laws, c. 69, § 1P, in sub-section (i) 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

¹ The full legislative charge 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.

regulate their emotions, behaviors, and attention so that it is possible for them to focus, behave appropriately and learn. And these schools ensure that physical and mental health needs that may interfere with learning are addressed.³

However, creating such environments while addressing the needs of individual children is not easy. Many children come to school having experienced significant adversity. In addition, schools are often burdened because many important policies and laws designed to create positive school cultures are often 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 General Laws, 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

Safe and Supportive Schools Framework:

To assist schools to align and integrate initiatives, the law calls for the Department to develop a safe and supportive schools framework to provide a structure and a tool 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 \(BHPS\) Framework](#) (recommended by the BHPS Taskforce in 2011), and organized according to the following areas of school operations:

- leadership,
- professional development,
- access to resources and services,
- academic and non-academic supports,
- 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 (per Chapter 321 of the Acts of 2008) developed the framework and tool between 2008-2011.⁵ Information about a timeline for when the Commission plans to make

³ In this law, safe and supportive schools are defined as "schools that foster a safe, positive, healthy and inclusive whole-school learning environment that: (i) enables students to develop positive relationships with adults and peers, regulate their emotions and behavior, achieve academic and non-academic success in school and maintain physical and psychological health and well-being." (See footnote 4 for the second part of the definition.)

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

⁵ 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 of course G.L., c. 69, § 1P (the portion of the Act Relative to the Reduction of Gun Violence that created this Commission); as well as the Department's [District Standards & Indicators, Conditions for School Effectiveness, Model Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan](#), (continued on next page)

recommendations to the Commissioner and Board regarding specific updates to the framework are included in this report.

Safe and Supportive Schools Self-Assessment Tool:

Massachusetts General Laws, 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 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.⁶ 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](#), which is accessible through the Department's website, has been used by approximately 80 schools in 50 districts, including the fiscal year 2013-2014 (FY14) Safe and Supportive Schools grantees, approximately one-third of the Gateway Cities districts,⁷ schools that work on trauma sensitivity through the [Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative](#), 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 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 who are creating and implementing action plans on effective and flexible ways to best meet their local needs. The Commission plans to make its initial recommendations to the Commissioner in spring 2016 for feedback and guidance on the timing and process for presenting them to the Board regarding ways to update and refine the content and format of the framework and self-assessment tool. To carry out this task it will further consult with tool users and also requests in its recommendations for 2016 the assistance of a technology expert to upgrade the tool's usability (discussed further in the Recommendations and Next Steps sections below).

(continued from prior page) [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](#).

⁶ Per G.L., c.60, § 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 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."

⁷ 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.

Recommendations

During 2015, the Commission met in six plenary meetings and in four working groups. It reached consensus at its November 18, 2015 meeting on (1) key recommendations for implementation starting in 2016, and (2) next steps regarding work to be carried out during 2016 and on an ongoing basis that will inform and determine future recommendations to the Board and Legislature. The Commission believes that the important recommendations called for in the statute⁸ 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. Accordingly, this first set of recommendations lays the groundwork for future recommendations.

Recommendation 1: The Commission recommends increased funding for the Safe and Supportive Schools line item ([7061-9612](#)) during FY17.

The Commission is grateful for the Governor and Legislature's support for this line item, which is critical because it can allow districts and schools to continue to pilot and share with others effective processes for developing as well as implementing Safe and Supportive School Action Plans in conformance with G.L. c. 69, § 1P. The work of the Safe and Supportive Schools grantees will help schools with their efforts to better serve students, and will also provide the Commission with important information regarding the feasibility of statewide implementation of the Safe and Supportive Schools Framework and the changes that need to be made to the self-assessment tool to make it more relevant and user friendly for today's schools. In addition, this line item will allow funding for the Department to host regional conferences where grantees can present their work; it will allow the Department to continue its evaluation of the grant program; and it will support other tasks related to implementation of the law.

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 MGL c. 69, s. 1P.

The Commission recommends that the Governor, Legislature, Secretary of Education, and Department consult with the Commission to explore opportunities for sustainable funding through Chapter 70 or through other means such as state entitlement grants or other forms of appropriation. The Commission supports the recommendations in the report of the [Foundation Budget Review Commission \(FBRC\)](#) which is dated October 30, 2015. 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

⁸ 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.

other needs of all students, including but not limited to students with disabilities, students who are English Language Learners (ELLs), and students from low-income families. The Commission also recommends including at risk students who have experienced bullying, have endured traumatic experiences in their homes and communities, have family members or themselves who have been affected by the scourge of addiction to opiates and other substances, as well as many others. 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 challenging fiscal constraint will lead to significant cost-savings in the future. The Safe and Supportive Schools Commission recommends the use of the Safe and Supportive Schools Framework and Self-Assessment Tool to provide a process and set of tools for local school districts and communities to identify the urgent priorities that require action in their schools. Once the self-assessment has been completed, schools can develop and implement locally tailored action plans that address the needs described above. The FBRC has articulated a compelling overarching vision for the use of new foundation education funding, and the work of the Commission can play an essential role in providing the tools that educators would need *to implement* the FBRC’s vision.

Recommendation 3: The Commission recommends that the Department have greater capacity to help schools and districts create and implement Safe and Supportive Schools Action Plans and carry out the responsibilities outlined in G.L. c. 69, § 1P(f).

The Commission greatly appreciates the Governor and Legislature’s commitment and efforts on multiple levels to help schools foster safe and supportive learning environments.

The \$500,000 in the FY16 state budget line item 7061-9612 is primarily for the Safe and Supportive Schools pilot grant program, and it also allows for up to \$100,000 of the funds to support Department capacity to conduct an independent evaluation of the grant and run conferences for grantees, as well as use towards work on the additional G.L. c. 69, § 1P(f) responsibilities outlined in more detail in a later section of the report [*Department Activities Related to G.L., c. 69, § 1P(f)*]. As noted in the first recommendation, these funds are a helpful beginning towards increasing Department capacity for supporting schools to engage in this work.

The Department needs increased funding capacity that will enable it to deliver effectively on the significant responsibilities outlined by the Legislature in G.L. c. 69, § 1P(f) and to collaborate with others to create greater alignment and effectiveness among initiatives related to creating and maintaining safe and supportive schools. These responsibilities 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, increased support would be helpful for convening focus groups and finding other ways of gathering input and expertise from experts on and off the Commission, and feedback from students and families as well as from educators, school support staff, and other school personnel to inform the Commission so that it can make recommendations as required by the statute regarding the feasibility of statewide implementation of the framework. This recommendation could be served by increasing funding to the Department for this purpose,

increasing the safe and supportive schools line item (7061-9612) and/or allowing more funding from the line to be used for that purpose, or other means.

Recommendation 4: The Commission recommends technological assistance to carry out usability and content upgrades for the Safe and Supportive Schools Self-Assessment Tool.

The Commission recommends that the Department (with support from the Legislature or other means) upgrade the online self-assessment tool that was created by the BHPS Task Force during 2008-2011, so that the content (current and future) is presented through the framework and self-assessment tool in a way that allows schools and districts to use it more efficiently and effectively. The Commission plans to present recommendations for improving the BHPS framework and tool, to be renamed the Safe and Supportive Schools Framework and Self-Assessment Tool, to the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education in Spring 2016 to receive guidance from him on next steps for presenting to the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education. These recommendations will include a focus on both content and format. Commission members to date have heard anecdotal feedback from schools who have used the tool that while the current content and process for developing action plans generates a rich and robust conversation that is very useful, it would be helpful if the tool itself were technologically easier to use. In addition to the Commission generating recommendations for updated and enhanced content, the assistance of an expert is needed to consult with the Commission regarding ways the tool could be upgraded to make it easier to use by schools wishing to create and maintain safe and supportive school cultures and environments. These recommended changes are likely to include, but are not limited to changing the interface of the tool to make it easier to understand, improving the ability to navigate the tool from each of the areas of school operations, allowing multiple entry points based on the needs of the school, and improving the overall speed and accessibility of the tool. The Department in collaboration with the Commission would first consult with one or more experts on what tool design improvements would be possible, and what the cost would be, and have this inform subsequent recommendations from the Commission and actions from the Department.

Recommendation 5: The Commission recommends that a public educational campaign be led 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.

A public education campaign involving media and other visible means would reach out to educators, parents, and students throughout the Commonwealth to share the statute's definition of a safe and supportive school and inform the public that the highest levels of leadership are supporting these goals and recognizing their connections to 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, weekly radio and television opportunities, and social media. This campaign would 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. 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 that direct attention and resources to areas focused on violence-prevention, the prevention of addictive disorders and substance abuse targeted at youth and parents, dropout prevention, student achievement, mental health and wellness, and more.

Commission Activities Undertaken in 2015

Commission areas of focus included creating an organizational structure with leadership, group norms, and working groups; increasing understanding and awareness among Commission members of Commission responsibilities as well as the strengths and weaknesses of the framework and self-assessment tool; reflections on areas to be addressed in this first report; identifying whom to consult with over the upcoming year; and a method for reaching consensus among Commission members on the core areas to be investigated. Below is a brief summary of activities conducted during the first year.

- Created a Commission website, with information on responsibilities, members, meetings, and contact information: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/ssce/safety.html?section=commission>.
- Convened six full Commission meetings, including a full day summer retreat: December 19, 2014 and March 20, 2015 at the Department in Malden; May 7, 2015 at the Worcester Public Library; July 22, 2015 (retreat) at the Harvard Law School in Cambridge; October 2, 2015 at the Department; and November 18, 2015 at Newton Public Schools.
- Established Group Norms.
- Heard brief presentations from BHPS' Framework/Self-Assessment Tool users on their experiences: Sara Burd - Reading; Kristine Camacho - Tantasqua; and Joe Ristuccia - School Psychologist/Lesley Adjunct Professor/Trauma and Learning Policy (TLPI) Initiative consultant.
- Selected a member to be the Co-Chair (a two-year position) by member vote: Susan Cole, Massachusetts Advocates for Children (MAC) Senior Project Director and TLPI Director, to serve alongside the Commissioner's designee from the Department (Rachelle Engler Bennett, Director of the Office of Learning Supports and Early Learning, serving on behalf of Commissioner Mitchell D. Chester and Associate Commissioner John L.G. Bynoe III).
- Organized into four Working Groups, after proposals and discussions and votes taken, with the areas of focus clustered primarily around the initial four topics required to be addressed in the first three annual reports: (1) Federal Funding, (2) Training and PD / Evaluation, (3) Improving Access to Services / Family Collaboration, and (4) Strategies for Schools' Administrative Capacity / Integrating with Other Requirements. Most working groups met twice during the first year, to consider the assigned topics as well as potential recommendations to make in the first annual report.
- Commission members were provided the opportunity to comment on the Department's Draft Guidance on Implementing a General Mental Health Plan in Schools.
- Used a mock scenario that was drafted by a Commission member representing the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents, Reading Superintendent John Doherty, and worked in small teams to test out use of the self-assessment tool. Reflected on strengths and weaknesses of the BHPS Framework and Tool – with discussions to be continued and deepened. Emerging themes included:
 - **Strengths:**
 - Comprehensive; good overarching themes; helpful action steps; six sections well formed; linking academic and non-academic; highlights importance of leadership;
 - Raises awareness of the importance of safe and supportive environments; supports that professional development is crucial to work;
 - Unifying for the school; this is for ALL students well-being; provides a structure that can help people across schools and disciplines have conversations.

- **Areas for Improvement – three main themes:**
 - 1) Overarching Comments;
 - 2) Updating the Content of the Framework/Tool, including current legislation, requirements, and initiatives not considered in the original tool; and
 - 3) Usability of the Tool (Mechanics as well as the need for a Guide to the tool and Resources available to help with implementation).
- Drafted topics and timeline to write first annual report.
- Identified a timeline for the Commission to propose to the Board recommendations to “Update, Improve, and Refine” the framework and self-assessment tool – with a target of winter/spring 2016 to present initial recommendations to the Commissioner and to have that meeting inform the timeline and process for the recommendations to the Board.
- Reflected on and confirmed purpose of the self-assessment tool for schools:
 - (i) assess their 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.*
- Drafted a landscape document that noted many of the laws and requirements related to safe and supportive schools. It will continue to be updated as well as inform discussions about helping schools and the state better align and integrate initiatives and requirements.
- Drafted initial questions to ask schools that have used the BHPS Self-Assessment Tool to get feedback on ways it was helpful and ways it could be improved, likely to be sent to schools this winter.

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, which are all 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 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.

This October, the Department posted a competitive grant funding opportunity for FY16 Safe and Supportive Schools Grants through Fund Code 335, with applications due November 30, 2015. Information about this opportunity was also included in the [October 23, 2015 Commissioner's Weekly Update](#). The [Safe and Supportive Schools Grant \(Competitive\)](#) offers 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 will create action plans based on all the elements of the safe and supportive schools framework and the self-assessment tool available online currently referred to as the [Behavioral Health and Public School \(BHPS\) Framework and Self-Assessment Tool](#). Selected districts will create district action plans that support the selected schools. In order to apply, districts are not required to submit letters of intent, nor request usernames and passwords for the self-assessment tool for schools. That said, dozens of districts have expressed interest, and more than three dozen districts requested usernames and passwords for their school(s). At least \$400,000 from line item [7061-9612](#) will be awarded through these grants.

The Department will use \$100,000 of the \$500,000 available in the aforementioned line item (7061-9612) by the end of June 2016 towards an independent evaluation of the above described Safe and Supportive Schools Grant program; towards conferences held by the Department; and towards a contracted Program Coordinator/Safe and Supportive Schools Program Specialist to 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 advisory panels and research and evaluation activities.

Next steps for 2016

The Commission understands the enormous opportunities and responsibilities that have been placed before it in making recommendations with respect to updating the Behavioral Health and Public Schools (BHPS) framework and self-assessment tool, on supporting effective implementation of the framework, and on the feasibility of implementing the updated framework statewide. The Commission is asked during the first three years of reporting to make recommendations to the Governor and Legislature, together with drafts of any proposed legislation, in four areas which will form the underlying groundwork upon which the Commission will make ultimate recommendations about the feasibility of implementing the Safe and Supportive Schools Framework statewide. These are strategies for increasing schools' capacity to carry out the administrative functions necessary to implement the framework; proposing steps for improving schools' access to clinically, culturally and linguistically appropriate services; identifying and recommending evidenced-based training programs and professional development for school staff on creating safe and supportive learning environments; and identifying federal funding sources that can be leveraged to support statewide

implementation of the framework. In its discussions the Commission has concluded that these recommendations should be based where possible on solid peer reviewed research; on-the-ground experience of schools and educators using the framework and self-assessment tool; the extensive professional wisdom and expertise that exists within the Commonwealth; and consensus from lead education stakeholders that have an understanding of change theory, leadership, and positive school culture change. The work of updating the framework and making recommendations are integrated and necessary to implement together. To accomplish these important goals, Commission plans to undertake the following next steps.

Gathering information:

- I. The Commission proposes to work with the Department on an ongoing basis to organize consultation and information gathering efforts (for example through focus group, surveys, hearings and/or interviews, peer-reviewed research, and best practices), to obtain feedback from school faculty and staff who have used the Behavioral Health and Public Schools Framework and Self-Assessment Tool, and to consult with others (such as parents, students, Commission members, state agencies, etc.) to obtain the following types of information:
 - a. Substantive areas (e.g., requirements and best practices related to discipline, social emotional learning, truancy prevention, LGBTQ safety, etc.) to inform updating, improving, and refining the framework and self-assessment tool.
 - b. Usability of the self-assessment tool and ways school staff would find it helpful to have the technology interface upgraded.
 - c. Data in key areas which G.L. c. 69, § 1P requires the Commission to investigate and make recommendations:
 - i. *Schools' capacity to carry out the administrative functions needed to implement the framework:* To address the administrative functions at the local levels that will be necessary for statewide implementation of the framework. Information gathering can, among other things, hone in on the time and personnel needed to ensure that coordination is taking place both inside the school and with outside agencies.
 - ii. *Schools' access to culturally, clinically, and linguistically appropriate services:* In addition to tapping experts and peer-reviewed research based best practice, information gathering can, among other things, hone in on the different needs among rural, urban, and suburban districts, and their differing resources and effective strategies to access appropriate services. This will also provide critical information to inform recommendations regarding updates to section three of the framework and self-assessment tool – access to resources and services.
 - iii. *Training programs and professional development for school staff on addressing students' behavioral health and creating safe and supportive learning environments:* Information gathering can hone in on what schools feel they need for professional development, effective practices used in schools, and the time and capacity that is needed to carry out adequate skill building for faculty and staff. This will also provide

critical information to inform recommendations regarding updates to section two of the framework and self-assessment tool – professional development.

- iv. *Model approaches for integrating safe and supportive school action plans with school improvement plans and for using the framework to organize other school and district improvement processes:* Information gathering can help the Commission learn what schools are effectively doing in this realm. This is a critical area because when barriers in the way of aligning initiatives are addressed, schools and districts can see that the use of the safe and supportive schools framework can help schools and districts with efforts to streamline processes and procedures, and focus resources in the most critical areas that support safe and supportive school cultures. The Commission will research reporting requirements for schools and consider recommendations on streamlining reporting, where helpful and appropriate, and will do this work informed by and in consultation with the Department’s recently piloted action planning process and the work of the Foundation Budget Review Commission.
- v. *Federal funding sources that can be leveraged to support statewide implementation of the framework:* The Commission will research and consult with the Department and others as appropriate, to identify ways federal funding sources can support this work.
- vi. *Collaboration with families:* The Commission will research and consult with others as appropriate to identify effective strategies for communicating and partnering with families to best support students and help them access services that can help them be successful in and out of school. It is important to consider collaboration with families - one of the six core elements of the framework-- not only by itself but also in a way that is integrated into all of the above topics, to be most effective.

Presenting recommendations for improving, updating, and refining the framework and self-assessment tool to the Commissioner and Board of Elementary and Secondary Education:

The Commission plans to present recommendations for improving the BHPS framework and the tool and renaming it the Safe and Supportive Schools Framework and Self-Assessment Tool to the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education in Spring 2016 to receive guidance on next steps for presenting to the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Note that the Commission anticipates making additional recommendations to the Board regarding the framework and tool over time (e.g., every 1-2 years), as it plans to consult on an ongoing basis with schools and others and research best practices in the field, and to have this inform subsequent recommendations for improvements to the framework and self-assessment tool. Members of the Commission plan to work with tool-users and other experts over time to draft proposed guidance on how to use the framework and assessment tool that include more details on its principles and theory of action.

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 appropriate recommendations to meet the legislative requirements in each annual legislative report.

Outreach to Commission Members' Represented Organizations and participation in public relations campaign:

When possible, 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 senior leadership, where desired, possible, and appropriate (see the Recommendations section for more information about this proposed campaign).

APPENDIX A: Safe and Supportive Schools Commission Members

Last Name	First Name	District / Agency Represented	Title
Amador	Andria	MA School Psychologists Association (MSPA)	MSPA 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 (Department Designee); Department Director of the Office of Learning Supports and Early Learning
Brown	Donna M.	MA School Counselors Association (MASCA)	MASCA Executive Secretary
Burd	Sara	Reading Public Schools, Practitioner of the Framework	Reading Public Schools District Administrator of Support Services
Camacho	Kristine	MA School Psychologists Association (MSPA)	MSPA President-Elect; Tantasqua Regional High School 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
Fay	Jean	MA Teachers Association (MTA)	MTA; Amherst-Pelham Education Association President
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
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
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 *An Act Relative to the Reduction of Gun Violence* can be found on <https://malegislature.gov/Laws/SessionLaws/Acts/2014/Chapter284>.