**FY (2024-2025)**

***State Student Advisory Council***

**Annual Report**

**I.** **INTRODUCTION**

The State Student Advisory Council (SSAC) serves as a statewide body representing students from across Massachusetts. Delegates are elected through five Regional Student Advisory Councils (RSACs), each composed of student representatives from schools in their respective regions. Together, SSAC members collaborate to analyze student experiences, influence educational policy, and present evidence-based recommendations to the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE).

During the 2024–25 academic year, SSAC prioritized mental health and school connectedness. This report outlines the Council’s work, key findings, recommendations, and future considerations for educational equity and student wellbeing in the Commonwealth.

**II.** **2024-2025 WORK OF THE COUNCIL**

The SSAC held hybrid meetings across regions including Worcester, Everett, and Leicester, increasing access. By offering hybrid participation, the Council increased accessibility and broadened its reach. Beyond formal meetings, the SSAC hosted office hours, community dialogues, and breakout sessions dedicated to workgroup meeting time.

A major milestone was SSAC’s statewide Community Dialogue, which was grounded in data from the 2023 Massachusetts Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS). The YRBS is conducted among high school students in grades 9 through 12. The survey is conducted as a sample of students in randomly selected public high schools in Massachusetts, including district, charter, and vocational technical high schools. Between January and June 2023, a total of 3,018 students at 61 high schools participated in the 2023 Massachusetts Youth Risk Behavior Survey. Data is weighted to be representative of all students in grades 9-12 and compensate for absenteeism and incomplete surveys, as well as those few schools that chose not to participate. In review of this data, this event shifted the Council from using small internal surveys to engaging with thousands of student responses, uncovering that 15% of students reported that they were electronically bullied, and 31% reported that their mental health was most of the time or always not good. One in seven students reported that they considered, planned, or attempted suicide, and 7% reported that they missed school because they felt unsafe. Encouragingly, 71% said they had at least one trusted adult in school. The Council engaged stakeholders from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), the Department of Mental Health (DMH), the Massachusetts Service Alliance (MSA), the Massachusetts Association of Student Representatives (MASR), and other partners. A new “Data Party” format made the interpretation of complex data more accessible and interactive for students.

The Council focused on three primary areas this year. In Mental Health, SSAC worked to increase student awareness and access to resources, reduce stigma, and normalize mental health conversations in the curriculum. In the area of School Connectedness, the Council examined chronic absenteeism, advocated for flexible scheduling, and emphasized the importance of building relationships. Furthermore, the SSAC continued to prioritize student-designed tools and peer-led outreach to strengthen the role of students in shaping educational decisions.

Statewide workgroups drove deeper engagement with these focus areas. The Mental Health workgroup partnered with DESE in discussions of expanding Youth Mental Health First Aid (YMHFA) and created outreach materials. The Connectedness workgroup explored the root causes of absenteeism and hosted policy conversations with key stakeholders to identify meaningful solutions to be used in coming years.

**III. COUNCIL RECOMMENDATIONS**

From these efforts, the Council put forth several statewide recommendations. These include expanding access to YMHFA and staff training in early intervention, introducing wellness periods and flexible scheduling such as “What I Need” (W.I.N.) blocks, distributing infographics and decision trees, and creating safe, private, and normalized ways for students to access mental health support. The Council also emphasized addressing racial and socioeconomic disparities in mental health outcomes.

Policy ideas emerging from workgroup discussions include linking extracurricular eligibility to minimum daily attendance, diversifying school staff to reflect student demographics, promoting peer-led education and outreach, and formally incorporating mental health days into school policy.

For structural reform, SSAC urged that mental wellness be treated as foundational rather than supplementary. Recommendations included integrating mental health education into the core curriculum and exploring district-wide scheduling pilots, taking inspiration from New Jersey’s success with intervention periods.

**IV. REGIONAL REPORTS**

In the Greater Boston region, school connectedness and mental health were their focus. With chronic absenteeism on the rise, council members focused on the fact that only 61% of students statewide felt a sense of belonging in school (as reported on  [2023 Massachusetts Youth Health Survey](https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.doe.mass.edu%2Fsfs%2Fyrbs%2F2023data-tables.docx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK)). Academic pressure, rigid policies, and low teacher-student connection were named as core causes. Students advocated for flex periods, staff empathy training, and increased student voice in decision-making. Mental health concerns were also prominent: 34% reported that they experienced prolonged sadness or hopelessness and 12.7% that they seriously considered suicide. Recommendations included peer mentoring, anonymous check-in tools, and designated mental health days.seriously considered suicide. Recommendations included peer mentoring, anonymous check-in tools, and designated mental health days.

In Western Massachusetts, safety and structural stress were central themes. Students noted that 7% skipped school due to feeling unsafe and 16% were bullied on campus. They called for alternatives to exclusionary discipline, staff accountability, and peer-led support groups. Burnout from AP classes and lack of support also fueled absenteeism. Students proposed wellness blocks for emotional recharge, academic help spaces, and expanded teacher training.

In Southeastern Massachusetts, regional data emphasized the gap between available resources and actual student awareness. Key solutions included mental health blocks during the school day for art, mindfulness, or peer-led sessions, treating mental health like physical health in attendance policies, and embedding wellness in the classroom curriculum.

In Northeastern Massachusetts, the Council partnered with teachers and administrators at Dracut High to co-develop infographics and decision trees demystifying how to access help. They highlighted stigma as a major barrier and recommended embedding discussions in PE classes, increasing visibility of supports, and sharing student-designed tools statewide.

In Central Massachusetts, delegates hosted a panel with trauma specialists and developed anonymous student surveys. Their work pointed to a need for prevention-first approaches, reducing stigma around medication, and building peer groups to replace traditional assemblies. Recommendations included offering psychology electives in early high school and ongoing staff training in suicide prevention.

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| **Theme** | **Regional Councils** | **State Workgroups** |
| **Mental Health Access** | Peer-led groups, wellness blocks, resource visibility | Staff training, DESE partnerships, statewide tools |
| **Connectedness/Attendance** | Flex periods, belonging, cultural shifts | Attendance-based eligibility, relation support |
| **Stigma Reduction** | In-class conversations, anonymous reporting | Teacher cards, student visuals, school-wide education |

**V. COUNCIL DETAILS**

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| **Regional Student Advisory Councils** | **Schools Represented** |
| Central Massachusetts Regional StudentAdvisory Council (CMRSAC) | 1. Ashland High School (Ashland PublicSchools)2. Burncoat (Worcester Public Schools)3. Doherty Memorial High School(Worcester Public Schools)4. Douglas High (Douglas Public School)5. Groton-Dunstable Regional High School(Groton-Dunstable Regional SchoolDistrict)6. Holliston High School (Holliston PublicSchoos)7. Hudson High School (Hudson PublicSchools)8. Marlborough High School (MarlboroughPublic Schools)9. Milford High School (Milford PublicSchools)10. North High (Worcester Public Schools)11. Quabbin Regional High School (QuabbinRegional School District)12. South High Community School(Worcester Public Schools)13. Tantasqua Regional Vocational HighSchool (Tantasqua Regional SchoolDistrict)14. University Park Campus School(Worcester Public Schools)15. Westborough High School (WestboroughPublic Schools)16. Worcester Technical High School(Worcester Public Schools) |
| Greater Boston Regional Student AdvisoryCouncil (GBRSAC) | 1. Belmont High School (Belmont PublicSchools)2. Boston College High School3. Boston Latin School (Boston PublicSchools)4. Boston University Academy5. Braintree High School (Braintree PublicSchools)6. Cambridge Rindge and Latin School(Cambridge Public Schools)7. Cohasset High School (Cohasset PublicSchools)8. Foxborough High School (FoxboroughPublic Schools)9. Lexington High School (Lexington PublicSchools)10. Malden Catholic High School11. Milton High School (Milton PublicSchools)12. Needham High School (Needham PublicSchools)13. Newton North High School (NewtonPublic Schools)14. Stoneham High School (StonehamPublic Schools)15. Wellesley High School (Wellesley PublicSchools)16. Westwood High School (WestwoodPublic Schools) |
| Northeast Regional Student Advisory Council(NERSAC) | 1. Billerica Memorial High School (BillericaPublic Schools)2. Burlington High School (BurlingtonPublic Schools)3. Dracut High School (Dracut PublicSchools)4. Hamilton Wenham Regional High School(Hamilton-Wenham Regional SchoolDistrict)5. Masconomet Regional High School(Masconomet Regional School District)6. Methuen High School (Methuen PublicSchools)7. Salem Academy Charter School (SalemAcademy Charter School District)8. Winchester High School (WinchesterPublic Schools) |
| Southeast Regional Student Advisory Council(SERSAC) | 1. Avon Middle High School (Avon PublicSchools)2. Attleboro High School (Attleboro PublicSchools)3. Bristol-Plymouth Regional TechnicalSchool (Bristol-Plymouth RegionalTechnical School)4. Hingham High School (Hingham PublicSchools)5. King Philip Regional High School (KingPhilip Regional School District)6. Middleborough High School(Middleborough Public Schools)7. New Bedford High School (New BedfordPublic Schools)8. Old Colony Regional VocationalTechnical High School (Old ColonyRegional Vocational Technical HighSchool)9. Old Rochester Regional High School(Old Rochester Regional School District)10. Oliver Ames High School (Easton PublicSchools)11. Sharon High School (Sharon PublicSchools)12. Southeastern Regional VocationalTechnical High School (SoutheasternRegional School District)13. Quincy High School (Quincy PublicSchools)14. Tri-County RVTHS (Tri-County RegionalVocational Technical High School)15. Walpole High School (Walpole PublicSchools)16. West Bridgewater Junior/Senior High(West Bridgewater Public Schools)17. Dighton Rehoboth Regional High School(Dighton-Rehoboth Regional SchoolDistrict) |
| Western Massachusetts Regional StudentAdvisory Council (WMRSAC) | 1. Agawam High School (Agawam PublicSchools)2. Easthampton High School (EasthamptonPublic Schools)3. East Longmeadow High (EastLongmeadow Public Schools)4. Granby Junior Senior High School(Granby Public Schools)5. Lenox Memorial High (Lenox PublicSchools)6. Longmeadow High School(Longmeadow Public Schools)7. Pathfinder Tech High School (PathfinderTech High School)8. Pioneer Valley Chinese ImmersionCharter School (Pioneer Valley ChineseImmersion Charter School District)9. R C Mahar Regional High School (RalphC Mahar Regional School District)10. Minnechaug Regional High School(Hampden-Wilbraham Regional SchoolDistrict)11. Southwick Regional School (Southwick-Tolland-Granville Regional SchoolDistrict)12. Springfield Virtual School (SpringfieldPublic Schools)13. Wahconah Regional High School(Central Berkshire Regional SchoolDistrict) |

**Department Liaison:**

Samantha Graham, Substance Use Prevention & Intervention Specialist

Chiniqua Milligan, MPH, School Health Analyst

Office of Student and Family Support

**Chairperson:**

Ioannis Asikis, SSAC Chair & Board of Elementary and Secondary Education Student Member

**Members of the 2024-2025 Council:**

SSAC is composed of five Regional Councils and the State Council. According to the state mandate, every secondary school can elect two representatives to serve on a Regional SAC. Each Regional SAC elects delegates to the State SAC. For 2024-2025, each RSAC had 5 members participate in State SAC. This included 3 elected delegates along with their elected chair and communications chair.

**SSAC Meeting Dates:**

August 8, 2024, 9:30-3:00 (Leicester)

September 18, 2024, 9:30-3:00 (DESE, Everett)

November 6, 2024, 9:30-3:00 (Worcester)

January 30, 2025, 9-11 am (Virtual)

February 4, 2025, 11:30 - 1:30 (DESE, Everett)

March 13, 2025, 9-11am (Virtual)

May 1, 2025, 9:30-3:00 (DESE, Everett)

**VI. CLOSING REFLECTIONS**

Feedback collected in May 2025 reflected high student satisfaction with SSAC’s structure and communication. Members highlighted the strength of workgroups and the success of the Community Dialogue. There was also a clear desire for smoother role transitions, more outreach to schools, and increased availability of evening meetings. On behalf of students across the Commonwealth, SSAC thanks the Board for its support and commitment to centering student voice. We look forward to presenting final recommendations and updates in June.