

Overview of DESE's Educational Vision & Catalog of Aligned Supports

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Acting Commissioner**

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Letter from the Acting Commissioner

I am pleased to present the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's (DESE)'s second annual [Catalog of Aligned Supports](#). This resource aligns with our [Educational Vision](#) and aims to guide schools and districts in providing equitable learning experiences in support of improved outcomes for students across the Commonwealth.

Before my current role, I spent 10 years at DESE and 18 years as an educator, administrator, and superintendent in Massachusetts public school districts. During those 18 years, I experienced DESE's initiatives firsthand. While DESE provided thoughtful and innovative supports for schools and districts, the initiatives and projects were not consistently connected, focused on the same priorities, and released in a timely and sequenced manner.

Since 2022, as deputy commissioner, alongside many dedicated DESE leaders and guided by our Racial Equity Decision-making Tool (REDT), we have been aligning the work of the agency with our educational vision and strategic objectives. Last year, our strategic planning process resulted in the first annual Catalog of Aligned Supports, which formalized our commitment to these strategic objectives.

This year, we have further strengthened the alignment and coherence of the supports DESE provides to districts, schools, and programs to promote equitable opportunities and experiences for all students, particularly those from historically underserved groups and communities. When the path to equity isn't clear, it becomes optional. Our path to educational equity is grounded in key concepts, including a focus on supporting the whole student, so they feel connected and ready to learn; supporting schools in engaging students in grade-level (or beyond) work that is relevant and meaningful; and continuing to foster a diverse and effective workforce.

During this period of transitional leadership at DESE, it is crucial that we leverage our resources to improve educational opportunities and outcomes; our students need us to advance more quickly and effectively together. We are excited to share this updated document with you, and we look forward to your review. Once you've engaged with the catalog, please consider providing feedback through this [form](#). Your feedback will inform future versions of this document.

Sincerely,

Russell D. Johnston

Acting Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education

Educational Vision

Our educational vision document describes the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's aspiration – our vision – for elementary and secondary public education and adult basic education in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. This vision is anchored in our commitment to high-quality teaching and learning in the Commonwealth. We will continue to work with districts, schools, and educators to promote teaching and learning that is antiracist, inclusive, multilingual, and multicultural; that values and affirms each and every student and their families; and that creates equitable opportunities and experiences for all students, particularly those who have been historically underserved.



Our goal is that as a result of their public education in Massachusetts, students will:

Attain academic knowledge and skills: achieve in a comprehensive and diverse range of subjects and apply their competencies in relevant, real-world contexts

Understand and value self: know their own strengths, interests, and areas of growth, be self-aware, be a self-advocate, and make responsible decisions

Understand and value others: understand differences and multiple perspectives, empathize with others, and build connections with peers and adults

Engage with the world: understand and think critically about local, national, and world events and societal systems; and create positive change through civic action

So that they can:

Be curious and creative: find joy in learning, pursue their interests, and use innovative thinking to approach opportunities and solve challenges, including those previously unseen

Shape their path: be well prepared to thrive in college and/or career and be positioned for life-long learning

Feel connected: see themselves as valuable and involved members of their communities and be aware of their independence and interdependence

Be empowered: play a role in advocating for equity, justice, and liberty in their communities and beyond

All students in Massachusetts, particularly students from historically underserved groups and communities, will have equitable opportunities to excel in all content areas across all grades. Culturally and linguistically sustaining classroom and school practices will support students to thrive by creating affirming environments where students have a sense of belonging, engage in deeper learningⁱ, and are held to high expectations with targeted support.

Learning experiences are relevant, real-world, & interactive

Learning experiences

- Students learn through curriculum and instruction that aligns with Massachusetts curriculum frameworks at or above their grade level, connects to their identities, and utilizes evidence-based practices.
- Students solve problems, think critically, ask questions, make meaning of complex ideas, and can demonstrate their learning.
- Students learn and develop language through content-rich activities that promote authentic communication.

Relevant and real-world

- Students learn by engaging with diverse perspectives and apply their learning to examine the natural world and different historical, social, and political contexts.
- Students have opportunities to make choices, connect to relevant or real-world contexts, and effect change.

Interactive

- Students enjoy and look forward to their learning experiences.
- Students have frequent opportunities to interact with their peers, make sense of complex ideas together, and develop academic language.
- Students take academic risks, learn from mistakes, incorporate feedback, and are proud to produce high quality work.

All students are known & valued

Students are known

- Students and families have a sense of belonging: they are known, respected, and valued for who they are and what they bring to the school community, including their unique identities, strengths, interests, needs, languages, exceptionalities, and backgrounds.
- Students attend safe and supportive schools that tend to their overall wellbeing.
- Students gain awareness of how they think, learn, relate, and communicate, including in multiple languages/dialects.

Students are valued

- Students engage in learning that values and builds on their background knowledge, lived experiences, and cultural and linguistic assets.
- Students are active participants and have a voice in shaping their learning experience.

Individualized supports enable students to excel at grade level (or beyond)

Excel at grade level (or beyond)

- Students receive necessary evidence-based supports and accommodations to learn knowledge and skills at grade level (or beyond).
- Students with disabilities receive carefully designed instruction that accelerates their growth towards learning goals.
- Students who are learning English receive explicit language instruction that enables access to grade-level content.

Individualized supports

- Students engage with flexible and responsive supports that are based on information gathered from classwork, observations, and assessment data; these supports are designed to fade away over time as students build more independent skills.
- Students have multiple options for how they access content and how they demonstrate the knowledge and skills they have learned, including in various formats or languages.
- Supports are tailored to students' academic, physical and mental health, and social-emotional needs.



ⁱFor more information, please visit
<https://www.doe.mass.edu/instruction/culturally-responsive/default.html>

ⁱⁱFor more information, please visit
<https://www.doe.mass.edu/kaleidoscope/overview.html>

Strategic Objectives

The Department's new educational vision sets an ambitious and long-term expectation of the learning experiences for students across the Commonwealth. The Department is deeply committed to providing aligned supports to districts, schools, and programs so that this vision may become a reality. As such, DESE has identified three key strategic objectives that it continues to focus on strengthening.

The Department believes that to provide the learning experiences to all students as described in the vision, it must first focus on supporting the whole student, so they feel connected and ready to learn. Secondly, students must engage in grade-level work that is relevant and meaningful, particularly in secondary schools where research shows student engagement plummets. And lastly, none of this work is possible without a diverse and well-prepared workforce that fosters a sense of belonging and provides access to deeper learning experiences every day.

DESE partners with districts, schools, and programs to:

1

Cultivate systems to support the **whole student** and foster **joyful, healthy, and supportive** learning environments so that all students feel **valued, connected, nourished, and ready to learn**. Districts, schools, and programs feel empowered and prepared to:

- 1.1 Promote students' physical and mental health and wellness in welcoming, affirming, and safe spaces
- 1.2 Implement a multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) that helps all students progress both academically and in their social, emotional, and behavioral development
- 1.3 Develop authentic partnerships with students and families that elevate their voices and leadership in decision-making and connect them to their communities



2

Promote **deeper learning** so that **all** students engage in **grade-level work** that is **real-world, relevant, and interactive**. Districts, schools, and programs feel empowered and prepared to:

- 2.1 Select and skillfully implement high-quality and engaging instructional materials that support culturally and linguistically sustaining practices and foster deeper learning
- 2.2 Use the MTSS process to implement academic supports and interventions that provide all students, particularly students with disabilities and English learners, equitable access to deeper learning
- 2.3 Reimagine the high school experience so that all students are engaged and prepared for post-secondary success
- 2.4 Develop a coherent and holistic range of programming that is responsive to the needs and interests of diverse learners



3

Develop and sustain a workforce that is **diverse, culturally responsive, well-prepared**, and committed to **continuous improvement**, so that all students have equitable access to **effective educators**. Districts, schools, and programs feel empowered and prepared to:

- 3.1 Develop an increased and robust pipeline of diverse and well-prepared educators and leaders
- 3.2 Create the conditions to sustain and retain diverse and effective staff, particularly those who entered the field through alternative pathways
- 3.3 Implement opportunities for all staff to engage in a cycle of continuous improvement, utilizing effective teaming structures





Core DESE Functions

As the state education agency, DESE operates under the authority granted by the Massachusetts Constitution as well as enabling legislation from both the state and federal governments. In this role, we execute critical responsibilities that provide the foundation upon which we continue to build a thriving, stable, and equitable public education system in Massachusetts. Our aim is to carry out these duties, functions, and activities in ways that help further the educational vision and strategic objectives. These core functions include:



Setting expectations including crafting regulations and guidance to implement and explain education laws; specifying what students should know and be able to do by the end of each school year; defining effective teaching and administrative practices; and, where appropriate, establishing criteria for program review and approval.

- Find the updated Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks [here](#)
- Review the Massachusetts Educator Evaluation System [here](#)
- Explore the state's standards and indicators of effective district policy and practice [here](#)
- Learn more about Educator Preparation program approval process [here](#)
- Access the laws, regulations, and legal advisories that guide DESE's work [here](#)



Promoting and measuring quality and compliance including data collection and reporting; assessment; accountability; monitoring programs and their adherence to state and federal laws and regulations; complaint resolution; research and evaluation; fiscal auditing; and recognizing excellence.

- Explore the School and District Profiles page [here](#)
- Find information on student assessment [here](#)
- Access recent research and evaluations [here](#)
- Find the Tiered Focused Monitoring calendar [here](#)



Supporting implementation and catalyzing innovation through grants, aid, and other funding mechanisms; professional learning opportunities; technical and targeted assistance; partnerships and networks; resources, materials, tools, and technology; seeding innovative school and program models; direct service provision; and creating economies of scale.

- Access information on current funding opportunities [here](#)
- Find information on Chapter 70, Circuit Breaker, and other aid programs [here](#)



Communicating and partnering with stakeholders including communications and information sharing; coordination with other state agencies; and engaging with statewide stakeholders.

- Sign up for DESE newsletters [here](#) and access press releases [here](#)
- Access Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) resources [here](#) and find a list of BESE advisory councils [here](#)

Core Function Highlights for SY24-25

- **Revised District Standards and Indicators.** The [District Standards and Indicators](#) represent the Department's definition of effective district policy and practice and serve as the framework for the district reviews conducted by the Office of District Reviews and Monitoring. With significant input from stakeholders, Department staff have been revising the indicators and "look-fors" that support each of the six standards. Revisions include better alignment with core DESE guidance, including the Educational Vision and the Coherence Guidebook, and a greater emphasis on equity and racial equity within each standard.

- **Massachusetts Education-to-Career Research and Data Hub.** The [Massachusetts Education-to-Career \(E2C\) Research and Data Hub](#) brings together data and research about how children and students' progress from early education and care settings, through their K-12 education, and into higher education and the workforce. The Hub serves educators, families, policymakers, and researchers by making data and research easier to find, use, and understand. In doing so, the goal of the Hub is to increase evidence-informed decision making and promote practices that lead to better and more equitable outcomes.



Strategic Objective 1: “Whole Student” Detail and Priority Strategies

DESE partners with districts, schools, and programs to cultivate systems to support the **whole student** and foster **joyful, healthy, and supportive** learning environments so that all students feel **valued, connected, nourished, and ready to learn**. Districts, schools, and programs feel empowered and prepared to:

- 1.1 Promote students’ physical and mental health and wellness in welcoming, affirming, and safe spaces
- 1.2 Implement a multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) that helps all students progress both academically and in their social, emotional, and behavioral development
- 1.3 Develop authentic partnerships with students and families that elevate their voices and leadership in decision-making and connect them to their communities

As DESE works to align supports (link to [catalog](#)) in service of the new educational vision, here are evidence-based programs and practices for districts, schools, and programs that are looking to build capacity in Strategic Objective 1 to consider.

- **1.1A Integrated Services for Student Wellbeing:** Utilize a system for integrating services and aligning initiatives that promote students' behavioral and mental health and wellness (e.g., bullying prevention, trauma sensitivity, dropout prevention, truancy reduction, foster care and homeless youth education, and inclusion of students with disabilities)
- **1.1B Enhanced Support for SEL and Mental Health:** Expand capacity to address social-emotional learning (SEL) and mental health needs of students and families (e.g., build knowledge and skills of current staff, add specialized support staff, partner with community-based providers, strengthen plans for responding to behavioral health medical emergencies, etc.)
- **1.1C Positive School Environments:** Create school environments that include high-quality facilities, healthy meals, physical activity, and positive youth development activities for all students
- **1.2A Effective Student Support System:** Implement key systems to build an effective approach to MTSS (e.g., using data to identify students’ strengths and needs, matching students with appropriate supports, and monitoring progress)
- **1.2B Comprehensive Tiered Supports:** Provide a comprehensive set of tiered supports for all learners across all three domains - academic, social/emotional, and behavioral - that are culturally sustaining and universally designed
- **1.3A Diverse Approaches to Meaningful Family Engagement:** Train all staff on multiple strategies and tools to engage with families in meaningful two-way communication
- **1.3B Students and Families as Valued Partners:** Create opportunities and systems for students and families to effectively participate as partners in authentic decision-making, with supports as needed

➔ For DESE supports aligned to these priority implementation strategies, check out the “Early Learning”, “Safe & Supportive Schools”, “Rethinking Discipline”, “Social Emotional Learning & Mental Health”, “MTSS,” “Social Emotional and Behavioral Supports & Interventions,” and “Family Engagement” tags in the catalog



Strategic Objective 2: “Deeper Learning” Detail and Priority Strategies

DESE partners with districts, schools, and programs to promote **deeper learning** so that all students engage in **grade-level work** that is **real-world, relevant, and interactive**. Districts, schools, and programs feel empowered and prepared to:

- 2.1 Select and skillfully implement high-quality and engaging instructional materials that support culturally and linguistically sustaining practices and foster deeper learning
- 2.2 Use the MTSS process to implement academic supports and interventions that provide all students, particularly students with disabilities and English learners, equitable access to deeper learning
- 2.3 Reimagine the high school experience so that all students are engaged and prepared for post-secondary success
- 2.4 Develop a coherent and holistic range of programming that is responsive to the needs and interests of diverse learners

As DESE works to align supports (link to [catalog](#)) in service of the new educational vision, here are evidence-based programs and practices for districts, schools, and programs that are looking to build capacity in Strategic Objective 2 to consider.

- **2.1A Inclusive Curriculum Adoption Process:** Implement a comprehensive and inclusive curriculum adoption process that engages multiple stakeholders in the exploration and assessment of potential instructional materials
- **2.1B Supporting Curriculum Implementation:** Engage teachers in professional development linked directly to the curriculum and set up a process to regularly monitor the effectiveness of curriculum implementation
- **2.1C Comprehensive Approach to Early Literacy:** Develop and implement a comprehensive approach to early literacy education that is supported by high-quality literacy core curricular materials that encompass foundational skills
- **2.1D Early Literacy Screening and Support:** Administer a reliable early literacy screening assessment to identify students who require additional support. Provide research-based interventions tailored to each student's learning needs and delivered by appropriately trained staff members
- **2.2A Effective Use of the WIDA Framework:** Train all staff to effectively employ the WIDA framework so they can provide effective scaffolds and supports for multilingual learners.
- **2.2B High Leverage Practices for Students with Disabilities:** Train all staff in high-leverage instructional practices designed for students with disabilities. (e.g., providing scaffolded supports, explicit instruction, flexible grouping, and adapting curriculum and tasks based on students' specific learning goals)
- **2.2C Collaborative Teaching Models:** Develop or expand co-teaching and other evidence-based models that leverage collaboration to best-serve students with disabilities and multilingual learners
- **2.2D Targeted Academic Support and Acceleration:** Implement academic intervention and acceleration opportunities targeting student groups demonstrating the largest gaps in achievement (e.g., high dosage tutoring, Acceleration Academies, and summer learning)
- **2.3A Authentic Postsecondary Planning:** Implement a process that engages students in authentic postsecondary planning through a continuum of learning focused on the unique interests, skills, and talents of each individual student
- **2.3B High-Quality Pathways and Programs:** Pursue designation and implementation of high-quality pathways and programs (e.g., Early College, Chapter 74 Career Technical Education including After-Dark

programs, Innovation Career Pathway programs, Career Connections programs, and/or other career-connected activities)

- **2.4A Expanded Access to Pre-Kindergarten:** Expand access to full-day, high-quality pre-kindergarten programs for 4-year-olds, including potential collaboration with local providers
- **2.4B Extended Learning Time:** Add time to the school day or year for all students and creatively reorganize the school day/year to both enhance the quantity and quality of core instruction and to offer expanded enrichment opportunities
- **2.4C Effective Programming for Multilingual Learners:** Develop or enhance research-based programs for multilingual learners that support and sustain students' native languages while also addressing their educational needs and language development
- **2.4D Diverse Enrichment Opportunities:** Provide students with a diverse array of opportunities to engage in arts, music, enrichment, electives, athletics, and world language courses

➔ For DESE supports aligned to these priority implementation strategies, check out the “**Deeper Learning**”, “**HQIM**”, “**Early Literacy**,” “**Content Resources**,” “**Academic Supports and Interventions**”, “**Multilingual Learners**”, “**Students with Disabilities**”, “**Acceleration**,” “**Pathways**”, and “**Additional Learning Time**” tags in the catalog



Strategic Objective 3: “Diverse & Effective Workforce” Detail and Priority Strategies

DESE partners with districts, schools, and programs to develop and sustain a workforce that is **diverse, culturally responsive, well-prepared**, and committed to **continuous improvement**, so that all students have equitable access to **effective educators**. Districts, schools, and programs feel empowered and prepared to:

- 3.1 Develop an increased and robust pipeline of diverse and well-prepared educators and leaders
- 3.2 Create the conditions to sustain and retain diverse and effective staff, particularly those who entered the field through alternative pathways
- 3.3 Implement opportunities for all staff to engage in a cycle of continuous improvement, utilizing effective teaming structures

As DESE works to align supports (link to [catalog](#)) in service of the new educational vision, here are evidence-based programs and practices for districts, schools, and programs that are looking to build capacity in Strategic Objective 3 to consider.

- **3.1A Intentional Hiring Systems:** Develop intentional hiring systems and processes that start earlier, include a diverse group of stakeholders, and offer support to teams to identify and mitigate biases
- **3.1B Enhanced Pathways to Increase Educator Diversity:** Develop or enhance pathways designed to intentionally attract a diverse pool of candidates (e.g., education-specific pathways for local high school students, “grow your own” teacher preparation programs, and paraprofessional pipelines)
- **3.1C Educator Preparation Partnerships:** Partner with educator preparation providers to promote and leverage student teacher placements and other partnerships that result in strong, effective, long-term hiring pipelines
- **3.2A Inclusive School Communities:** Train all staff in strategies to create an equitable and culturally responsive environment that fosters a sense of belonging for students, families, and staff
- **3.2B Retention Support Programs:** Establish or expand induction, mentoring, feedback programs, and affinity groups that are carefully designed to offer targeted support for retaining staff from underrepresented backgrounds, ensuring their sustained engagement and success
- **3.2C Pathways for Professional Growth and Leadership:** Create specific roles and/or structures that offer staff professional growth and leadership development (e.g., leaders-in-training programs, coaching roles, etc.)
- **3.3A Resource Allocation Aligned to Student Success:** Implement a systematic and ongoing process to allocate resources including people, time, funding in alignment with district and school priorities to promote student success
- **3.3B Support for Effective Team Practices:** Districts and schools provide all staff with robust training, additional common planning time, and ongoing support in implementing effective team processes, use of protocols, and effective data use as a part of a cycle of inquiry
- **3.3C Collaborative Labor-Management Partnerships.** Districts and schools establish and/or maintain collaborative labor-management partnerships to improve student performance

➔ For DESE supports aligned to these steps and strategies, check out the “**Recruit**,” “**Educator Preparation**,” “**Sustain and Retain**,” and “**Continuous Improvement**” tags in the catalog