**Safe and Supportive Schools (SaSS) Commission Meeting**   
**Thursday, May 8, 2025 Virtual Meeting, 9:00-11:00 AM**

**MINUTES**

**Commission Members in Attendance:** Co-chairs Rachelle Engler Bennett and John Doherty

**Additional members in attendance:** Tayyab Afzal, Faith Ambrose, Donna M. Brown, Margie Daniels, Marissa del Rosario, Jayus DiCarlo, Susan Farrell, Donna Grady, Ellen Holmes, Michelle Lipinksi, Raquel Martinez, Lucinda Mills, Melissa Pearrow, Johana Rodriguez, Shanyn Toulouse, and Jariel Vergne

**Others in Attendance:** Catherine Brooks, Stacy Cabral, John Crocker, Anne Eisner, Katherine Houle, Kristen McKinnon, Chiniqua Milligan, Chris Pond, Gabriel Rivas, Lillia Rosenkranz, Emily Taylor, and Jason Wheeler

1. **OPENING SECTION**

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

***VOTE ON MINUTES****: On a motion duly entered and seconded, the February 4, 2025, Commission minutes were approved (17 yes) by roll call vote, with one (1) member (F. Ambrose) not in attendance at time of vote.*

The two focus areas for this year were reviewed:

1. Access to services – proposing steps for improving schools access to clinically culturally and linguistically appropriate services.
2. Analysis of Action Plans – Analyzing school wide action plans consistent with the Safe and Supportive Schools budget language.

The co-chair explained that the next meeting on June 25 will be in person. There are a number of benefits to meeting in person and the commission has not met in person since before the pandemic. Another in person meeting is scheduled for August (13, from 10am-1pm, also at DESE in Everett).

DESE staff shared an update on a partnership between the Executive Office of Education (EOE) and the Departments of Early Education and Care (EEC), Higher Education (DHE), and DESE, in consultation with Public Health (DPH), Mental Health (DMH), and others to create a framework that will help to strengthen mental and behavioral health wellness and supports in education from birth to adulthood. There will be two listening sessions with specific invitations sent directly to potential participants as well as a stakeholder survey.

Co-chairs wished teachers and nurses a happy teacher appreciation and nurses appreciation week.

1. **NEW MEMBER INTRODUCTION**

The co-chair welcomed the newest commission member, Raquel Martinez – representing the Massachusetts School Administrators Association (MSAA). She is the head of school at Snowden International School, Boston.

1. **CO-CHAIR SELECTION VOTE**

The Co-chair described the process for selecting co-chairs – in addition to the commissioner’s designee (Rachelle Engler Bennett) a co-chair is selected every 2 years. See minutes from February 4, 2025 meeting for more details. No other members had expressed interest; and many expressed gratitude for Dr. Doherty’s leadership.

***VOTE ON selection of John Doherty as the Commission Co-Chair****: On a motion duly entered and seconded, John Doherty is selected as the Commission Co-Chair for a period of 2 years (17 yes) (1 abstain – John Doherty)*

1. **SPOTLIGHT I**

Data highlights related to safe and supportive learning environments including examples of 2023 Youth Risk Behavior Survey Results and the School Health Profiles, led by Chiniqua Milligan, School Health Analyst, DESE.

After providing an overview of what school based surveillance is, what data is collected and how frequently, Chiniqua shared some of the connections between school health profiles and Safe and Supportive Schools. Findings related to school environments, education related to behavioral and mental health and family engagement practices, and students experiences related to school connectedness and mental and behavioral health supports were shared and discussed. Slides available upon request.

1. **SPOTLIGHT II:** Student & educator panel — perspectives on cultivating safe and supportive learning environments

Commission members introduced themselves –Tayyab Afzal, Jayus DiCarlo, Donna Grady, and Lucinda Mills.

The panel responded to questions from the co-chairs and members and others in attendance were given time to discuss and respond. The panel shared their insights based on their own experiences in their schools and programs and provided ideas and solutions based on what they have seen to work to support a feeling of safe and supportive schools, what additional supports are needed, and efforts they think could improve students’ feelings of safety and support.

1. NEXT STEPS/CLOSING

Other updates will be shared through email.

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