



Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

**SAFE AND SUPPORTIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS
GRANT EVALUATION SUMMARY
Fiscal Year 2007 (School Year 2006-07)**

Massachusetts State Line Item 7061-9614 – Section B

OVERVIEW

Grant Purpose

The purpose of this state-funded grant program is to assist school districts with the development and establishment of:

1. comprehensive programs to promote school safety and help prevent violence in schools from whatever causes; and/or
2. in-school programs and services to address, within the general education school program, the educational and psycho-social needs of students whose behavior interferes with learning, particularly those who are suffering from the traumatic effects of exposure to violence. (Students suffering from the traumatic effects of exposure to violence shall include, but not be limited to, those exposed to maltreatment, family or community violence, war, homelessness, or any combination thereof.)

Grantees

In Fiscal Year 2007 (FY07), a total of 23 districts were awarded Safe and Supportive Learning Environment (SSLE) grants (funded through section B of state line item 7061-9614). The 23 districts receiving SSLE funding included:

Academy of Strategic Learning Charter School, Amherst-Pelham Regional Schools, Athol-Royalston Regional Schools, Barnstable, Boston, Boston Day and Evening Academy Charter School, Chicopee, Dennis-Yarmouth Regional Schools, Fitchburg, Framingham, Lowell, Ludlow, Mashpee, Methuen, New Bedford, North Central Charter Essential School, Orange, Peabody, Quincy, Smith Leadership Academy Charter School, Somerville, Springfield, and Triton Regional Schools.

Grant awards ranged from \$15,000 to \$36,000. Among the 23 funded districts, 18 were funded through continuation grants and had received funding for similar work in FY06. Grant awards were either focused on a specific school or schools, or were implemented district-wide, at the discretion of the individual grantee.

Department Activities

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) provided ongoing technical assistance to the 23 grantees and facilitated grantee meetings and a professional development event, all of which provided opportunities for SSLE grantees to network and learn about topics such as effective ways to engage parents and self-care management.

ESE staff also provided information and technical assistance to other school districts interested in a “trauma-sensitive schools” framework. This information and assistance was provided through an updated trauma-sensitive schools website (www.doe.mass.edu/tss) as well as through responses to phone and email inquiries. Furthermore, the ESE convened the second annual statewide trauma conference, attended by approximately 250 participants from throughout the state. The conference shared promising practices on implementing trauma-sensitive schools to grantees and other interested districts.

Advisory Committee

Per state legislative requirements, the ESE convened a Safe and Supportive Learning Environment Grant Advisory Committee. The SSLE Advisory Committee met five times during FY07. The total membership was 12 participants, including representatives from ESE, other state agencies including the Department of Mental Health and the Department of Public Health, and private organizations.

In FY07 the Advisory Committee focused on improving the evaluation of the SSLE grant program. As a result, a graduate student intern was hired to further research efforts by developing a process evaluation tool for the SSLE grantees. The tool evaluates grantees’ planned and actual implementation level of SSLE grant funded activities related to school leadership, staff training and professional development opportunities, mental health linkages, school policies/procedures/systems, instructional practices, community collaborations/partnerships, and small group or individual level interventions. This tool was piloted and fully implemented among all grantees during FY08.

In addition, the ESE hosted two forums to set a research and evaluation agenda for the SSLE grant program. Advisory Committee members, trauma experts, and researchers throughout the state attended both forums. Participants in the research forums discussed the various outcomes and indicators that should be used to assess the overall success of the SSLE grant program and developed long-term goals for the evaluation of the SSLE grantees.

The remainder of this report summarizes the activities of grantee districts related to school leadership, staff training/professional development, community linkages and collaborations, school and parent/caregiver partnerships, instructional practices, and impact/outcomes of grant-related activities. Grantees are highlighted for each section to provide concrete examples of the activities.

FISCAL YEAR 2007 GRANTEE ACTIVITIES

School Leadership

All of the 23 grantees formed leadership teams or committees to strategically plan how to incorporate trauma-sensitive policies, programs, and activities into the classrooms and the school-wide environment. Many districts conducted needs assessments among staff and students to help guide-planning activities. Districts had diverse membership on their leadership teams including teachers, administrative staff, student support staff, and representatives from community-based organizations.

Grantee Highlights

- *Barnstable*: Developed a trauma-sensitive school advisory board to address concerns about school climate and culture. The committee was well received by school administrators, and it was later incorporated into the school-wide diversity committee, which is a school-wide committee that addressed concerns about school climate and culture.
- *Boston Day and Evening Academy Charter School*: Organized regular meetings for the Student Support Team that combined day and evening staff. Meetings were held monthly to build a more collaborative team culture and in order to discuss student scenarios, participate in trainings, and professionalize the entire team.
- *Ludlow*: Organized a 10 member advisory committee that included the superintendent and representatives from community agencies. The committee established a five-year sustainability plan related to trauma-sensitive initiatives.
- *Somerville*: Formed a Social Competency Team that conducted an assessment of social competency programming among grades K-8. The team developed a report for the superintendent on recommendations for programs that address social competency needs.
- *Orange*: The Child Advisory Committee conducted a needs assessment in the schools and the community of Orange. As a result of the needs assessment, a grant administrator was hired to plan trauma-sensitive programs and initiatives.

Staff Training and Professional Development

More than 850 teachers and staff across all districts received training on the effects of trauma on learning and development, the identification of signs of trauma, and classroom management strategies to create safe learning environments. The number of staff trained in FY07 is 40 percent increase from FY06.

Grantee Highlights

- *Athol-Royalston*: Conducted training for teachers and staff on teaching students self-calming skills, positive cognitive behavioral replacement techniques, and recognizing and responding to traumatized children.
- *Amherst-Pelham Public Schools*: Provided training on student diversity, the impact of trauma on student development, and student confidentiality.

- *Fitchburg*: Developed a district-administered trauma training module that will be used to train to every teacher and administrator from pre-kindergarten through grade 8. Over the course of the year, 320 teachers and 13 administrators received this training.
- *Framingham*: Provided teachers with the opportunity to enroll in a four-day graduate level course on trauma and learning. A total of 23 teachers enrolled, and 21 of them earned an “A” in the class. The district also hosted a three-part presentation on trauma and learning, school and community collaborations, and classroom management strategies for teachers; as well as a lecture on understanding homelessness & its effect on student achievement.
- *Methuen*: Partnered with a local community-based organization to provide a number of after school trainings for teachers on the signs of trauma and strategies for creating safe learning environments.
- *Triton Regional Schools*: Trained high school staff on promoting an understanding and responding to challenging behavior in the classroom, and provided an introductory training on the effects of trauma on learning.

Student Trainings, Program, and Interventions

Sixteen grantees implemented programs or small-group interventions to help students develop skills in regulating or modulating their behavior and emotions, and to foster healthy relationships with their peers and staff. Anti-bullying and violence prevention curriculums (e.g. *Second Step*, *Steps to Respect*, and *Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support*) were implemented among seven grantees to train students and staff how to recognize and respond appropriately to bullying, and to gain a better understanding of the effects of bullying, harassment, and violence on others. Five grantees trained student peer mediators to give students a greater sense of agency over their school environment. These school wide, classroom, and individual trauma-sensitive programs and activities impacted approximately 15,992 students.

Grantee Highlights

- *Amherst-Pelham*: Implemented a healthy relationships support group for girls with a history of chronic trauma, early signs of bullying behaviors, and/or difficulties in forming healthy peer relationships.
- *Dennis-Yarmouth Regional Schools*: Trained students in grades 4-5 to be peer mediators and had 39 mediations during the school year, impacting 93 students. The program was available to all the students and was encouraged as a first step in problem solving. The program a 100 percent success rate of students not returning to the peer mediators for the same issue.
- *Peabody*: Hosted a number of plays and films addressing teen violence, domestic violence, and bullying. Also offered a Peer Mentoring program (all 46 mediations were successful) and the Transitional Partner’s Program, where older students were matched with freshmen to help them adjust to high school and make healthy decisions.
- *Methuen*: Instituted Bully Awareness Week in April, during which each day had a different theme (e.g. friendships, courage, and random acts of kindness). These themes were integrated into the curriculum, counseling sessions, and school activities.
- *New Bedford*: Provided training for pregnant and parenting students on healthy relationships, decision-making skills, and safety strategies for students and their children.
- *North Central Charter Essential School*: Implemented a high school preparation period for all 8th grade students every morning. Teachers met with students in small groups to

provide additional help as needed. The district also implemented an advisory and life skills curriculum to educate students on anger management, stress management, social skills, as well as on prevention of drug and alcohol risky behaviors.

- *Smith Leadership Academy Charter School*: Twenty 8th grade students participated in an intensive eight-week training that focused on exploring and processing issues of gang violence, homophobia, peer pressure, family issues, conflict resolution, and mediation.
- *Springfield*: Provided formal professional development training for school staff on topics such as understanding trauma in children, responding to disruptive behaviors in the classroom, and guidance for relaxation for teachers working with traumatized children.

Mental Health Linkages and Community Collaborations

Fifteen grantees engaged in activities to help establish or maintain linkages between school staff and professionals both inside and outside the school environment. These activities included developing a referral system with community-based mental health and/or social service agencies, collaborating in consultations and case reviews of individual cases, and hiring professionals to provide training for school staff, parents, and students on issues related to trauma and learning.

Grantees Highlights

- *Athol-Royalston*: Partnered with the local Department of Social Services office and community-based organizations to provide information and referrals for traumatized children and their families to increase physical and mental health services.
- *Boston*: Coordinated with community organizations to provide group counseling for students that included a curriculum based on the overarching goal of enhancing conflict resolution skills among group members, with an understanding of the skills deficits that often are present in children who have suffered trauma. Also provided grief counseling after two students were murdered on the streets of Boston.
- *Boston Day and Evening Charter School*: Hired a part-time Community Liaison who approached over 30 city and state agencies about possible collaborations. The district also partnered with a local foundation to provide staff training and counseling for students.
- *Framingham*: Collaborated with a mental health consultant to review two student cases, and convened a community round table as a means to improve communication between school staff and district and community agencies. The community round table met three times, which resulted in an increase in the number of mental health referrals made in FY07.
- *Peabody*: Developed a robust and readily accessible repository of district and community information and resources related to violence prevention and intervention.
- *Triton Regional Schools*: Provided in-house counseling intervention services to students who have been exposed to trauma and violence and who do not have an Individualized Education Program (IEP).

School and Parent (or Caregiver) Partnerships

Eleven districts incorporated parent training and educational workshops to help encourage parents to be more engaged in their children's learning and to educate them on issues that impact student achievement.

Grantee Highlights

- *Dennis-Yarmouth*: Held a number of parenting classes and workshops open to any family in the district. Workshop topics included effective communication with your child, fostering self esteem in children through healthy peer relationships, and what to do when your child is bullied or is the bully.
- *Lowell*: Sponsored three family night sessions for community pre-kindergarten children and their caregivers. Planned activities were related to classroom themes (e.g. cooking, songs, and writing/science) as a means to help parents feel more comfortable in the school environment and take a more active role in their children's education.
- *Ludlow*: Provided theme-based monthly support group meetings for families that included facilitated discussion with parents and structured activities for students. Also distributed information sheets to families about the effects of trauma, including the potential affects of domestic violence on academic achievement.
- *Methuen*: The SSLE Grant facilitator worked to establish a linkage with the local Parent Teacher Organization. Began to educate parents about cyber bullying by providing parents with information through the district website.
- *Orange*: Offered a Saturday Family Enrichment Series that provided quality programming on a consistent basis at no cost to families. Children and their parents came together in a positive environment. Activities included writing and art instruction, a science show, storytelling, gym/adventure games, and nature/outdoor exploration.
- *Springfield*: Engaged parents throughout the school year by delivering presentations at Parent Teacher Organizational meetings and Parent Nights on topics related to responding to disruptive behaviors and bullying.

Instructional Practices

Nine districts incorporated strategies to improve academic instruction of traumatized children. These strategies included incorporating non-verbal teaching techniques into lesson plans, equipping teachers with classroom resources to help them create a trauma-sensitive classroom, and activities to help improve students' self esteem and perceived level of safety in their classroom environments.

Grantee Highlights

- *Academy of Strategic Learning Charter School*: A professional artist instructed students in glass mosaics, which was piloted as a tool for healing, recovery, and expression. Four students received awards at a local art show for their mosaics.
- *Barnstable*: Incorporated multiple project-based methods into classroom instruction. For example, teachers integrated cooking and baking sessions into math lessons. Also encouraged students to participate in community service-learning projects to connect projects to the curriculum and foster a sense of empowerment.
- *Fitchburg*: Supplied all teachers and staff with a resource brochure outlining the most important points outlined at the trauma training. The brochure provided teachers easy-access to resources and tips during the school day.
- *Methuen*: Supported teachers in the incorporation of violence-prevention curriculum in all classrooms, from pre-kindergarten through fourth grade.
- *Quincy*: Organized activities to help students with known trauma histories prepare for their transition from 8th grade to high school. For example, during a summer program students were able to visit high schools to meet guidance counselors and deans.

School Policies, Procedures, Systems

Twelve districts established policies, procedures, and systems to support efforts to establish trauma-sensitive environments, both in the classroom and school-wide. These policies, procedures, and systems gave teachers and staff guidelines for issues related to discipline infractions, referrals to support services for students, as well as student case reviewing and confidentiality of student information.

Grantee Highlights

- *Boston*: Developed a protocol to obtain teacher referrals and parental permission for students to participate in group counseling sessions with an outside mental health provider.
- *Chicopee*: A system for case conferencing between the principal and his administrative team for students with emotional/behavioral problems or who experienced trauma was implemented. Also began an incentive program to encourage school attendance among students.
- *Mashpee*: Revised their student support referral forms so data could be collected and tracked using a school-wide information system.
- *North Central Charter Essential School*: Established a referral system to connect students to school resources. Also instituted an initiative where students complete a contract in collaboration with Social Support staff to help ensure academic success.
- *Somerville*: Developed recommendations on policy and protocol improvement needed to support the consistent and sustainable application of social competency activities.

Overall Impact

A number of districts conducted surveys among school personnel and students to determine how their efforts to create trauma-sensitive environments in both classrooms and school-wide are perceived by the school community, as well as their impact on outcomes such as disciplinary infractions, teacher/student relationships, and student academic achievement.

Grantee Highlights

- *Academy of Strategic Learning Charter School*: Surveyed 50 students regarding their assessment of their abilities to contribute successfully to their school and community. Preliminary data analysis suggests that students significantly increased their sense of civic engagement and ability to transform problems into action plans. Additionally, an unintended and positive impact was the effect on disengaged youth who had dropped out of school but found refuge at the Academy with support from students who encouraged them to seek help at the school.
- *Chicopee*: Results from qualitative study revealed that both students and teachers reported that they witnessed positive changes made in policies and school climate since the implementation of the grant-funded initiatives and programs. Faculty and staff also reported that they felt supported and valued by the administration to use non-traditional (and effective and appropriate) methods to engage students and enhance learning.
- *Mashpee*: Results of a FY07 School Safety Survey showed a decrease in the following incidents when compared to FY06 survey results: minor fights (49 to 22 incidents), harassment (13 to 0 incidents), serious fighting (5 to 3 incidents), and fighting/physical assaults (34 to 26 incidents).

- *New Bedford*: Reported that among participants of the Parenting Teen Program, there was a substantial increase in pre/post Test Adult Basic Education (TABE) results (reading: 1.8 average score gain; math: 1.6 average score gain; language: 1.92 average score gain).
- *Lowell*: Offered a Music Therapy program in grades pre-kindergarten to 3 to address emotional, behavioral, social, and curricular needs of students. Evaluation of the program indicated that by the end of the school year, participating students showed improvements in listening, impulse control, and their ability to regulate and express emotion.
- *Quincy*: Eleven students participated in the Jumpstart Program, where students begin their school day eating breakfast and discussing any issues or concerns. Also, once each week guidance counselors convened an academic support and life skills period. A ceremony was held recognizing these 11 students at the end of the school year for their families. Among the 11 participants, all students passed their classes, participated in a voluntary after-school program, and reported that they believed the program made them better students.
- *Smith Leadership Academy Charter School*: Suspensions due to violent behaviors decreased from 103 in the 2004-2005 school year, to 83 in the 2005-2006 school year, to six in the 2006-2007 school year. Furthermore, the academic achievement of students who have been exposed to violence improved.

For more information on this summary report or the Safe and Supportive Learning Environments program, visit the web site <http://www.doe.mass.edu/tss/> or contact Jenny Caldwell Curtin via jcurtin@doe.mass.edu or 781-338-6839.