Strategies for increasing schools’ capacity to carry out the administrative functions required to implement the Safe and Supportive Schools Framework.

# Draft Interim Report to the Safe and Supportive Commission summarizing interviews with 5 school leaders

**Background.** The “Safe and Supportive Schools Framework” statute (MGL c69 1P) calls upon the Department, together with the Safe and Supportive Schools Commission, to develop the Safe and Supportive Schools Framework to serve as a guiding resource and common structure for schools as they create the infrastructure for whole-school safe and supportive environments. Among its many duties, MGL c69 1P(g) instructs the Safe and Supportive Schools Commission to identify strategies and make recommendations for increasing schools’ capacity to carry out the administrative functions required to implement the framework. In order to carry out this task, the legislature directed the Commission to seek answers to six questions that had earlier been identified in a 2011 report[[1]](#footnote-1) to the governor and legislature by the precursor to the Commission, the Behavioral Health and Public Schools Task Force. The Commission charged Susan Cole, co-chair of the Commission, and the Harvard Law School Education Law Clinic to work under her supervision to interview leaders across the state to investigate these administrative needs. This interim report contains information graciously provided in interviews with five prominent administrators, three of whom are superintendents (both urban and suburban), one of whom is an SEL director (former elementary school principal), and one high school principal. Additional information will be gathered through focus groups to be held during 2017. Building from the questions identified by the Task Force, the interview questions were structured as follows:

1. What are your thoughts about the draft framework?
2. What if any additional capacity do you think is needed to implement the framework?
3. If additional capacity is needed,

* When would implementation require a new position and when can these functions be reallocated among existing positions?
* How should such a position differ according to context—e.g. in rural and suburban, small and large districts, elementary schools and high schools?
* Where should additional support or staff be located? The school level? The district level? The community?
* What is an effective staffing level for carrying out these functions?
* What professional qualifications should be required?

1. Which administrative functions are more appropriately allocated to the district level and which are more appropriately allocated to the school level?
2. What role can/should educational collaboratives play in ensuring these functions take place in schools and districts?
3. What are the funding implications, and what creative cost effective funding mechanisms can be developed? If Chapter 70 funding is expanded, would earmarking be necessary for implementing the Safe and Supportive Schools Framework?

# Executive Summary

The interviewed school leaders explained that for all students to learn, support at the state, school district, and school level is needed to create sustainable safe and supportive school cultures. Each leader emphasized the importance of viewing the creation of safe and supportive schools as school culture change and described a sense of urgency and a willingness to implement the framework from educators in a district as critical for success. Several leaders felt that now was the time for the Commonwealth to recognize the implementation of this law as a way to improve academics for *all* students. Those who are committed to safe and supportive school culture change must be recognized and expand their work in this area, and those leaders who are not yet bought into creating safe and supportive schools must be encouraged to prioritize this work. The leaders were grateful for the locally tailored approach in the framework and the self-assessment tool that allows schools to identify and address their own local needs and incorporate action plans into their school improvement plans. This report will be organized by themes that include answers to the questions listed above. We encourage you to read the full report where the rich conversations provide much more context than the executive summary can.

## What capacity is needed to help all schools in MA become safe and supportive?

**Leadership for culture change.** Interviewees emphasized that for safe and supportive school culture to take hold at the school level, leaders at all levels must:

* Demonstrate and convey a **sense of urgency** that safe and supportive schools are needed to ensure all students learn;
* Work to **change the mindsets of the public and other members of the school community** and overcome barriers posed by different philosophies. (Examples include: moving from punitive approaches to teaching self-regulation skills and accountability, from segregation of students to inclusion, understanding that learning takes place in the contexts of relationships);
* Build **internal capacity** for culture change at the district and school levels; and
* Effectively use **data** to demonstrate need for culture change (e.g. using the Youth Risk Behavioral Survey data to show whether students feel connected at school).

**Coordination at the district and school level to build internal capacity.**

* + **District level position**
    - Each interviewee stated that at least **one person at the district level is needed** to coordinate school culture change. This can be accomplished by hiring for a new position or by reallocating duties among existing staff. The purpose of the position is to **drive system change and put structures in place to build internal capacity to sustain culture change.** Interviewees had various visions for the position including:
      * a social emotional learning director housed at the district level;
      * an assistant superintendent to lead the culture change; and
      * a cultural proficiency specialist at the district level.
* One leader wanted a district-based data coach to assist in the process.
  + - *Duties* of the district-level person:
      * A major part of the job would be to **persuade others in the district to believe in the process of culture change.** This includes messaging and creating buy-in at multiple leadership levels; keeping others on track to identify priority needs and implement S&S culture; and stressing the connection to academics. Some specific duties would include:
        + Helping the district and schools identify their local needs and then create action plans and school improvement plans;
        + Breaking down silos by integrating district-wide initiatives;
        + Using data to create buy-in and helping create feedback loops for use within the school and between the district and schools; and
        + Responding to local needs of the district and of schools:
* One leader stressed that the district-level coordinator should lead a self-reflection process on what challenges the district and schools are facing, on developing action plans, and monitoring progress of culture-change.
* One administrator created online modules for educators on teaching math in a relational way.
  + - *Qualifications of the in-district coordinator.* The district-level person must believe in S&S schools and know how to support others to work actively on school-wide culture change. Two leaders suggested that experience working in schools was also critical. Other suggestions were for strong facilitation skills and experience in creating school culture change.
* **School level positions**
  + Interviewees felt that one or more people at the school level are needed to help coordinate and drive local culture change, by for example: organizing the use of the assessment tool, helping develop the action plan, gathering regular feedback on progress, holding meetings to identify urgencies and creating action plans or strategies to address them.
  + Based on local resources and conditions, leaders suggested this work could be undertaken by:
    - Lead teachers in each school;
    - School adjustment counselor or social workers with redefined role;
    - School-based committee including students and a social worker; or
    - Leadership teams, with representatives from various faculty levels.

## What resources do districts need to build internal capacity at the district and school level?

**Retraining educators, adjustment counselors, and/or social workers to lead culture change.** There was a shared recognition that administrators, support professionals, and teachers could logically provide the coordination at the district and school levels; however, the skills required for the duties described in Section I (above) are not commonly acquired. Universities are not providing training on school culture change to educators, and social workers and adjustment counselors are generally trained to focus on crisis interventions, rather than preventive coordination and consultation. Without a deep understanding of the culture change required to create safe and supportive schools and make use of the framework, it is common to rely on siloed programs that can cause fragmentation and make integrating initiatives difficult.

*Suggestions for training.*Professional learning should be sustained, interactive, and focused on developing capacity within the district.

* + One interviewee suggested that DESE could provide schools with a vetted list of experts whom schools and districts could access on school culture change and the use of the framework. (One school had an excellent experience with Jeff Perrotti, a consultant provided by DESE on the issue of addressing LGBTQ issues.)
  + Each interviewee felt that outside consultants can be helpful for the purpose of helping to develop internal capacity by training local staff. One caveat was that outside consultants might not pick up on the culture of the community or get buy-in from staff. They should be supporting local staff to do this work.
  + One superintendent worked to build capacity by making principal staff meetings more interactive and generative. Instead of listening to lectures, principals present ideas to each other and learn about best practices at different schools within the district. This has been effective and energizing.
  + The role of collaboratives in helping districts and schools create internal capacity will vary by region and local district needs.

# Funding

There was a shared belief that **long-term, sustainable funding is needed** to support the necessary whole-school culture change for making all schools safe and supportive. According to each interviewee, **Chapter 70** would be an effective and sustainable way to fund implementation of the Safe and Supportive Schools Framework. Leaders recognized that the funding resources needed for implementation will be impacted by the urgent priorities and needs of different school districts (e.g. poverty level, geographic isolation), what step the school and district is in the culture change process, and whether there is room to reallocate funding or reassign responsibilities. It was acknowledged that funding alone does not create culture change; self-assessment and monitoring will be needed to ensure that funding is being appropriately used. Suggestions regarding Chapter 70 included:

* an earmark for creating safe and supportive schools;
* a general earmark for social and emotional health with flexibility in how schools spend it;
* funding to those districts that opt to use the framework and create safe and supportive schools culture change; and
* funding available for particular needs or small changes that come up during implementation.

Interviewees consistently stated that if grants are continued, they should go beyond one year. Two leaders stated that grants should be for three to five years. Multiple leaders wanted to see capacity building as the goal of the grant money.

# Accountability

Interviewees shared the view that **accountability measures are needed** to prompt districts and schools to create culture change and to reward the districts that are already engaged in culture change work. While there are districts that recognize the need, there are students in districts where leaders are not yet making it a priority. To ensure prioritization across the state, the following ideas were offered:

* Safe and Supportive Schools Framework plans should be required as part of school improvement plans (2 leaders);
* compliance monitoring should give credit for the actions that districts and schools are taking to make their environments safe and supportive (1 leader); and
* teaching social and emotional learning should be incorporated into the model teacher evaluations. (2 leaders) One leader also wanted guidance from DESE on what to include in teacher evaluations for supporting the framework. One administrator wanted to see SEL indicators on student report cards.

Three administrators stated that questions about school climate on the MCAS would not adequately capture information about school culture.

# Full Interim Report to the Commission

**A sense of urgency is critical to implementing the Safe and Supportive Schools Framework.**

Across the interviews, leaders felt that a sense of urgency and educator willingness to implement the framework in a district is critical for culture change. One superintendent articulated this point by saying the change process requires a “sense of urgency first or else people will not be willing to listen.” Another administrator stated superintendents and principals must be willing to implement the process. Principals will implement safe and supportive schools if the system prioritizes it. Multiple interviewees suggested using data to cultivate buy-in and make safe and supportive schools a system priority. The leaders thought making school culture change for safe and supportive schools a system priority would incentivize effective implementation.

*Interviewees identified the need to change mindsets and create buy-in.*

There was unanimous support for the notion that schools need staff who have bought into the framework, its implementation, and the larger culture change. Interviewees stated that it is important to have people working in the school who buy into the Safe and Supportive Schools Framework and are willing to work on implementing it. One administrator identified that a major barrier to effective implementation of safe and supportive schools (or SEL) is the philosophical barrier of educators who do not believe it is important or the role of the school to engage in this work. This difference in philosophy is a challenge at the school, district, and state level, and it is exacerbated by the way that educators are currently trained. Multiple administrators stated that the culture needs to change so that social and emotional skill development becomes as important as testing, including the MCAS. Another superintendent who was engaged in implementing safe and supportive schools said that superintendents and teachers are not trained to think about system change, even in the context of social and emotional learning. Social workers and counselors are trained to concentrate on crises more than prevention.

One superintendent identified the need to change mindsets as an important step in the implementation of this framework. The leader offered the example of teachers who think that students are the problem; they need to change their mindset about what causes behavior problems and not blame students. Another example is an expectation that students who had behavioral problems would be sent to different schools. Part of creating safe and supportive schools is changing that expectation so that students can stay in their home schools if possible. Changing this mindset is a key part of implementation.

Three administrators emphasized that self-assessment is an important piece of changing mindsets. One superintendent noted that the framework self-assessment tool can force schools to question whether they have systems in place that are necessary for creating safe and supportive schools. Two additional interviewees repeatedly emphasized the importance of self-assessment and self-reflection during all stages of the implementation process to ensure that schools are meeting the needs of students.

*Strong messaging at the state, district, and school levels is crucial.*

There was a general belief in the need for a clear message that focusing on supporting the whole child, including emotionally and socially, will ultimately improve academics. One superintendent used the example of students being more focused on learning since the school started providing breakfast directly in the classroom. It is important to send the message that schools need to pay attention to areas that are not academics in order to increase academic gains.

One superintendent emphasized that it was important for the state to demonstrate that it takes SEL seriously and to provide the necessary support to allow districts to focus on SEL and have sufficient resources to do the work well. One interviewee stressed the importance of districts sending a consistent and unified message that safe and supportive school cultures are a priority. This leader emphasized that teachers need to understand that a safe and supportive school is valued and that taking a job in the district means working toward this goal.

One administrator identified that their district has created a feedback loop that goes top down and bottom up. Teachers and school level leaders provide information to the system team and the district and the district provides information to the teachers and school leaders.

*Data can be used as a tool to create a sense of urgency.*

Two leaders suggested that data can play a role in helping to create the necessary buy-in and sense of urgency. One superintendent suggested collecting data to demonstrate where Massachusetts is falling short on serving portions of its student population. Massachusetts students are doing well academically on paper which gives the state the opportunity to reflect on where they are not doing well. This leader suggested looking at data on suicides, drug overdoses, arrests, and behavioral problems to identify where there are urgent needs, stating: “The schools are working for a lot of kids but there is a portion of the population where literally they are dropping out or dying in some cases.”

Another administrator offered the example of using data on school connectivity to create a sense of urgency, stating: “Something that was hugely transformative in our district for buy-in…our mayor and superintendent shared the data from the Youth Risk Behavioral Survey [which is given to grades 6-12] on school connectedness…That data showed that our African American students feel significantly less connected to school than our white students.” The data galvanized the city and the administrator then was able to tie the data to the importance of SEL. Additionally, this district created and used a survey to gather information about how connected K-8 students feel at school. When this survey demonstrated that students felt unconnected, principals bought into addressing this urgency as none of them wanted to have a school where a segment of the population felt unsafe and unconnected.

# Coordination is needed at the district and school level to facilitate implementation.

*District Level*

Each leader stressed the need for leadership and coordination at the district level, and they all thought that there needs to be someone at the district level implementing this framework who understands system change. The interviewees had different perspectives on whether they needed a new position or whether responsibilities could be reallocated to other staff, but all emphasized the need for a position with primary responsibility for implementing the framework and changing school culture. One superintendent emphasized that there needs to be someone leading the implementation efforts who is dedicated to work on the issue and has the framework as a priority. This could be a person in a new position or reallocating responsibilities to a current position, but either way this person should be coordinating at the district level.

In one district, the superintendent restructured two positions to create an SEL Director who drives implementation of the framework. Additionally, this leader would like to have a district data coach, someone who understands data and could coach others on how to use data to effectuate change in a system. In another district, the social and emotional director position (newly created based on a federal grant) at the district level was critical. The administrator in this district noted the need for someone in the room at every conversation to ensure this work is getting done, including when curriculum coordinators are meeting.

Another superintendent stressed the need for district-level coordination. This district has been attempting to hire an SEL director at the district level. However, the superintendent stated that applicants tend to come with an understanding of services, not with an understanding system change. This director needs to understand how to link the various S&SS initiatives in an academic environment. Similarly, another leader thought it was important for the district-level person, and other educators, to connect the dots to integrate the different siloed initiatives. One administrator stated that the district-level person needs to be able to “draw the through lines [and] articulate the urgency” and part of their role needs to message the importance of safe and supportive schools.

One district used a committee system to drive the culture change in the district. The assistant principal at the high school receives a stipend to run a committee that works on safety and coordination in the district. This committee works on issues of civil rights, incident referrals, and equity and includes student representatives and educators. The task force has between 10 to 15 members who are compensated for their time and meets three to four times a year to assess the district’s needs and reflect on implementation. The leader from this district believes that every district should have this kind of task force with members compensated for their time.

Another superintendent envisioned a cultural proficiency specialist at the district level (and thought every urban district should have one). For example, the district struggles to find teachers of color whose backgrounds reflect their student population, and the cultural proficiency specialist would help bridge that gap.

Three leaders assessed whether they needed a new position based on their internal needs and resources. One leader explained that there is sometimes an impulse for districts to throw in more services or people to solve problems, but that this requires more self-reflection on what a school needs, whether it be a new position or more retraining.

*School Level*

The leaders saw professional development for capacity building and redefining roles as critical at the building level, and discussed the kind of position or team it would take to facilitate this work.

One superintendent indicated that the implementation of the framework through the six operations needs to be done mainly at the school level. There should be coaching support for leadership and leadership teams at the building level which would help increase sustainability. This interviewee thought there should be data analysts at the school level who would be coached by someone at the district level.

On the topic of leadership in schools, another interviewee wanted three teacher leaders in each school to focus on engaging the community, discussing district policies within schools, and creating strong faculty support for culture and climate. These teacher leaders would receive stipends and have an additional free period to work on their responsibilities.

A different interviewee had created school teams in the district. The members of those school teams currently receive stipends although the interviewee believes the stipends are not necessary. The school teams check in with district teams to create a feedback loop, which is important for ensuring silos are being broken down and integration is happening.

A fourth administrator set up a committee at the school led by the school social worker and student representatives. This committee works on issues of social and emotional learning and helps ensure that student voice is driving school priorities on issues of safety and emotional support. The social worker and the students on this committee work together to develop action items that they can implement to address these issues. [Students on these committees surprised the adults with their concerns. For example, students were more worried about classmates than they were about their own safety, and as a result of these discussions wallet cards with resources for getting help were developed and distributed to each student.]

There was also a shared view on the need to reimagine the roles some staff play to create culture change. One superintendent wanted school adjustment counselors to lead culture change at the school level, and expressed that they spend too much time putting out fires currently and do not have time to step back and design a better system. This leader felt that hiring more counselors will not help without a vision and system in place. Another administrator similarly suggested that social workers have the potential for capacity building at the school level and wanted social workers to be skilled in working with and coaching teachers rather than just pulling the kids out of the classroom. This leader also wanted counselors to work on building skills with students to help them function in the classroom. In order to redefine these roles, it is necessary to provide coaching and professional development, and to retrain mental health service providers and psychologists to act as consultants. Another administrator reallocated some of the time of the social worker to do the social and emotional work. So far, this district has been able to so far do this prevention work without additional staff although it has put a burden on staff to do so and this administrator would like to hire an additional social worker.

*Qualifications*

According to all the interviewees, the people who are involved in this work need to believe in the change process and understand the importance of having a safe and supportive environment. Leaders must understand schools and there was a strong preference for practitioners with school experience who understand evidence based practices. One superintendent thought leaders must have excellent interpersonal and communication skills. Another interviewee thought that it was necessary for leaders to have strong facilitation skills and be willing to help the students with their needs regardless of personal opinions. In practice, one district selects school team liaisons based on their knowledge of SEL and the local pillars of the school district. Another superintendent wanted someone with both an understanding of how to link initiatives to academics and how to proactively work on changing culture.

# Capacity must be built *internally* for sustainability of culture change.

There was a strongly shared view that implementation of the framework should focus on building capacity at both the district and building level. Interviewees stated that building internal capacity is critical for changing school culture. They characterized the role of outsiders in supporting the process as limited, and they wanted to see more capacity built internally.

One superintendent said the most effective way to build capacity is for individuals in the school to be able to implement the framework and self-assessment tool. Therefore, it is critical for in-house staff to receive training and coaching to use the tool. The most cost effective and sustainable approach is to train school leaders who then train new staff and new leaders. The eventual goal is having principals and leadership teams doing the coaching support.

One superintendent saw the role of an external coach as helpful in building the capacity of internal staff. The usefulness of an external trainer depends on the school staff: a school with consistent leadership will be able to take on the training role, but if a school or district has a lot of turnover then there may be a greater need for continued external training. Similarly, another administrator said that while having an outside consultant lead the work is inferior to building capacity in a school, initial outside support from a person who understands the framework may be helpful as a bridge to culture change. The difficulty of using someone from outside the community is that outside consultants often do not understand the local school culture. Having someone with excellent experience in school change working with a staff member at the district level to coach that staff member and others on building support in schools would be helpful.

Another district has taken internal steps in order to build capacity. To start building internal capacity, the superintendent shifted district-wide principal meetings from simply talking at the principals to allowing principals to present to each other, discuss best practices, and travel to each other’s schools to see what works. This approach is peer driven, promotes collaboration, and breaks down the barriers between schools competing against each other. Included in these meetings are discussions on how to implement SEL and culture change throughout the district. This process allows the district to grow its own principals and create its own administrative teams internally. The superintendent also has a leadership team, where deputy team members share responsibilities for the pillars or “rocks” of the district-wide plan which are: instructional excellence, safe and supportive schools, and family and community engagement. This team also meets with an external consultant from DC on a regular basis.

In another district, the administrator driving the culture change requires teachers to take two full graduate level courses on SEL and Responsive Classrooms. A consultant has been helping build and train schools on safe and supportive schools. This district also works with an outside evaluator who created a fidelity assessment tool for implementation of social and emotional learning. Every school team does the assessment at the beginning of the year and creates an action plan. This district also uses two other outside consultants, one of whom is an expert in the PBIS framework. While the school teams have been receptive to the outside consultants, an understanding of the culture of the district is often missing with outsiders. This is a problem because understanding the local conditions and relying on longstanding trusting relationships are necessary to secure buy-in from others.

# The role of outside consultants—including Collaboratives- to build capacity will vary based on local relationships.

While leaders emphasized the importance of building internal capacity among all the staff to create school culture change, where expertise does not exist in the district there will be a need for outside assistance to jump start the process of developing internal capacity.Administrators explained thatthis is an upfront investment because the goal is to train internal staff to lead and support each other in this work.

Two administrators felt that they should be allowed to pick the technical assistance themselves so that the assistance fit their own identified needs. They prefer to work with organizations with which they have local relationships. To them, this is preferable to one person at DESE trying to play many different roles and levels of expertise.

*Collaboratives:* The leaders’ felt that using Collaboratives to build internal capacity depended the individual needs of each district, its relationship to its Collaborative and the Collaborative’s strength in the area of culture change. One superintendent from a suburban system felt Collaboratives could play key role in regional implementation of the framework, offering professional development opportunities and training, as well as special education programming. This would take advantage of an existing structure, rather than having to create a new one. For another administrator, geographical distance of the district made it difficult to receive a lot of services from a collaborative. Three interviewees from large districts felt their districts were too large to rely on Collaboratives for this work; they did not currently use Collaboratives for their special education needs.

*Technical assistance should come from organizations with local relationships.*  One interviewee explained that their district is using outside consultants, for example to implement PBIS Framework. However, while helpful, the consultants are not experts in the culture of the district, so they can lose a bit of their culture when providing support. People on the inside are able to get buy-in through relationships, a barrier present when using outside support. Another superintendent emphasized that when the outsider understands schools they are more effective. In one successful consultation, the expert was able to capture the stress level educators felt, leading to buy-in. One administrator suggested using DESE as a resource for outside consultants and suggested that DESE should keep a list of vetted experts that schools could use for training and assistance. This would help ensure a consistent message and that the expert has been vetted. (See positive comments on Jeff Perrotti in the executive summary)

# Funding

*Funding needs vary depending on the district needs.*

Leaders generally felt that the state should allocate funding taking into account the different funding needs of various districts. This should depend on what resources are currently available in the district and if there is room to reallocate funding or staff responsibilities within the existing budget. Interviewees identified that there are different funding needs for high poverty districts and different funding needs for suburban and urban districts. One interviewee identified the unique challenges of working in an isolated, high poverty district where different support services are needed.

One superintendent was able to combine two existing positions to create a position for a district leader on safe and supportive schools. One interviewee said that if there was funding for only one position, the district coordinator should be prioritized.

One administrator identified that it would be very helpful to make additional funding available for needs that come up over time. There are small changes that could be made in this district in order to make schools safer and more supported that are not predictable in advance. Updating bathrooms to make them safer for transgender students, for example, was an unanticipated need but could be accomplished with relatively little funding.

One interviewee recognized that the funding requirements will vary depending on where schools and districts are in the change process. *“Early on you’re going to need a lot of up front funding. You are building leadership teams.”* However, once internal leadership capacity has been developed, then schools and districts that are further along in the process will need less funding because they will be able to do internal training. Therefore, building internal capacity so that building leadership can do coaching and training is the most sustainable and cost effective model for implementation. Sustainability is important because any funding source (but especially grants or state funding) might come and go.

*Interviewees would prefer multi-year, capacity building grants to one-year grants.*

All interviewees felt that grants should be longer and identified as “capacity building” grants. There needs to be “initial support in designing the framework for the district, supporting the point people, helping to redefine roles and leaving the point people to implement the framework on their own.” Similarly, another interviewee did not think that the district needed money to hire additional personnel, but instead thought that money is needed to build capacity and to help start the change process. Two interviewees suggested that grants should last for three to five years. Specifically, one superintendent argued that grants “have to be three to five years because a change process isn’t a one year process.” One district received a 5-year federal grant that is specifically for capacity building, which has enabled the district to carry out the SEL work on a high level. The grant pays for two salaries, teacher stipends, and the creation of an online self-assessment tool. Another interviewee stated that grants should be multi-year given for the sole purpose of building capacity and that these grants should be substantial enough to allow schools and districts to use them for capacity building.

There were some concerns about the long-term viability of grants generally. One superintendent expressed concern about grants as a long term solutions because “grants can dry up.” One district had an experience with a Safe and Supportive Schools grant where the grant was used to hire a social worker who was then removed when the grant was over without creating any system change. The interviewee from that district stated that this has left the perception that initiatives will not last.

***Restructured chapter 70 would be an effective mechanism for funding culture change.***

The leaders interviewed thought that providing funding for school culture change through Chapter 70 would be sustainable and effective. In order to provide funding for culture change through Chapter 70, the formula would have to be restructured. Another interviewee stated that any funding option other than chapter 70 would seem like a one-time disbursement rather than a reliable source of funding for the school. One interviewee, however, thought that safe and supportive schools could be partly funded through the Chapter 70 calculation, but that it could not be the whole funding solution. This interviewee thought that there should be funding allocated for this work based on district poverty levels, in addition to Chapter 70. This interviewee also emphasized that funding for safe and supportive schools should be in addition to current funding rather than a reallocation of current funding to schools.

One interviewee suggested creating an opt-in funding structure where, if a district adopts this framework, they will get funding to implement their plan. Another interviewee thought that Chapter 70 funding needs to be earmarked to implement safe and supportive schools. Two additional interviewees thought that money could be earmarked for social and emotional health but that districts should be able to use that money how they see fit. One of those interviewees suggested that the state could require schools or districts to come forward with goals to qualify for additional funding, and then get more funding based on progress reports.

*There are other limited possibilities for funding.*

Two leaders both suggested the possibility of looking at current sources of funding to do this work. One superintendent suggested that every school district should look at their budget and the entitlement grants—Title 1 or IDEA—that are received each year to see if there is a way to restructure funding. The second interviewee was more hesitant about attempting to tie SEL or safe and supportive schools to IDEA funding but did mention it as a possibility. This leader was concerned because safe and supportive schools are meant to benefit all students and should not be tied to only a specific subset. However, consideration should be given to the IDEA since a lot of the culture change work schools need funding to do is also covered by IDEA (such as safe and supportive environments and tiered supports).

# Accountability measures would facilitate implementation of the Safe and Supportive Schools Framework.

Each interviewee felt that accountability measures are an important part of supporting and implementing the safe and supportive schools framework; otherwise, this safe and supportive school culture change does not get put on the front burner with so many other initiatives Four leaders believe that accountability should be based on the actions that the school takes through the framework to become safe and supportive and one leader believed that standards for teachers and students are also a crucial aspect of implementing safe and supportive schools.

*Districts and schools should be held accountable based on the actions the schools are taking.*

Four interviewees stated that districts and schools should be held accountable based on the actions that schools are taking in order to implement the framework. They felt that DESE should recognize the actions the schools are taking through action plans or school improvement plans.

Two interviewees stated that the state should *require* framework implementation as part of school improvement plans. One administrator asked DESE to provide guidance how to implement the framework and incorporate the identified practices into their improvement plans. A second administrator believed that legislation should be changed to require specific steps to do SEL work in school improvement plans. If culture change goals were required in the school improvement plans, schools would need to report on their progress to their school committees which would help create accountability. This is important because “what doesn’t get monitored doesn’t get done.” Incorporating culture change into school improvement plans will also help communicate the intentions and the importance of SEL to the community.

One superintendent further explained that the best way for social emotional learning and safe and supportive schools to become integrated into school culture is to measure it. This leader asked for a system that gives points to districts for their *actions* to support social and emotional learning as part of the ESSA accountability measures. This superintendent also suggested that the state should develop compliance measures to determine whether a school is working to meet these measures. The district’s actions should be considered by the state when it does district reviews and/or certified program reviews. If schools are not working to meet the compliance measures, then the state should require them to make action plans that the state can monitor.

*Two interviewees suggested incorporating the Safe and Supportive Schools Framework into the teacher evaluations.*

Two of the leaders suggested that aspects of the safe and supportive schools framework should be incorporated into teacher evaluation. The current model teacher evaluations from DESE do not include anything about school culture or safe and supportive schools. Two of the leaders suggested that these models should change to evaluate teachers on aspects of safe and supportive schools. One superintendent believed this will help measure the work being done and induce teachers to implement the framework. The interviewee identified the lack of knowledge by educators about what implementation would look like as a problem that more robust teacher evaluations might be able to solve. Another district has already adapted the teacher evaluations to assess teachers on whether they are implementing practices to support SEL.

*One interviewee advocated creating SEL standards for students.*

One interviewee believed that standards for students are an important aspect of implementing the Safe and Supportive Schools Framework. Standards for students should measure the SEL skills that students should be learning and evaluate their ability to do those skills, and teachers should be evaluated on aligned standards as part of the teacher evaluations. The school should support these standards in its school improvement plan, professional development coaching and establishing school wide practices. This leader’s district has developed its own SEL standards for students and includes them on report cards. In general, the district’s standards (which are based on CASEL) are strong, but DESE should provide SEL standards to all districts. This leader said that standards are important because if teachers and principals have limited resources, they will devote those resources to doing what they have to do (such as meeting math and literacy standards and complying with IDEA) rather than choosing to work on safe and supportive schools. “People all over think that this is important. But they are going to spend their money and their time and their support on what they are required to.” This leader stated that implementation should start with standards focused on individual students rather than systemic change because children are being harmed right now in schools that are not close to making the systemic changes necessary.

*MCAS culture surveys will not provide sufficient information for accountability*

Three of the interviewees were skeptical that questions about school climate on the MCAS would provide the accountability data necessary to track the implementation of the Safe and Supportive Schools Framework. One administrator, whose district conducted its own connectedness survey, was unsure if data collected by the department would be as well received and effective as data collected and developed internally.

1. The BPHS Final Report is available online through http://BHPS321.org. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)