

Education Leaders Quarterly Webinar

Fall 2026

Commissioner Martinez

Monday August 31, 2026



Agenda

- Commissioner's Goals and Priorities
- Introducing New DESE Staff
- Literacy Law Update
- Graduation Standards Update
- Timeout and Seclusion Regulations
- Department of Public Health Reminders
- PROTECT Act Updates
- Mass Leads Act Updates

Commissioner's Goals and Priorities

Our Why

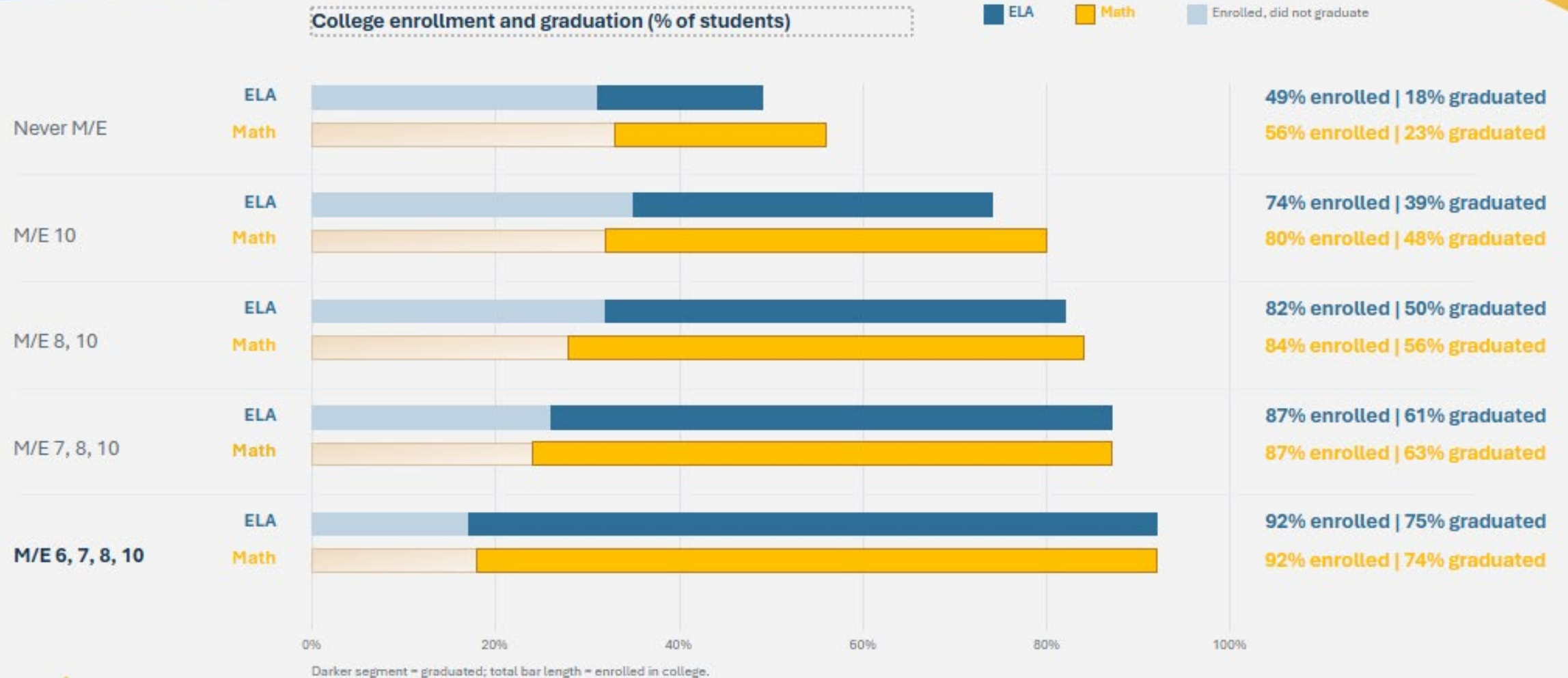
Social and Economic Mobility for Students

The more you learn, the more you earn

A bachelor's degree is associated with substantially higher median earnings than a high school diploma or associate's degree.



Students who consistently meet or exceed Massachusetts standards are far more likely to graduate from college



DESE Strategic Plan

**2031
Better Than Our
Best**

**2036
World Class**

DESE Strategic Plan

Two cross-agency priorities sit on top of the floor, raising the bar for every student and accelerating growth for those that need it the most

**Accelerating
Achievement**

**Future
Focused**

Six core commitments form the floor and establish the necessary conditions for student success

**Safe & Supportive
Schools**

**Evidence-Based Early
Literacy**

**High-Quality
Teaching & Learning**

**Individualized Programming for Students
with Disabilities**

**Expanding & Honoring
Multilingualism**

**Diverse & Effective
Workforce**

Five core levers are the tools available to DESE as the Commonwealth's state education agency

**Supporting
Implementation and Catalyzing
Innovation**

**Grounding in
Research & Evidence**

**Communicating and Partnering
with
Stakeholders**

**Setting
Expectations**

**Promoting and Measuring
Quality
& Compliance**

Introducing New Senior Associate Commissioners



Matt Deninger

Strategy, Monitoring & Compliance



Erica Gonzales

Data, Accountability & Assessment



Shirley Vargas

District & School Assistance



Adam Seidel

Secondary Schools & Beyond

How do we want you to experience us this year?

- More alignment and coherence
- More celebration and elevation of your hard work
- More responsiveness and customer service

An Act Relative to Teacher Preparation and Student Literacy

Law Requirements

1. High-quality Curriculum Adoption for K-3 by Fall 2027
2. DESE Free, Complete Curriculum for K-3 by Fall 2027
3. Educator Professional Development
4. Educator Preparation
5. Registered Teacher Apprenticeships
6. Early Literacy Screening

1 & 2: High-Quality Curriculum for K-3 ELA

Districts must implement HQIM by fall 2027:

- **Adopt from DESE-approved list**
 - DESE to build and post approved list (informed by CURATE) December 2026
- **Get an approved waiver from the list from DESE**
 - DESE to design waiver application and criteria to announce December 2026, portal anticipated open January 2027, decisions by April 2027
- **Opt into field test of DESE curriculum**
 - DESE to announce components of the K-3 curriculum in December 2026
 - Phase 1: Foundational skills component to pilot districts to implement fall 2027
 - Phase 2: Comprehensive integrated curriculum units to implement fall 2028

3: Educator Professional Development

DESE must:

- Publish a list of approved PD providers/programs (to be developed this year)
- Publish and operate free online training modules (currently in development as part of Literacy Launch)

4: Educator Preparation

DESE must:

- Review ed prep programs for early literacy (launched in 2025)
- Publish data on approved programs
- Charge a fee to programs under review (fee structures to be developed)

Early Literacy Preparation Program Approval Ratings

5: Registered Teacher Apprenticeships

DESE must:

- Operate a pilot RTAP program (underway)
- Evaluate and report on outcomes (would contract with vendor)
- **Note:** this requirement is explicitly “subject to appropriation”

6: Early Literacy Screening

- **Districts must** [duplicates existing regulation]: Develop protocols for early literacy screening that adhere to DESE guidelines; screen K-3 students at least twice annually; determine supports for students scoring significantly below benchmark; communicate results with families
- **DESE must:** Issue screening guidelines (updated guidance to be issued Oct 2026); collect and publish screening info from districts; maintain an approved list of screening assessments
- **Support:** DESE is planning FY27 grant to districts using state literacy funds for districts needing to switch to an approved screener

Stay Updated!

- Join the [DESE Literacy Leaders Network](#)
- Subscribe to the [DESE Literacy & Humanities Monthly Newsletter](#)
- Subscribe to the [DESE Curriculum Directors Monthly Newsletter](#)

Graduation Standards Update

Where are we now?

- In June 2026, the Statewide Graduation Council released its final report, *Reimagining High School, Reimagining Readiness*.
- It included four proposed components of a statewide graduation framework: Foundational Coursework, Demonstrating Mastery, Postsecondary Planning and Culminating Experiences.
- The recommendation is that the class of 2031 would be required to complete MassCore and the class of 2032 would be required to complete all components.

What can you expect in the months ahead?

- DESE will release a Readiness Assessment to assist districts as they plan for implementation. Designed as an assessment and planning tool for schools and districts.
- DESE will share a survey on End-of-Course assessments to deepen stakeholder engagement around this component.
- DESE will convene two advisory groups to support design and implementation.
- DESE will continue to support schools with MassCore and MyCAP planning and implementation.
- DESE will release a suite of resources aligned to each component in 2027.

Timeout and Seclusion Regulations

Purpose of the Regulatory Amendments

- The amended regulations are designed to **reduce and eliminate the use of seclusion** and promote equitable access to safe learning environments that support both academic and social-emotional development for all students while ensuring students continue to receive meaningful access to instruction and the services and supports necessary to receive a free appropriate public education (FAPE).
- The overuse or inappropriate use of seclusion can isolate students, hinder their connections to peers and staff, have a traumatic impact, and result in academic disruption.
- Schools, districts and programs that **use emergency seclusion must** examine and adopt alternatives and strategies for reducing and eliminating its use **no later than 3 years from the date of effectiveness** in 603 CMR 46.08.

HOW WE GOT HERE

A Phased Approach to Regulatory Change



NATIONAL CONTEXT 2016–PRESENT

- U.S. Department of Education guidance regarding restraint and seclusion
- U.S. Department of Justice enforcement and settlement agreements nationwide
- Government Accountability Office (GAO) reports and recommendations
- Multiple states adopting restrictions on seclusion practices



PHASE 1: GUIDANCE & MONITORING 2020–2021

- DESE engaged stakeholders regarding time-out practices
- Issued guidance: *Reducing or Eliminating the Use of Timeout Rooms During the 2021–2022 School Year*
- Encouraged schools to:
 - ✓ Implement proactive behavioral supports
 - ✓ Reduce or eliminate reliance on time-out rooms
 - ✓ Improve data collection and parent notification
- Public School Monitoring and OASES increased monitoring of time-out practices and spaces



PHASE 2: INVESTMENT IN ALTERNATIVES 2024

- DESE awarded **\$1.5 million** in competitive grants
- **19** districts, collaboratives, charter schools, and approved special education schools funded
- Focus on professional development, behavioral supports, and alternatives to restrictive practices



PHASE 3: STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT 2024

- DESE convened a statewide working group
- Included educators, administrators, advocates, families, attorneys, collaboratives, approved special education schools, and state agencies
- Gathered feedback on potential regulatory updates



PHASE 4: REGULATORY AMENDMENTS 2025

- **January 2025:** Board presentation on time-out practices in Massachusetts
- **March 2025:** Proposed amendments to 603 CMR 46.00 and 603 CMR 18.00 released for public comment
- **June 2025:** Regulations adopted following extensive stakeholder feedback
- Implementation date extended to August 2026 to allow for training, guidance, and local planning



PHASE 5: STATEWIDE IMPLEMENTATION 2025–2026

- **78** implementation grants awarded
- **\$3.6 million** invested statewide
- Guidance document released (February 2026)
- Training materials, reporting tools, and monitoring updates developed
- Ongoing technical assistance and implementation support



AUGUST 17, 2026



NEW REGULATIONS TAKE EFFECT

- Updated definitions of time-out and seclusion
- Limited emergency use of seclusion with safeguards
- Updated reporting, monitoring, and implementation expectations



OUR GOAL: Promote student safety, dignity, and inclusion through proactive supports, clear expectations, and appropriate use of behavioral strategies.

2022 Federal Guidance

- **Dear Colleague Letter addresses disparities in the use of discipline for children with disabilities and the implementation of IDEA's discipline provisions**
 - [Dear Colleague Letter on Implementation of IDEA Discipline Provisions. OSEP DCL 22-01](#)
- **Two accompanying guidance documents** support state educational agencies' and local educational agencies' efforts to fulfill their obligations to appropriately meet the needs of children with disabilities
 - [Questions and Answers: Addressing the Needs of Children with Disabilities and IDEA's Discipline Provisions. July 19, 2022 \(PDF\)](#)
 - [Positive, Proactive Approaches to Supporting Children with Disabilities: A Guide for Stakeholders. OSEP Policy Support 22-01 \(TA guide\). July 19, 2022. \(PDF\)](#)

Resources

- Special Education Policy Memo SY2026-2027-1
- Guidance on Time-Out Practices and Implementation of Amendments to 603 CMR 46.00 and 603 CMR 18.00 **Updated August 2026**
- Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) on the Use of Emergency Seclusion **Updated August 2026**
- Special Education Policy Memo SY2025–2026-9: Required Reporting on the Use of Seclusion and Emergency Seclusion
- Emergency Seclusion Reporting Reference Guide
- Reducing Reliance on Crisis Management Practices in MA Schools on Vimeo
- Questions & Support: specialeducation@mass.gov

Department of Public Health Reminders

Annual Vaccinations - Key Points

- Annual vaccination prevents serious illnesses and hospitalization that contribute to missed work and school absenteeism
- Declining rates of **Flu** and **COVID-19** vaccination in MA school-aged children and adults
- In Massachusetts, vaccines are free for children through a *Vaccine for Children* provider (local boards of health or community health centers)
- **Talk with your School Health Teams and consider reaching out to your local or regional Health Department to host an annual school-located vaccine clinic** to provide increased availability and access for families, staff, and the community.

Helpful Resources

School Health Resources

- **Clinic Planning & Toolkits:** School-located clinics can be a powerful tool for increasing vaccination rates in your school community. This resource can help you think through how to organize and run your clinic: [School-Located Vaccine Clinic Toolkit](#).
- **Local & Regional Public Health Nurse Contacts:** Do you know your local or regional public health nurse? If not, please reach out to your region's Public Health Nurse Consultant for an introduction: [Local Public Health Nurse Consultant Program - Search by City or Town](#). **Note:** *The Eastern Region nurse consultant role is currently vacant; please reach out to Karen Robitaille (Karen.Robitaille3@mass.gov) for coordination in that region.*
- **DPH School Health Services Overview:** [School Health Services](#) is comprised of professional staff who collaborate with other DPH programs and MA DESE to provide ongoing school health service systems development and technical assistance to the Commonwealth's public-school districts and nonpublic schools.

Family-Facing Resources

- **AAP (American Academy of Pediatrics):** [HealthyChildren.org Immunization Guidance](#) & [AAP Vaccine Toolkit](#)
- **MMS (Massachusetts Medical Society):** [MMS Vaccine Information & Resources](#), [Kids Can Get Free Vaccines Guide](#), & [Massachusetts Families for Vaccines](#)
- **DPH (MA Dept of Public Health):** [Common Questions About Childhood Immunizations](#), [Parent & Family Vaccine Downloads](#), & [Mass.gov School Immunizations Overview](#)

Additional Reminder

The annual **MA School Immunization Survey** will be open September 14, 2026 - January 22, 2027.

- The survey helps identify children entering school who are not protected against vaccine-preventable diseases and helps ensure they are properly immunized according to the [Massachusetts School Immunization Requirements](#).
- These requirements apply to all students attending public and private schools and are enforced at the local level.
- Enforcement questions should be directed to your legal counsel. School-level results will be published publicly on [Mass.gov](#) in spring 2027.

PROTECT Act Updates

Guidance and Resources

- On August 5, 2026, Governor Maura Healey signed into law the PROTECT Act (Stat. 2026, c. 163, §§ 1-24) (Act).
- The Act requires school districts, charter schools and collaborative schools to enact a policy and implement procedures about interaction with civil law enforcement. Under the Act, those policies and procedures must be consistent with model policies and procedures released by the Executive Office of Education and Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.
- Links to new guidance and resources published on August 21 are below:
 - Model Policy (*download*)
 - Model Procedures (*download*)
 - Guidance (*on the Governor's PROTECT Act webpage*)

Mass Leads Act Updates

Diversity Plan and Appointment of Diversity Director/Team

- In November 2024 Governor Healey signed the Mass Leads Act, Chapter 238 of the Acts of 2024.
- Among other things, the Act requires public school districts and charter schools to adopt a three-year educator diversity plan and appoint a diversity, equity, and inclusion officer or team reporting to the superintendent.
 - Educator diversity plans:
 - 3-year plans directed at increasing diversity which may be embedded as part of an existing plan
 - DEI officer or team:
 - The role and responsibilities of a diversity officer or team may be assigned to an existing school employee or existing school entity.
 - Public school districts and charter schools shall establish a process for advising the school committee or board of trustees on matters of diversity, equity and inclusion

Questions