**Safe and Supportive Schools Commission Meeting**

Tuesday, March 19, 2024

MINUTES

**Members in Attendance:** Co-Chair Rachelle Engler Bennett; other commission members: Andria Amador, Kristin Campione, Marissa del Rosario, Heidi Gold, Ellen Holmes, Raquel Negron, Alex Nugent (*one of the spotlight presenters*), Melissa Pearrow, Shanyn Toulouse, and Beverly Williams

**Others in Attendance:** *Spotlight presenter:* DESE staff Nyal Fuentes*. Also attending:* Ibrahim Afzal, Amy Ballin, Catherine Brooks, Stacy Cabral, Nick Caron, Anne Eisner, Kate Lytton, Chris Pond, Emily Taylor, and Jariel Vergne

1. **Welcome, Agenda Review, 2024 Commission Focus Areas Update, Approve February 6, 2024 Minutes**

The commission co-chair welcomed commission members and guests and reviewed the agenda.

***VOTE****: On a motion duly entered and seconded, the February 6, 2023, Commission minutes were unanimously approved by roll call vote.*

The co-chair shared information related to the Commission focus areas for 2024 (slides available upon request). The focus areas are informed by the SaSS line item, the 2/6/24 and prior years’ Commission discussions and recommendations, Commission member check-ins, DESE and Commissioner goals, strategic objectives, and EdVision, and themes of equity (including for race/ethnicity and gender identity/sexual orientation) and student and family voice woven throughout.

**The two 2024 Commission Focus Areas:**

1. **ATTENDANCE -**Specifically looking at the connection between safe and supportive schools and increasing attendance (and decreasing chronic absenteeism), and at these two Commission charges in particular:
   1. …best practices for **collaborating with families,** including families of children with behavioral health needs.
   2. …[improving students’] **access to clinically, culturally, and linguistically appropriate services –**
      * …that promote physical, mental, and social-emotional health and wellbeing, and academic success.
      * …that are an integrated part of a comprehensive, multi-tiered system of support
2. **ANALYSIS OF GRANTEE ACTION PLANS -**   
   Analyzing school wide action plans consistent with Safe and Supportive Schools (7061-9612) FY24 budget line item:
   * … Schools receiving Safe and Supportive Schools (SaSS) continuation grants shall, at the end of the grant year, submit a **self-reflection report** to DESE detailing progress made in implementing their school-wide action plans…
   * …DESE shall provide such self-reflection reports to the SaSS Commission which shall **summarize it in its annual report** to the legislature…
   * … the SaSS Commission shall conduct an **analysis of such school-wide action plans and school improvement plans,** which DESE shall provide to the SaSS commission..
   * … and the SaSS Commission shall **include in its annual report the results of such analysis and any recommendations**, including any recommendations related to improving the framework or the self-assessment tool**…”**
3. ***Spotlight:* Absenteeism: A Massachusetts Landscape Analysis and Discussion.**

DESE colleague Nyal Fuentes shared statewide data related to student attendance and chronic absenteeism and how these data relate to drop-out rates, graduation rates, MCAS results, etc. (slides available upon request). Commission members and others in attendance discussed what he shared and gave some examples from their own experience in schools.

1. ***Spotlight:* Connections between Attendance, Wellbeing, and Safe and Supportive Learning Environments for LGBTQ+ Students - Data and Discussion,**

Safe and Supportive Schools Commission Member Alex Nugent shared data collected through a [2021 National School Climate Survey](https://www.glsen.org/research/2021-national-school-climate-survey) by GLSEN related to absenteeism, bullying, and academic outcomes and future plans for LGBTQ+ students. Information shared also include data for MA schools specifically. (Slides are available upon request.) They provided examples of factors that reduce absenteeism for LGBTQ+ students, including: 1) Supportive student clubs, such as GSAs (Gay-Straight or Gender and Sexuality Alliances); 2) LGBTQ+ inclusive curriculum; 3) Supportive staff; and 4) Inclusive and supportive school policies (e.g., school policies that explicitly name LGBTQ+ protections). As noted in the GLSEN report:

* + **GSAs:** Compared to LGBTQ+ students who did not have a GSA in their school, students who had an active GSA in their school were less likely to have missed school in the past month because of feeling unsafe or uncomfortable (24.4% vs. 36.3%)
  + **Inclusive curriculum:** Compared to students in school without an LGBTQ+-inclusive curriculum, LGBTQ+ students in schools with an LGBTQ+-inclusive curriculum were less likely to miss school in the past month because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable (54.7% vs. 67.1%)
  + **Supportive staff:** Compared to LGBTQ+ students with few supportive school staff or none (0 to 5), students with many (11 or more) supportive staff at their school were less likely to miss school because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable (20.1% vs. 42.4%)
  + **School policies that explicitly name LGBTQ+ protections:** Among transgender and nonbinary students, those in schools with a transgender/nonbinary student policy or guidelines were less likely to miss school because of feeling unsafe (30.7% vs. 38.2% missed at least one day of school in the past month for safety reasons)

Additionally, they shared an article: [Strengthening Our Schools to Promote Resilience and Health Among LGBTQ Youth: Emerging Evidence and Research Priorities from The State of LGBTQ Youth Health and Wellbeing Symposium](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6551982/). Commission members and others in attendance offered comments and reinforced the importance of using specific groups’ data and looking at the systems level to support student attendance.

1. **DESE Updates**

DESE staff shared:

* 1. SaSS/SEL-Mental Health/Rethinking Discipline PD [series](https://www.doe.mass.edu/sfs/discipline/pd-calendar.docx): In person kickoff with the Equity Imperative related to Transformative SEL and Alternatives to Exclusionary Practices. There will be virtual sessions following the in-person session. And an end-of-year in-person celebration will follow and showcase of the work of school districts.
  2. Updates to the SaSS tool were described.
  3. Student voice grant (Fund Code 127) – approx. $5.5M requested. Awards anticipated to be announced this spring (April/May).
  4. Acting Commissioner Johnston has started his work as the leader of DESE with a smooth transition.

1. **Next Steps/Closing**

The co-chair thanked everyone for their participation and feedback, and encouraged all to share any additional thoughts via the feedback survey.

The meeting was adjourned.