

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
Highlights from participation in the Collaborating States Initiative
facilitated by the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning
Summer 2016 – Winter 2018

In July 2016, Massachusetts was one of eight states accepted into a [Collaborating States Initiative](#) (CSI) convened by the [Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning](#) (CASEL). Over subsequent phases of the initiative, the number of participating states has more than doubled. Our application was enriched by Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (Department) staff working across program areas, and by the input and support of many Massachusetts educators and administrators, including but not limited to representatives from the [exSEL](#) coalition and the non-profit group, [SEL4MA](#). Our state's involvement in this work was preceded by a special [Board of Elementary and Secondary Education](#) meeting devoted entirely to social and emotional learning (SEL). The purpose of this summary document is to provide brief highlights of the Department's efforts to support SEL during our participation in the CSI, and to preview the direction in which we are headed.

As part of the Department's work informed by the CSI, we took an integrated approach to establishing a common language and shared vision of positive social and emotional competencies for all students through the following efforts:

- Including SEL core competencies as guiding principles in revisions to the Massachusetts [ELA/Literacy](#) and [Mathematics](#) Curriculum Frameworks, and in proposed revisions to the Massachusetts History and Social Science Curriculum Framework;
- Updating the Massachusetts [Guidelines on Implementing SEL Curricula](#), in partnership with Massachusetts stakeholders;
- Exploring the inclusion of SEL core competencies in [planned refinements](#) to the Massachusetts Model Teacher Rubrics, piloted during School Year 2017-2018; and
- Continuing to find ways to integrate SEL throughout our initiatives that support student and educator learning and growth, as appropriate, versus considering it a stand-alone effort.

In addition to these resources, Department staff have also engaged in a wide range of additional projects that support and promote SEL, and in many conversations with Massachusetts teachers, principals, superintendents, students, and parents. The Department has also shared updates about this work on an on-going basis through an [email newsletter](#) and correspondences such as [Teachers Top 3](#) and the [Commissioner's Updates](#).

The importance of a culturally responsive approach to SEL has been a recurrent theme in conversations with Massachusetts educators and with colleagues across the country. Department staff have heard the caution that SEL instruction that is not culturally responsive can risk becoming a source of acculturative stress for students who are not members of the dominant group. On a more optimistic note, Massachusetts educators have described the power of leveraging a culturally responsive SEL pedagogy to better engage and develop students from all backgrounds. In response to this theme, the Department is pleased to present the guidance and reflective tools found in [Social and Emotional Learning for All: Access, Cultural Proficiency, and Cultural Responsiveness](#). We are deeply grateful to educators across Massachusetts, and the country, whose contributions were instrumental to the development of this guidance document.

Although the Department's initial two-year commitment to the CSI has passed, we will continue to draw on the experience and expertise of the team at CASEL and from other state teams as we engage with the field to advance the work around supporting the social and emotional learning of Massachusetts students. For example, in 2018 we will [begin the process of revising](#) the 1999 Massachusetts [Comprehensive Health Curriculum Framework](#). These standards currently define some [key characteristics](#) of social and emotional learning; it is our intent that the work that the Department has done in collaboration with the CSI, and the progress that Massachusetts educators have made in supporting their students' SEL, will inform a deep and impactful revision to these standards.

Department staff are very grateful for the thought partnership with the team at CASEL and with SEL teams from additional states. Throughout the partnership, CASEL staff have hewed closely to the belief that teachers know their students best, principals their schools, superintendents their districts, and state agencies their states. They have been responsive, thoughtful, positive partners throughout this project. We are grateful, and aim to continue our learning and seeking of ways to best support the field to best serve students in Massachusetts.