**Safe and Supportive Schools (SaSS) Commission Meeting**   
**Tuesday, February 4, 2025 Virtual Meeting, 1:00 – 3:00 PM**

**MINUTES**

**Commission Members in Attendance:** *Co-chair(s):* Rachelle Engler Bennett

*Additional members in attendance:*Tayyab Afzal, Faith Ambrose, Kristin Campione, Margie Daniels, Marissa del Rosario, Jayus DiCarlo, Susan Farrell, Donna Grady, Michelle Lipinksi, Lucinda Mills, Melissa Pearrow, Shanyn Toulouse, Jariel Vergne, and Beverly Williams

**Others in Attendance:** Jane Ayers, Stacy Cabral, John Crocker, Louise Ebbeson, Anne Eisner, Marlina Green, Katherine Houle, Juin Liu, Kate Lytton, Gabriel Rivas Orellana, Regina Robinson, Chris Pond, Emily Taylor, and Joan Wasser Gish

1. **OPENING SECTION**

The co-chair welcomed everyone and took attendance by roll call. She reviewed the agenda for the meeting. Commission members introduced themselves including the organization they represent.

The co-chair provided an update on the status of the annual report which was drafted and discussed with the Commission in November. A final draft version informed by the November meeting and vote was shared with the Commissioner’s Office in December and has been undergoing several layers of interagency review before final official submission. When there is an update and an official version submitted to the legislature, the report will be posted on the DESE legislative reports and Commission web pages and shared with the commission.

***VOTE ON MINUTES****: On a motion duly entered and seconded, the November 14, 2024, Commission minutes were approved (11 yes) (3 abstained) by roll call vote, with three (3) members abstaining: Members DiCarlo, Grady, and Mills.*

1. **NEW MEMBER INTRODUCTION**

The co-chair the invited the new members to introduce themselves, the organization they represent, and share an example of how they envision or have experienced safe and supportive learning environments. The commission was thrilled to welcome the new members: Tayyab Afzal and Jayus DiCarlo, sharing the student member position (appointed by the State Student Advisory Council in consultation with the State GSA Student Leadership Council), and Donna Grady and Lucinda Mills, sharing the educator member position (jointly appointed by the MTA and AFT-MA).

The co-chair also shared that there is one more vacant spot on the commission representing principals (appointed by the MA School Administrators Association), and that DESE and the Association are in communication about next steps to fill the position.

1. **COMMISSION BACKGROUND & 2025 COMMISSION FOCUS AREAS**

The Co-chair shared slides (available upon request) that reviewed:

* The Definition of a Safe and Supportive School from An Act Relative to the Reduction of Gun Violence (M.G.L. Ch. 69 Section 1P).
* The SaSS Framework and Self-Reflection Tool, including the 6 Implementation Levers (Leadership and Culture, Family and Community Engagement, Professional Learning Opportunities, Access to Resources and Services, Teaching and Learning that Fosters Safe and Supportive Environments, and Policies and Practices).
* The Essential Elements of Safe and Supportive Schools (Support All Students, Deepen Understanding, Exemplify Cultural Responsiveness, Reflect and Adapt, and Advance Equity).
* The many responsibilities of the commission which the commission chooses from for their focus each year.
* The organizations and categories that appoint commission members.

The co-chair shared the commission focus areas from last year (2024):

1. Attendance: Specifically looking at the connection between SaSS and increasing attendance with specific attention to collaboration with families and access to clinically, culturally, and linguistically appropriate services.
2. Analysis of SaSS action plans.

The co-chair proposed (informed by consultation with commission members and prior year’s commission meeting discussions) that this year’s focus areas be:

* + Access to services –
    - propose steps for improving schools’ access to clinically, culturally, and linguistically appropriate services.
    - And including some updates and consultation related to a new state budget funded initiative to develop a statewide birth through higher education and adult learner framework for mental and behavioral health and associated metrics and pilot implementation grants.
  + Analysis of Safe and Supportive School Grantee action plans (as required in the state safe and supportive schools line item)

The co-chair shared a reminder of DESE’s EdVision that helps guide our work:

* DESE’s Educational Vision – All students are known and valued. Learning Experiences are relevant, real-world, and interactive in order to enable students to excel at grade level and beyond.
* DESE’s 3 strategic objectives
  + Whole student
  + Deeper learning
  + Diverse and effective workforce

Commission members and others in attendance were given the opportunity to ask questions or to react to the proposed focus areas.

1. **SPOTLIGHT**

Commission member Beverly Williams, BAMSI Executive Vice President, Behavioral Health and Community Services, shared about her work at the Community Based Organization BAMSI, and its connection to the Commission charge related to increasing schools’ (and students’) access to clinically, culturally and linguistically appropriate services. She shared background information about BAMSI, the services provided, and who they are able to partner with to provide those services. She included a definition of culturally, linguistically appropriate services and how this is important to the people her organization serves. She described bright spots as well as challenges to the work of BAMSI. (Slides available upon request.)

1. **CO-CHAIR SELECTION PROCESS**

The co-chair reminded the commission that per the safe and supportive schools framework legislation, one of the commission’s co-chairs is the DESE Commissioner’s designee, and the other commission co-chair is selected by the Commission.

Informed by previous commission practice, it is time for the commission to vote again to select a co-chair for the next two-year term. A vote is planned for the next meeting (5/8/25). The current co-chair, Dr. John Doherty, is interested and willing to serve again in this capacity. Dr. Doherty is PD Chair for the MA Association of Superintendents and a retired superintendent from Reading. He has extensive experience in education in many roles, including experience implementing the safe and supportive schools framework as a superintendent. He invests a great deal of time into helping plan and facilitate the commission’s work, and the commission is grateful for his service and generosity. It was noted that if any others are also interested in serving in this capacity, they are asked to contact Rachelle within a week of the meeting (or within a week of when the draft minutes are emailed to members).

1. **NEXT STEPS/CLOSING**

DESE Deputy Commissioner Dr. Regina Robinson shared a message with the commission about the importance of their work and support.

* Next meeting – May 8 (9-11am via zoom)
* Feedback survey – will be sent in follow up email.

*Motion to adjourn was duly entered. All present voted in favor.*