Massachusetts Advocates for Diversity in Education Task Force Recommendations: The Department’s Action Plan

Department of Elementary and Secondary Education’s Action Plan in Response to Task Force Recommendations

APRIL 2014
Dear Members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education,

Massachusetts has a well-deserved reputation as a premier educational system. This achievement reflects the dedication of stakeholders who support the educational progress of all children. However, the data show that while academic performance has increased for all student groups, a proficiency gap persists between student groups in Massachusetts. The 2013 Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) results show that 10th graders across the Commonwealth are performing at higher levels than ever before\(^1\). Yet, despite a narrowing of the proficiency gaps, racial and ethnic disparities are still present. For example, where 95 percent of white students scored proficient or higher in 10th grade English Language Arts, only 83 percent of African American students and 78 percent of Hispanic/Latino students scored proficient or higher. In Mathematics, the gap is even wider. Eighty five percent of white students scored proficient or higher on the 2013 10th grade Mathematics MCAS in comparison to only 59 percent and 57 percent respectively for African American students and Hispanic/Latino students\(^2\).

Most recently, through the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) flexibility waiver, the Department has established an aggressive yet attainable goal of cutting student proficiency gaps in half by 2017\(^3\). To this end, the Commonwealth is engaged in several reform efforts which include, but are not limited to, the introduction and implementation of the new statewide educator evaluation system, the implementation of the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks in English and Mathematics, and a strategy for turning around the lowest performing schools and districts to support the attainment of proficiency for all students\(^4\). As the Department works towards this goal, it is important to acknowledge that the students in the Commonwealth are more diverse than in the past\(^5\). Therefore, the capacity of educators and school administrators to effectively promote academic and social success for all students will rest upon their ability to succeed in meeting the academic and social needs of a diverse student population.

In June 2013, the Department convened a diverse group of stakeholders to assist in identifying actions that will lead to a more diverse educator workforce and that will enhance the ability of the current educator workforce to effectively educate the Commonwealth’s students from all backgrounds. In an effort to enhance the utility and impact of the group’s efforts, the Department asked the Massachusetts Advocates for Diversity in Education Task Force (Diversity Task Force) to identify recommendations that will further two specific strategies:

1. Increase the racial and ethnic diversity of the educator workforce.
2. Decrease the disproportionate number of suspensions/expulsions of students of color.

These strategies are designed to support the ambitious goal of reducing proficiency gaps by half by 2017.
The Diversity Task Force met over much of the past year (June 2013- January 2014) and identified ten recommendations. In the report presented here, the Department describes the Task Force’s recommendations and outlines an action agenda for each to which we are committed. The action agenda is responsive to the Task Force recommendations; promotes the two strategies identified above; and is an agenda that we feel is feasible within current resource and capacity constraints.

The members of the Task Force included:

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**Rachel Bowen Coblyn**, Assistant Director, Human Resources, Amherst Regional Public Schools  
**Michele Brooks**, Assistant Superintendent, Family/Student Engagement, Boston Public Schools  
**Dione Christy**, Ph.D. Senior Director, Boston Public Schools  
**Ceronne Daly**, Director of Diversity Programs, Boston Public Schools  
**Stacey DeBoise Luster**, Human Resources Director, Worcester Public Schools  
**Julie Hackett**, Superintendent of Schools, Taunton Public Schools  
**Gary L. Gilardi**, Education Policy Specialist, Massachusetts Teacher Association  
**Tom Gosnell**, President, American Federation of Teachers  
**John Jackson**, President and CEO, Schott Foundation for Public Education  
**Nealon Jaynes-Lewis**, Co-Chairperson, Racial Imbalance Advisory Council  
**Glenn Koocher**, Executive Director, Massachusetts Association of School Committees  
**James Martin-Rehrmann**, Professor of Education, Westfield State University  
**Velda McRae Yates**, Interim Deputy Director, Commonwealth Compact  
**Chris McGrath**, Director of Operations, Massachusetts Association School Superintendents  
**Wilma Ortiz**, Assistant Professor, 2011 Massachusetts Teacher of the Year, Westfield State University  
**Elizabeth Shevlin Tripathi**, Education Policy Specialist, Massachusetts Teacher Association  
**Ray Shurtleff**, Lecturer, University of Massachusetts Boston, Department of Leadership in Education, College of Education and Human Development  
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I thank the Massachusetts Advocates for Diversity in Education Task Force for their commitment to and support of this work. I am enthusiastic about the outcomes of the Diversity Initiative and the impact these recommendations will have on realizing the Department’s mission to strengthen the Commonwealth’s public education system so that every student is prepared to succeed in post-secondary education, compete in the global economy, and understand the rights and responsibilities of American citizens and in so doing, to close all proficiency gaps.

Enclosed is a summary of the Diversity Task Force recommendations and the Department’s response to each recommendation. I look forward to working on this important initiative with the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education and with the field, including statewide education associations, educator preparation institutions, and other stakeholders, to help each and every student in the Commonwealth’s schools achieve success.

Sincerely,

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

The Department reviewed each recommendation in light of: any regulatory or other change necessary for implementation, the level of impact on outcomes, the human capacity needed, sustainability, supporting research where available, and alignment to initiatives or projects underway. Department staff members engaged in research, reviewed, and discussed each recommendation. The responses to each recommendation capture the Department’s action steps. However, some of the implementation efforts will require stakeholders to lead or support the effort.

The Diversity Task Force Recommendations and the Department’s Response

Recommendation #1: Attract Students of Color to the Teaching Profession

Design opportunities to attract highly talented students of color to the teaching profession. Use the variety of teacher pipelines to create customized cohorts of teachers (e.g. males of color, students interested in STEM, career changers, multi-lingual educators, etc.). In particular, develop a model for a local/community-based pipeline, and encourage districts to create a variety of entry points into the educator pipeline, including (but not limited to) middle school, high school, paraprofessionals, parents and/or community members vested in public education. Innovative partnerships should be fostered among community organizations, institutions of higher education, and school districts to maximize the benefits of this initiative. This strategy enables districts to recruit culturally and linguistically diverse candidates by accessing their entire school community.

The Department’s Action Plan:

Opportunities that attract students and local community members (such as paraprofessionals and substitute teachers) to matriculate into the district’s educator workforce contribute to a more diverse educator workforce and to the success of the individuals and the local communities. The Department commits to highlighting and disseminating information about promising models of pipeline programs existing in Massachusetts (or elsewhere) to recruit teachers of color. For example, such programs include:

- **Today’s Students Tomorrow’s Teachers Program:**
  
  Participating Districts:
  - Andover High School
  - Arlington High School
  - Brookline High School
  - Lexington High School
  - North High School

- Boston Public Schools’ “High School to Teacher Pipeline Program”

The Department will work with the Diversity Task Force members, state associations, preparation programs, and other stakeholders to assist in identifying these promising models, promoting awareness of the models, and identifying districts implementing these models.
Recommendation #2: Out-of-State Educator Requirements

Expand the acceptable out-of-state educator experience requirements for Initial licenses from three full years of employment under the license sought to include educator license candidates who have successfully completed a National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification (NASDTEC) or Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) accredited educator preparation program and who hold a comparable educator license.

The Department’s Action Plan:

The Department recognizes the need to support effective and qualified out-of-state educators to successfully navigate the licensure process and be competitive for available positions. In the spring 2014, the Department will begin engaging stakeholders in discussions about licensure policy and soliciting ideas for the redesign of licensure policies. These discussions will include the topic of out-of-state educators and the current requirements for licensure (both attainment of the license to teach initially and the license renewal requirements). The recommendations presented by the Diversity Task Force will be included in the stakeholder engagement and will be discussed further.

The Department plans to continue to require all educators to pass the Massachusetts Tests for Educator Licensure (MTEL) as one of the requirements for licensure in the state. The MTEL are a strong lever for ensuring that all Massachusetts educators have the content knowledge required to successfully teach the subject matter content to students. Specifically, the MTEL are customized to align with the subject matter content in the Massachusetts licensure regulations and the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. Other tests used in other states for licensure purposes, such as the Praxis, are not designed to meet Massachusetts licensure subject matter test requirements and student learning standards.

Further, a previous examination of pass rates for the MTEL compared to pass rates for Praxis showed that the passing scores for candidates of color were not significantly different for the Praxis when compared to the MTEL. Specifically:

Excerpted from April 22, 2008 Memorandum to Board, Discussion of MTEL Pass Rates Report-
On May 30, 2007, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education released a report of MTEL pass rates by racial, ethnic and linguistic subgroups. The report indicated that white candidates were passing MTEL at a significantly higher rate than minority candidates. For example, in the 2005-2006 school year 77 percent of white teacher candidates passed the writing exam, as compared to 46 percent of African-American and 48 percent of Hispanic test-takers. On the reading exam, 86 percent of white test takers passed, as compared to 62 percent of African American and 61 percent of Hispanic candidates.

This disparity in pass rates is not unique to Massachusetts. The 2005-2006 pass rates for the Praxis II subject tests show that for the highest volume subject tests, white candidates’ pass rates are approximately 30-40 percent higher than for African-American test takers and approximately 10-30 percent higher than for Hispanic test takers.
The Department will update its online recruitment website, aMAzing Educators, to provide direct links for out-of-state candidates to the appropriate licensure information. aMAzing Educators is a free online platform for candidates to search for job opportunities in Massachusetts K-12 public schools, obtain information about the licensure process, hiring practices, and facts about our districts and schools, and create a profile that includes their resume and links their Massachusetts licensure information.

The Department will continue to have discussions with other states regarding licensure reciprocity as we make revisions to our licensure system as part of a project called the Network for Transforming Educator Preparation (NTEP). The Network is sponsored by the Council of Chief State School Officers and includes a network of seven states selected to pilot a two-year initiative to reform educator licensure and educator preparation.
**Recommendation #3: Diversity of Preparation Programs**

Increase the transparency and accountability of the preparation program efforts to diversify their enrollment and program completers by requiring approved programs to report on the recruitment, retention, and program completion of their students. The Department should consider producing a report of educator preparation programs. ESE should collect and publicize additional data sets that would demonstrate the recruiting and retention of diverse educator candidates. Enrollment data should be linked to data around program completers. There should also be an opportunity for annual discussion amongst preparation programs and the Department with a goal of highlighting successful or promising practices.

**The Department’s Action Plan:**

In June of 2013, the Department launched the Educator Preparation Program Provider profiles reports on the ESE website. These publicly-available web-based reports, updated and published bi-annually, include data on: preparation program enrollment by race/ethnicity; preparation program completion for all enrolled, and faculty diversity. Publication of profiles will raise awareness for the educator preparation Sponsoring Organizations about the need to diversify their preparation programs.

In addition, the Department has released revised Guidelines for Program Approval. Under these guidelines, Sponsoring Organizations are evaluated on their capacity to create, deliver and sustain effective preparation programs. This standard includes an indicator that assesses the program’s outreach and recruitment efforts to enroll and retain a diverse candidate pool.

In 2013, the Department launched Edwin Analytics. Edwin Analytics is a powerful reporting and data analysis tool that gives authorized users access to detailed, disaggregated data and additional reporting capabilities. Through Edwin Analytics, Sponsoring Organizations have access to the program completion data for their candidates by race/ethnicity and gender. Sponsoring Organizations are expected to use the information for continuous improvement.

The Department will include the status and progress of preparation programs on recruiting and graduating diverse cohorts of educator candidates as a point of inquiry and discussion during program reviews, conferences, and in reports on preparation programs.

The Department will issue a summary report at the end of the 2014-2015 academic year.
Recommendation #4: MTEL Pass Rate Study Report
State will respond to Massachusetts Tests for Educator Licensure (MTEL) Pass Rate Task Force Report. We request that ESE review the technical recommendations of the 2008 MTEL Pass Rate Task Force report, especially those recommendations that are designed to reduce the disparities in pass rates on MTEL tests with respect to race/ethnicity and first language. We also request that ESE follow up with the test vendor and require a comprehensive report with respect to these recommendations.

The Department’s Action Plan:

In 2008, in response to the MTEL Pass Rate 2008 Task Force Report, the Department committed to strengthening the MTEL Technical Report by working with Evaluation Systems group of Pearson (ES), the testing contractor, to include more comprehensive documentation in the MTEL Technical Report.

The Department requested and has received from ES two documents: a revised Technical Report, and a Planning Document for Annual Program Review of Test Items that includes plans for a review for potential bias based on differential item functioning (DIF).

The Department will reach out to the MTEL Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) to coordinate the review of the submitted documents and to ascertain to what extent the submitted documents address concerns outlined in the 2008 MTEL Pass Rate Report and concerns raised in this recommendation by the Diversity Task Force. The TAC and the Department will then provide feedback to the testing contractor, ES. Further, the Department will work with ES to determine what revisions need to be made to the Technical Report. After completion and approval, the Technical Report will be available on the Department’s MTEL web pages and plans will be made to implement the annual program review of test items. The Department anticipates an update on the Technical Report will be available in winter 2014-15.
Recommendation #5: Hiring and Retaining Diverse Educators

Develop a systemic search process protocol. School leaders and school committees must be knowledgeable about cross cultural practices, and understand the importance of recruiting and retaining educators of color. These leaders must create and sustain the conditions necessary to retain educators of color in their school systems. Prospective superintendents and school administrators must also have a tool to gauge a school system’s professional culture and an understanding of cultural proficiency on a continuum of learning.

1.) To that end, the State, in collaboration with MASS and MASC and other organizations, will develop a training program to improve cultural proficiency to create and sustain an inclusive environment for candidates and potential employees whose cultural backgrounds offer differing perspectives of the school community involved.

2.) Cultural competency assessments should be conducted across the school system to determine the conditions and culture of the district and community. This will provide school leadership with the opportunity to prioritize areas for training and will give ESE the opportunity to encourage the change of community mindsets.

School districts in conjunction with local community organizations and the school committee should establish search committees that have been trained on legal considerations, practices, behavioral interviewing questions to promote standardization of process, probing techniques, and candidate selection. A model guideline should be established with the goal of increasing the number of educators of color in the workforce.

The Department’s Action Plan:

The Department recognizes the value in using effective recruitment and hiring processes to recruit and retain candidates of color. Such practices and processes affect not only the types of candidates recruited and hired to a district, but also the retention of diverse and effective teachers and administrators.

The Department also recognizes the local autonomy of districts in their hiring and staffing decisions. The Massachusetts Educator Evaluation Framework (School-Level Administrator Rubric) includes standards and indicators that articulate expectations for administrators in the domains of human resources management and development and cultural proficiency. For example, Indicator II-B specifically evaluates a school or district leader’s ability to implement a cohesive approach to recruiting, hiring, induction, development, and career growth that promotes high-quality and effective practice. Indicator IV-B specifically evaluates an administrator’s ability to ensure that policies and practices enable staff members and students to interact effectively in a culturally diverse environment in which students’ backgrounds, identities, strengths, and challenges are respected.

To support effective implementation of these indicators, the Department will identify additional resources that highlight notable practices and strategies, including but not limited to the work of the Human Resources Pilot Project and its “spotlight on cultural proficiency”. The HR Pilot Project, funded by the Race to the Top initiative, is a joint effort between the Working Group for Educator Excellence and the Department to identify efficient, effective, and supportive Human Resource systems and strategies that improve educator performance.
Statewide professional associations such as the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents, the Massachusetts Association of School Committees, and the Massachusetts Association of School Personnel Administrators are better poised to lead the work in developing a model system and identifying effective practices for hiring and retaining candidates of color. The Department will collaborate with these associations if they choose to develop a model and identify and promote useful resources that support effective practices in hiring and retaining candidates of color.

Further, the Department will explore ways that our ongoing leadership initiatives, such as the new superintendent induction program can share in this collaborative effort.
Recommendation #6: Monitoring Student Exclusion

Create a system for monitoring student exclusion data at the state level. ESE internal staff will monitor the full data set of student suspension and retention regardless of the size of the cohort and for all student groups. Suspension data from all schools will be monitored, and districts with high suspension rates will receive supports to decrease non-violent suspension rates. ESE will respond with commendations, recommendations, suggestions, and identification of supports.

The Department’s Action Plan:

In accordance with the new state law on student discipline, Chapter 222: Student Discipline, which takes effect on July 1, 2014, the Department has enhanced its School Safety and Discipline Report system to capture data for all students who have been removed from school. As a result of these recent changes, the Department is able to review disciplinary actions linked to offenses for all students who have received a disciplinary action. The newly-created School and Safety Discipline Report, available to the public through the Department’s website as of March 2014, allows the Department and the public to view discipline data by population subgroup. Further, a key feature is the ability to see the data for all populations in a district or school displayed in one table.

In addition, Chapter 222 requires that the Department annually determine the schools with the highest percentage of students placed on long-term suspension for more than ten (10) cumulative days in a school year or expelled, based on analysis of the reported discipline data. The law further requires that the Commissioner, after review of the discipline data and other relevant school and school district information, such as demographics, student performance, attendance, attrition, graduation, and dropout rates, identify public schools that need assistance to reduce the use of long-term suspension or expulsion. Schools and districts with significant disparities in the rate of suspension and expulsion by race/ethnicity, or disability will be required to develop and implement a plan approved by the Department to address such significant disparities.

The Department’s Office of Tiered System of Supports is developing a state-wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) training and coaching academy. PBIS is a framework designed to improve school climate for all students and staff to ensure all students have access to the most effective and accurately implemented instructional and behavioral practices and interventions. PBIS uses a decision making process that guides selection, integration, and implementation of the best evidence-based behavioral practices for improving academic and behavior outcomes for all students. The PBIS framework proactively and systematically addresses student problem behavior by providing positive behavioral expectations for all students that are clearly articulated, consistently upheld, and nested within a comprehensive infrastructure of support.
Recommendation #7: Transition Points for Students

Create and implement strategies to support transition points for students. The new reality of public schooling is changing rapidly. In a few short years, students of color will be the majority population in U.S. public schools. In order to remain competitive nationally and internationally, it is imperative that Massachusetts lead the way in supporting the academic, social, emotional and cultural growth of all students. Imperative to their development, students need to be educated to understand the fullness of “who they are”, particularly students of color. Supports need to be in place that promote a sense of self efficacy and provide these students with another “common core,” – a common core that enables them to understand the critical importance of knowing in a deep and intimate way “who they are” and why knowledge of their culture and identity are inextricably bound to their hopes, dreams, aspirations and success.

The Department’s Action Plan:

The success of Massachusetts’s education system rests on the success of all of our students. It is imperative that our students of color are given supports that meet their needs and affirm their strengths, background, and challenges. Currently, Massachusetts is engaged in numerous initiatives which aim to provide students the supports necessary to advance successfully in their K-12 education experience and academic career.

The new Massachusetts Educator Evaluation Framework and model evaluation system calls for educators to “teach all students,” and have more specific standards and indicators for Guidance Counselors (Standard II, Indicator IIE-1 and IIE-2) that capture their responsibility in Academic Advising and Transitions. Guidance Counselors are evaluated on their ability to help all students become college and career ready through academic, career, and post-secondary planning and knowledge-building that promote equity and access; and to provide responsive services and supports transitions to reduce barriers to impact student achievement.

The Department is currently working with an external vendor to develop examples of effective culturally proficient practices that align to the model evaluation rubrics for teachers and administrators. These examples will be distributed as vignettes with additional resources for educators, including Guidance Counselors. Each vignette describes a scenario an educator may find him/herself in and a culturally responsive approach for addressing the scenario.

The Department’s College and Career Readiness (CCR) Unit is actively supporting the development of Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) in a range of settings. This work is guided by the core competencies for Social and Emotional Learning (SEL), which are self awareness, self management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision making. These core competencies speak to the heart of student self-efficacy. The ILPs under development apply to all students, but are appropriate vehicles for self-efficacy for specific groups of students. ILPs are part of a process of intentional planning for students across multiple years, starting at least in middle school, with a clear focus on the particular assets and challenges of each individual student. The CCR Unit is currently developing a guide on ILPs to support their use state-wide.
The Department is also collaborating with the Department of Higher Education (DHE) to explore ways to support low-income males and males of color (from grades PK-16) in accessing, enrolling in, and successfully completing college.
Recommendation #8: Culturally Responsive Education Academy

Create and establish a Culturally Responsive Education (CRE) Academy for Educators at all levels with a requirement that educator preparation programs demonstrate effective cultural proficiency training for all approved Initial licensure programs for teachers and administrators. The CRE Academy will focus on building an in-depth understanding around the critical importance of CRE within all school-based settings and how they impact policies, procedures, and practices. There needs to be a culturally responsive mindset and commitment developed amongst our leadership, as well as specific courses should be offered to policy-makers. Awareness of what it means to be culturally proficient needs to be raised among all educator stakeholders, followed by professional development. Professional development should be made available for all school-based and district staff, as well as school committee members. A commitment to provide CRE training will help to develop a culturally responsive mindset among all education stakeholders. Candidates in approved programs for Initial licensure should complete training and field experiences that increase their understanding of cultural proficiency, family and community engagement and diversity in education. An optional endorsement to educators’ licenses should be made available to those who already hold an Initial or Professional license and complete additional professional development in culturally responsive education and family and community engagement.

The Department’s Action Plan:

The Department’s work with an external vendor to develop examples of effective culturally proficient practices that align to the model educator evaluation rubric will also include examples for administrators. These examples will be distributed as vignettes with additional resources for educators to reference. Each vignette describes a scenario an educator may find him/herself in and a culturally responsive approach for addressing the scenario.

The Department will work with the statewide education associations, including the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents and Massachusetts Association of School Committees, to enlist their support for offering professional learning related to cultural proficiency for their members.
Recommendation #9: Commendation School Status

Create a second form of Commendation School Status to recognize that school culture plays a powerful role in student achievement. The ESE has created “Commendation School Status” to recognize school systems for outstanding academic performance as measured by a school’s Level I status and growth scores. Educators and school leaders are motivated by this positive incentive that focuses on the academic aspects of education. For schools and districts to become more cross-culturally proficient, a similar level of motivation and commitment is needed. Cultural proficiency is a powerful variable in student and staff success, and schools and districts that invest in helping people from diverse backgrounds work together may be better equipped to recruit and retain educators of color. The purpose of this recommendation is to encourage school and/or district leaders who are invested in improving cultural proficiency to demonstrate their effectiveness with a set of standards adopted by the ESE, many of which are identified in the recommendations set forth in this report (see Full Description of Recommendations for details). A self-study process and site visit similar to that used in accreditation programs will be used, and school and/or district leaders will have an opportunity to be recognized for outstanding strategies and best practices being implemented in their school/district, or they might go through the process to learn more about how to improve their knowledge and understanding.

The Department’s Action Plan:

The Department agrees that one way to promote schools’ and districts’ focus on cultural proficiency is to recognize the excellent work taking place across the Commonwealth. Shining the spotlight on these efforts and highlighting promising practices will allow other schools and districts to set goals to reach those levels and to learn from other’s experiences. The Department will spotlight schools and districts that are actively working to develop a school culture that is culturally proficient. The Department will use its website as the primary means to highlight the efforts of schools and districts.

The Department will ask the statewide associations, including Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents, Massachusetts Association of School Committees, Massachusetts Teachers Association, and the American Federation of Teachers-MA to also recognize schools’, educators’, and districts’ efforts to promote cultural proficiency.
Recommendation #10: Alternatives to Out-of-School Suspensions

Develop a guide for alternative practices to zero tolerance and out of school suspensions. It is difficult to change long-standing disciplinary practices in schools, and given the disproportionate number of out-of-school suspensions for students of color in Massachusetts, there is an urgent need to rethink current policies and practices. A bold approach is needed to encourage school leaders to examine new approaches to discipline. We recommend that the ESE, in collaboration with the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents (MASS), the Massachusetts Association of School Committees (MASC), the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), the Massachusetts Teachers Association (MTA), and the Massachusetts Opportunity to Learn (MOTL) produce a guide for alternative practices to zero tolerance including policies, and procedures that promote positive and restorative behavior. To encourage active use and consideration of positive behavioral management, ESE, in collaboration with the local school districts and school committees, will place a moratorium on all non-violent and non-drug related out of school suspensions. The moratorium will be instituted on a date and time certain but within a period of no less than one year to allow each locality time and space to align and implement supports for students and teachers.

The Department’s Action Plan:

The Department has already embarked on this initiative, to encourage school leaders to examine their discipline practices and policies and reduce the loss of learning time for students due to in-school and out-of-school suspensions. The requirements of the new state student discipline law, Chapter 222: Student Discipline Law, which take effect on July 1, 2014, require schools and districts to provide students who have been suspended with an opportunity to make academic progress during their period of suspension, expulsion, or removal from regular classroom activities. This requirement applies to all suspensions from school: in-school or out-of-school, or expelled, regardless of the type of offense.

The Department will support schools and districts in adopting evidence-based strategies and programs, such as mediation, conflict resolution, restorative justice, social and emotional learning, and positive behavioral interventions and supports that can foster a safe and positive school climate, reduce the need for suspension, and address existing problems in culturally respectful ways.

The Department will work with the statewide education associations, including the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents and the Massachusetts Association of School Committees to identify resources and effective strategies to support schools, districts and communities.

The Department will update the Safe and Healthy Learning Environments website to highlight and share resources available to assist schools and districts in this change in discipline policies and practices.

The Department will continue providing training in Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports and promoting resources available through the Mass Tiered System of Support.