

Evaluation of the Safe and Supportive Schools Grantmaking Program

Summary themes prepared for the Safe and Supportive Schools Commission

January 2023

The Work:

- Five evaluation cycles (currently in sixth)
- Regular meetings with the grant administrator and DESE evaluation specialists
- Artifact analysis, site visits, interviews, surveys, focus groups, convening attendance
- Three summative evaluation reports [Fiscal Year 2018 (FY18), FY19, FY22]
- Four thematic reports:
 - Review of action plan alignment with DESE expectations (August 2020)
 - Tool completion analysis (November 2020)
 - Analysis of leadership supports provided by DESE (June 2021)
 - Analysis of participation in and impact of the Equity Imperative professional development series (December 2021)

Areas of focus:

- How do schools use the Self- Reflection Tool?
- How do they like the new version of the Tool?
- How is equity centered in this work?
- How are action plans aligned with school and district improvement plans?

Major Findings:

- Most teams complete most of the Tool. Ratings questions have higher response rates than open-ended questions, and the latest version of the Tool has higher response rates than previous versions.
- Teams appreciated the thoroughness of the Tool and the opportunity to reflect on their practices. However, they found the Tool to be complicated and difficult to share with partners outside of the education community, including families and students.
- Teams struggle with the timing of the grant cycle.
- Grantee schools and districts are actively engaged in work around equity and anti-racism
 - Challenges to this work include lack of awareness and understanding among families, community members, and sometimes school administrators. Some teams are facing active resistance from the community.
- Alignment of action plans with school and district improvement plans is a recent expectation and a work in progress. DESE and the Commission need to consider the purpose of this expectation as well as the best ways to support it.



Major recommendations:

Logistics:

- Revise the timing of the applications and grant awards such that districts can plan over the summer and begin to implement the work in the fall of the school year. (FY18, FY22)
- Consider extending implementation funding for two or three years, to allow implementation to take root and become incorporated into school and district culture (FY18, FY19)

Support: Grant requirements

- Develop a process for progress monitoring and revisiting the Tool as needed (FY18, FY19, FY20-FY21, FY22)
- Provide support and structure for districts who take on the responsibility of mentoring new grantees. (FY19, FY22)
- Clarify the role of DESE and the use of the information collected in the Tool as non-punitive and non-evaluative (FY18)
- Consider sharing the CES ratings rubric for the alignment of action plans with expectations, with modifications as appropriate, so that schools and districts will clearly understand what is expected in action plans. (FY20-FY21)
- Provide districts with detailed expectations of what types of initiatives will meet the criteria for each area of the Safe and Supportive Schools Framework and Self-Reflection Tool. (FY20-FY21)

Support: General

- Work with other DESE offices to coordinate and promote the SaSS work, with attention to ways that current grant funding streams can be streamlined and combined (FY19, FY20-FY21).
- Provide a web-based clearinghouse of information, including a list of DESE initiatives related to SSSP, consultants, and direct service providers who specialize in social-emotional learning (FY18).
- Create convenings, including virtual convenings, to provide opportunities for districts to share best practices and to communicate in a two-way channel with DESE leaders (FY20-FY21).

Promoting Equity:

- Work with other DESE offices to respond to concerns about promoting equity, anti-racism, and social emotional learning; allocate resources to support educators and administrators in facilitating difficult conversations about race and racism, through Equity Imperative or similar organizations (FY20-FY21, FY22).
- Require school and district administrators to attend professional development related to the Safe and Supportive Schools grant, particularly around issues of equity and anti-racism (FY22).