



Memorandum

To: Superintendents, Assistant Superintendents, and Charter School Leaders; and Elementary, Middle, and High School Principals

From: Pedro Martinez, Commissioner

Date: April 28, 2026

Subject: 2025-2026 Commissioner Letter to District and School Leaders about the Safe Schools Program for LGBTQ Students

Massachusetts has long been a national leader in advancing equity and protecting student rights. That commitment continues with the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's (DESE) Educational Vision that supports a public education in which every student, in every school, experiences a community where they are safe, supported, valued, and can thrive.

This commitment is grounded in Massachusetts law:

- M.G.L. c. 76, § 5 prohibits discrimination in public schools based on race, color, sex, gender identity, religion, national origin, immigration or citizenship status, disability, or sexual orientation.

These protections are central to DESE's Educational Vision. At the same time, we know that LGBTQ students, staff, and families often hold multiple, intersecting identities—including race, language, ability, socioeconomic status, and immigration background. Those furthest from opportunity often face compounded barriers. As leaders, your role is pivotal in helping every student to have access to an education free from fear, harassment, or exclusion.

Safe Schools Program for LGBTQ Students

The [Safe Schools Program for LGBTQ Students](#) (SSP)—a joint initiative of DESE and the Massachusetts Commission on LGBTQ Youth—exists to support schools in fully implementing Massachusetts laws and policies that protect LGBTQ students. Our work helps districts translate these requirements into daily practice, promoting school communities that are safe, affirming, and inclusive for all students.

Training, Technical Assistance, Resources and Implementation Support

The Safe Schools Program offers customizable support for schools and districts (at no cost to schools/districts) on topics such as:

- Meeting the needs of transgender and nonbinary students
- Developing inclusive policies and practices
- Enhancing family and caretaker engagement
- Building inclusive physical education and athletic programs
- Reducing disparities in health and safety outcomes
- Responding to community questions about LGBTQ-inclusive practices and curricula

► [Submit a training or technical assistance request](#)

In addition, the SSP provides additional resources and supports related to topics such as:

- **Resources for Supporting Younger Students:** Affirmation and belonging are important at every developmental stage, including the elementary grades. The Safe Schools Program for LGBTQ Students shares information and offers resources to support age-appropriate, school-based initiatives such as locally organized Rainbow Clubs.
- **Family and Caretaker Engagement:** Family engagement is one of the strongest protective factors for LGBTQ youth. By partnering with families, schools strengthen the circle of care around students, promoting consistency between home and school.
- **Inclusive Curriculum:** Curriculum can be where students see themselves and learn about others—or do not. Massachusetts regulations (603 CMR 26.00) require all public schools to “through their curricula, encourage respect for the human and civil rights of all individuals regardless of race, color, sex, gender identity, religion, national origin, or sexual orientation.”
- **Pronouns, Language, and Everyday Practices:** Everyday actions send powerful messages about who belongs. Sharing pronouns, using affirming language, and making LGBTQ identities visible in schools all help create a climate of respect and safety. The Department models this by supporting the inclusion of pronouns in staff email signatures, and schools are encouraged to adopt similar practices.

► Contact the safeschoolsprogram@mass.gov and/or visit the [SSP webpage](#) for more resources and information.

LGBTQ+ Student Leadership Council

Students are not only participants in this work, they are leaders. The LGBTQ+ Student Leadership Council:

- Brings together middle and high school students, along with allies, across one statewide council and five regional councils.
- Meets regularly during the school year to share resources, collaborate on projects, and strengthen student voice.
- Launches each year with the LGBTQ+ Student Leadership Summit, a statewide gathering that equips students with tools for leadership and making change.

School leaders are encouraged, when appropriate, to provide excused absences to support student participation.

► [More on the LGBTQ+ Student Leadership Council](#)

Next Steps and Support

This work is urgent and necessary. By leveraging the resources of the Safe Schools Program and modeling inclusive leadership, we can collectively work to:

- Reduce absenteeism and disengagement
- Improve school climate and mental health outcomes
- Promote communities where every student feels valued and a sense of belonging

Professional learning and resources are available by contacting the Safe Schools Program for LGBTQ Students at safeschoolsprogram@mass.gov or by [submitting a training or technical assistance request](#).

Thank you for your leadership in promoting school communities where every student can thrive with dignity, safety, and joy.