**Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education**

**Rethinking Discipline Professional Learning Network -**   
**School Year 2023-2024 Update**

**Initiative Purpose:**

Since 2016, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (Department) has partnered with schools and districts across the Commonwealth in the Rethinking Discipline initiative, associated primarily with state law ([Chapter 222](https://malegislature.gov/Laws/GeneralLaws/PartIII/TitleI/Chapter222)) and regulations ([603 CMR 53.00](http://www.doe.mass.edu/lawsregs/603cmr53.html)).

This initiative includes a Professional Learning Network (PLN) designed to assist schools and districts with reducing the use of long-term suspension and expulsion for all students, and with decreasing disproportionate rates of suspension and expulsion for students with disabilities and students of color. [Information about a number of related Department initiatives](https://www.doe.mass.edu/sfs/discipline/indicators-4-9-10.docx) can be found on the [Rethinking Discipline](https://www.doe.mass.edu/sfs/discipline/) webpage.

**Phase Two of the Initiative:**

During school year 2022-2023 (SY23), the Department [transitioned to a second phase](https://www.doe.mass.edu/sfs/discipline/pln-update-sy2023.docx) of the Rethinking Discipline initiative. The Department reset the data used in the identification process and made more clear the duration of time schools and districts participate in the initiative.

In late winter 2023, the Department identified a preliminary cohort based on SY22 [student discipline data](http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/statereport/ssdr.aspx), collected through the School Safety and Discipline Report ([SSDR](https://www.doe.mass.edu/infoservices/data/ssdr/)). Schools and districts with a preliminarily identification attended monthly meetings during the 2023 calendar year and helped inform plans for the first two-year cohort in Phase Two.

In the winter of 2023-2024, the Department identified and welcomed its first multi-year cohort of Phase Two into the PLN. The SY24 identifications used a [methodology](https://www.doe.mass.edu/sfs/discipline/calculations-sy2024.docx) that takes into consideration a multi-year analysis of SSDR suspension and expulsion data submitted by districts to the Department (from SY22 and SY23). Identified schools and districts are required to submit an [action plan](https://www.doe.mass.edu/sfs/discipline/action-plan-2024.docx) (due in June 2024), and are encouraged to participate in professional development opportunities (see more details below), which include monthly sessions designed to support action plan creation and implementation.

**Professional Development Offerings:**

The Department continues to make available professional development opportunities to PLN members, as well as previous initiative participants and other interested schools and districts. The professional development is primarily facilitated by the [Equity Imperative](https://www.equityimperative.org/) and is geared towards increasing student engagement and creating safe and supportive learning environments. For more details, see the [SY24 professional development calendar](https://www.doe.mass.edu/sfs/discipline/pd-calendar.docx).

**Rethinking Discipline–Related Expectations in the New Mental Health Law:**

*An Act Addressing Barriers to Care for Mental Health* was signed into law as [Chapter 177 of the Acts of 2022](https://malegislature.gov/Laws/SessionLaws/Acts/2022/Chapter177) and took effect on November 8, 2022. Section 29 addresses expectations for schools and districts related to alternative remedies prior to suspensions and expulsions. The section replaces paragraph (b) of M.G.L. c. 71, s. 37H-3/4 and requires school leaders to consider and employ alternative remedies to reengage students in the learning process before suspending or expelling a student, except in specific documented circumstances. Alternative remedies can include mediation, conflict resolution, restorative justice, and collaborative problem solving. The law also calls for implementation of school- or district-wide models to re-engage students in learning. The Department has informed school and district leaders about the changes to the law, and a guidance document (in [English](https://www.doe.mass.edu/sfs/discipline/updated-expectations.docx) and [Spanish](https://www.doe.mass.edu/sfs/discipline/updated-expectations-spanish.docx)) can be found on the Department’s [Rethinking Discipline webpage](https://www.doe.mass.edu/sfs/discipline). More information related to implementing alternative remedies has also been incorporated into the professional development opportunities described above.

**Rethinking Discipline Initiative – 2023-2024 PLN Participants**

Schools and districts participating in the Rethinking Discipline Initiative’s Phase II, Cohort I are as follows.

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| **District** | **School (if applicable)** |
| Argosy Collegiate Charter School (Fall River) | Argosy Collegiate Charter School (Fall River)\* |
| Baystate Academy Charter Public School (Springfield) | Baystate Academy Charter Public School\*^ |
| Chicopee Public Schools | Bellamy Middle School^ |
| *(Chicopee Public Schools)* | Chicopee Academy^ |
| *(Chicopee Public Schools)* | Dupont Middle School^ |
| Hampden-Wilbraham Regional School District | Wilbraham Middle School^ |
| North Adams Public Schools | (district level)^ |
| Pittsfield Public Schools | John T Reid Middle School^ |
| *(Pittsfield Public Schools)* | (district level)\* |
| Springfield Empowerment Zone | Springfield Legacy Academy^ |
| Wareham Public Schools | (district level) ^ |

*\*Districts with identifications associated with Special Education Compliance Indicators 4a/4b (associated with the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)* [*(20 U.S.C. 1416(a)(3)(A); 1412(a)(22))*](https://sites.ed.gov/idea/statute-chapter-33/subchapter-ii/1416) *and the* [*State Performance Plan / Annual Performance Report (SPP- APR*](https://www.doe.mass.edu/sped/spp/maspp.html)*).*

^*Schools/districts with identifications* associated with [Chapter 222](https://malegislature.gov/Laws/SessionLaws/Acts/2012/Chapter222), *An Act Relative to Student Access to Educational Services and Exclusion from School* and state regulations [603 CMR 53.00](https://www.doe.mass.edu/lawsregs/603cmr53.html)).

*Please note that identifications related to* [*Significant Disproportionality*](https://www.doe.mass.edu/sped/idea2004/sig-dispro/) *are made in the Fall of each new school year.*

*For a brief reminder of these initiatives, see this* [*overview*](https://www.doe.mass.edu/sfs/discipline/indicators-4-9-10.docx)*.*