Accountability and Assistance Advisory Council (AAAC) Meeting Notes
June 12, 2024 (9:30 – 10:30am)
Virtual Meeting (Zoom)

*AAAC members in attendance:* Noah Berger, Bill Cameron, Erin Cooley, Heidi Driscoll, Barish Icin, Brandi Kwong, Ed Lambert, Glen McKay, Tim Piwowar, Yves Salomon-Fernández

*DESE staff in attendance****:*** Charmie Curry, Kevin Daly, Erica Gonzales, Robbie Havdala, Tess Murphy, Corinne Thomas

The following notes were recorded during the whole-group discussion between Council members, and a copy of the presentation can be found at <https://www.doe.mass.edu/bese/councils/sda/>.

# Welcome, Introductions, and Review of Discussion Norms

Council Co-Chair Heidi Driscoll called the meeting to order at 9:33 a.m.

Council members and staff from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) introduced themselves. Erica Gonzales, Associate Commissioner of Data and Accountability, reviewed meeting norms and the meeting agenda.

# District Standards and Indicators Discussion: Update and Implementation

Corinne Thomas from the Office of District Reviews and Monitoring (ODRM) provided Council members with an update on the progress ODRM staff have made on the update to the District Standards and Indicators since the April AAAC meeting. She noted that in addition to sharing the work with the AAAC, they shared their work with the Racial Imbalance Advisory Council and the Gifted and Talented Advisory Council, provided an update to the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, and received feedback from 22 individuals and organizations via a feedback survey. The team compiled all feedback, reviewed and reconciled the ideas, questions, and comments provided, and made changes where appropriate. The final draft is currently being reviewed and approved by DESE leadership, after which, it will be posted to DESE’s website and shared broadly. Ms. Thomas provided an overview of the timeline for the work, which is anchored on the steps of DESE’s Racial Equity Decision-Making Tool (REDT).

Robbie Havdala, Director of District and School Accountability, shared that the team is currently focused on the immediate next steps of their implementation plan, which include reviewing the list of documents and other evidence collected during each district review and updating interview protocols. He posed the following questions for the Council’s consideration:

* *How should we evaluate the quality of the District Standards and Indicators?*
* *Outside of the district review process, where else should DESE use this document?*
* *For districts being reviewed next school year, how might we best familiarize their district leaders with this new document?*
* *How else might districts use the District Standards and Indicators in their work?*

Council members offered the following questions and comments:

* What does DESE mean by “evaluating the quality of the *District Standards and Indicators”*? Mr. Havdala explained that the team wants to ensure that the standards and indicators are comprehensive and that they are asking the right questions during the reviews. He further explained that the team wants to make sure that through the district review reports, they are producing something useful to districts and providing the information districts need to make improvements.
* Are the indicators tied back to outcomes, even indirectly (e.g., literacy rates, achievement gaps, high school outcomes)? Should the district reviews limit the scope of their visits to concerning outcomes, and map them back to the standards and indicators? For example, there may be districts in which the school committee is not functioning well but student outcomes are still good. Mr. Havdala explained that DESE can conduct comprehensive and targeted reviews but has not considered any changes to the review process yet. The next phase of the team’s work is related to processes. Ms. Gonzales added that DESE wants the district review reports to highlight strengths and areas for growth, as both can exist in the same district.
* This is how urban districts are evaluated, but other districts are not going to see some of these things due to size, community, funding, etc.
* This should be shared with the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents (MASS) and the Urban Superintendents Network, as well as through the new superintendents’ induction program. Having this document would be helpful for new superintendents in their planning efforts.
* Is there a way to catalog and publish the positive work highlighted through reviews? Mr. Havdala noted that DESE does publish a best practices summary document. However, it is relatively new and may be well-known, so it could be shared more widely as well.
* Can this be part of the grant application process? Mr. Havdala responded that there is no formal connection between district reviews and grant applications, but the team has heard from a few districts that they have used the information from their district review reports in their grant applications.
* Is there follow-up among districts who have been reviewed about how they found the process, and how they have used it 1 to 2 years later? Mr. Havdala noted that ODRM holds follow-up calls following the conclusion of each review, but the team does not check in again in subsequent years.
* There is an imbalance in the district selection process – some districts and superintendents have never experienced a review, while others have had multiple reviews.
* The Massachusetts Association of School Committees (MASC) and MASS are important stakeholders and should be partners in the dissemination of this work.

# Accountability Updates: System Review Update and Next Steps

Ms. Gonzales reminded members about the external stakeholder group that DESE tasked with reviewing the existing district and school accountability system. As part of a thorough process, they will report on the strengths, weaknesses, and potential changes to that system. That work has been going on since the beginning of December.

Ms. Gonzales then highlighted the differences in roles and responsibilities between that committee and the AAAC. She then shared the timeline for the work, and noted that when their recommendations are finalized, DESE will publish and share the report with the Council.

She also shared that there is some overlapping membership between the two committees. She flagged, in addition, that 2024 accountability calculations based on the current system will be released in the fall – as is usual. At the same time, over the winter, DESE will begin to develop or revise the system. She noted that tentatively, Fall 2025 is the earliest point at which DESE could produce accountability results based on a new or revised system. The Department must determine whether that’s feasible and the preferred direction; an alternative timeframe could be in Fall 2026. Council members can likely expect to have a number of items to discuss at the next meeting, including 2024 MCAS and accountability results, recommendations from the report, and next steps.

Ms. Gonzales offered members a chance for questions. A member of the AAAC and the committee shared that they appreciated the committee’s work, and that they suspect the report will show that while there is no consensus on many issues, the conversations have been held with openness and civility.

# Future Meetings

Ms. Gonzales shared plans for the AAAC for the 2024-2025 school year. There is a plan for five meetings: October, December, February, April, and June. She sought input from members about the format and location of the meetings, particularly in regard to whether these should be in-person. Council members shared the following:

* In-person meetings are valuable, though traveling for in-person meetings is a challenge – so a central location is preferable.
* A blend of meetings is a good idea – October and April would make the most sense for in-person meetings. There are many distractions during virtual meetings.
* Could a hybrid option be maintained, so that the public could listen in remotely? Ms. Gonzales responded that it would depend, as hybrid can be challenging, based on legal guidance. However, she did offer that as an option, if there is an interest for that from members.
* The content warrants meeting in person, and the conversation is richer. There is value in networking with each other when we are together. However, the challenge of travel is real. A hybrid option should be explored.
* Technology may prove to be a limitation for hybrid set-ups for DESE. You may lose the richness of the meeting that is hybrid, as many members may choose to stay at home.

Ms. Gonzales summarized that she heard an interest in an in-person meeting as well as a hybrid meeting. She then promised to follow up with the legal office to determine the best way to do so. She offered to get all the necessary information before asking the council how they wish to proceed. For any in-person meetings, she would keep in mind the desire for a convenient meeting start time and location.

Ms. Gonzales said that she and Dr. Charmie Curry, Associate Commissioner of the Statewide System of Support, work collaboratively to set the agenda for the Council. However, she offered the opportunity for members to share relevant agenda items.

Finally, Ms. Gonzales said that there will be some Council membership and leadership changes next year. Co-chairs Tim Piwowar and Heidi Driscoll are among those who will be ending their second terms soon. Therefore, DESE will be looking for new Council Co-Chairs in the coming months. Members may want to consider nominating themselves or others for this role; to do so, they may communicate that to Ms. Gonzales or Dr. Curry. The current Council Co-Chairs shared that Ms. Gonzales or Dr. Curry make efforts to ensure that serving in a co-chair role does not require a significant time commitment.

Council Co-Chair Piwowar thanked all members for their time and adjourned the meeting at 10:30 a.m.