**Safe and Supportive Schools Commission Meeting**

Tuesday, February 6, 2024

**MINUTES**

**Members in Attendance:** Co-Chairs Rachelle Engler Bennett and John Doherty; Kristin Campione, Margie Daniels, Marissa del Rosario, Susan Farrell, Heidi Gold, Ellen Holmes, Michelle Lipinksi, Raquel Negron, Alex Nugent, Shanyn Toulouse, and Beverly Williams

**Others in Attendance:** *Spotlight Presenters:* John Crocker and Methuen students Ibrahim, James, Mueez, Myah, Nicholas, Quinn, Tayyab, and Thomas; *Also attending:* Catherine Brooks, Stacy Cabral, Louise Ebbeson, Anne Eisner, Russell Feinman, Michael Gregory, Katherine Houle, Anu Joy, Hannah Justus, Shinyi Kang, Sophie Lenihan, Kate Lytton, Tom O’Hara, Chris Pond, Emily Taylor, and Donna Traynham

1. **Welcome, Agenda Review, Approve December 4, 2023 Minutes**

The Co-chair welcomed commission members and others in attendance and reviewed the agenda

***VOTE****: On a motion duly entered and seconded, the December 4, 2023, Commission minutes were unanimously approved by roll call vote.*

1. **New Member Introduction**

Co-chair introduced the newest Commission Member, Raquel Negron, appointed by the Parent Professional Advocacy League (PPAL). Commission member Negron is a Family Support Specialist at PPAL, and shared about her experience as a parent and a family advocate.

1. **2024 Students Speak Legislative Briefing — Brief Update on Plans**

Commission Member Marissa del Rosario’s colleague, Michael Gregory from the Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative, shared about work they are doing at Harvard Law School with graduate students and with high school students in the Students Speak Initiative. Law students from the program shared information about upcoming events and work they will engage in with students.

* The Students Speaks Legislative Briefing will take place on March 5th from 12-1 PM at the State House. Commission members and others are invited to attend in person or to view the briefing virtually. The link to the livestream and recording is: [Special Event Details - Students Speak: Humanizing Our School Communities (malegislature.gov)](https://malegislature.gov/Events/SpecialEvents/Detail/416)
* The Students Speak Youth Summit will take place on April 17 from 10-3 at Harvard Law School. Commission members and others were invited to contact the team at TLPI/MA Advocates for Children if they know groups of students who may be interested in participating.

More information about the Students Speak initiative and statements from young people are available at <https://students-speak.org>. Email [info@students-speak.org](mailto:info@students-speak.org)for more information.

1. ***Spotlight:* High School Student Panel and Discussion: Informing mental health and wellness policies and initiatives in high schools,** with student representatives of Methuen's *Mental Health Parent & Student Advisory Council*, moderated by John Crocker, Methuen's Director of School Mental Health & Behavioral Services

Co-chair Bennett introduced the panel of students from Methuen Public Schools who are part of the district’s mental health advisory.

The Mental Health Parent & Student Advisory Council was formed in order to give students and parents a voice regarding the mental health initiative in Methuen. Crocker shared a brief description of the robust system of supports available in the district and how student voice is included in the decision making for the types of supports that are available and other mental health programing in the district. Students shared about a number of specific initiatives and projects they have been actively involved with and have led, e.g., related to student recruitment for the council, organizing forums and trainings, creating a student informational video, reviewing and discussing data and implications for student screenings, and future plans. Slides with more details are available upon request.

1. **Context Setting and Proposed Focus Areas for the 2024 Commission Year**

Co-chair Doherty shared ideas for Commission focus areas based on meetings with individual Commission members, the language in the Safe and Supportive Schools Law, and other factors such as the Department’s Educational Vision and Commissioner’s priority areas. Slides are available upon request. The two proposed focus areas shared centered around the following:

1. The connection between Safe and Supportive Learning Environments and Chronic Absenteeism/ Student Attendance.
2. Reviewing and analyzing Safe and Supportive Schools grantee action plans, along with their school and district improvement plans, and connections to attendance and other [Commission charges](https://www.doe.mass.edu/sfs/safety/commission.html#responsibilities) as well as potential implications for the grant program, DESE professional development offerings, and/or Commission recommendations to the legislature to be included in the annual report.

At the next Commission meeting, the co-chairs will share a further refined proposal for the rest of the 2024 year.

1. **DESE Updates**

DESE staff shared brief updates:

* 1. SEL/MH grant is supporting 152 school to think about their MTSS as well as how they are working collaboratively with community agencies or other agencies that support SEL/MH supports.
  2. The Safe and Supportive Schools competitive grant was awarded to 21 districts, which serve 58 schools. There are 18 option 1 grantees (who with grant support complete the self-reflection tool and action plan). The other 3 grantees are option 2 grantees (working on implementing previously created action plans and providing information and support to other grantees). Additionally, 22 continuation grantees are implementing action plans they created last year.
  3. *Promoting Safe and Healthy Learning Environments: Elevating Student Voice and Well-Being*. The grant anticipates awarding approximately $10m using the federally funded Stronger Connections federal grant. Up to approximately $3m will support districts hosting an emergency shelter welcoming newcomers and families experiencing homelessness; and these funds can help address the needs of the students and families residing in the emergency shelters. Additionally, up to approximately $7m will support districts to engage in up to 6 different student voice initiatives as described in the [Fund Codes 127/644 RFP](https://www.doe.mass.edu/grants/2025/0127-0644/).
  4. It was recently announced that 11 districts/schools have been identified and will create action plans and participate in a professional learning network as part of the first 2-year cohort in Phase II of the [Rethinking Discipline Initiative](https://www.doe.mass.edu/sfs/discipline/pln-update-sy2024.docx).
  5. A number of informational resources and professional development have been offered and continue to be available to support implementation efforts for the updated Comprehensive Health and Physical Education Framework. For more details, see this new [CHPE web page](https://www.doe.mass.edu/stem/chpe/default.html).
  6. The Commission’s annual report continues to be under review, and DESE will let members know when the report has been officially submitted and posted.
  7. The Governor released her House 2 budget. There is roughly $600,000 for the SaSS grant and the language is slightly different, as it often is during this stage of the budget cycle. We will monitor the language and budget allocations as it moves through the budget process.
  8. The posted SaSS Framework and Tool documents were updated with the revised [essential elements](https://sassma.org/essentialelements.asp) image (thank you to all who provided feedback).

1. **Next Steps/Closing**

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

The meeting was adjourned.