Thank you for your interest in the DESE-SEL newsletter. This Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) newsletter periodically shares updates and offerings related to holistic supports & enrichment, including efforts to help strengthen social emotional competencies, health & safety. This edition is released during school closures associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, and we hope everyone is doing as well as possible while navigating the many challenges. Please see below for a sampling of DESE offerings and other information designed to help bolster efforts to support student, staff, and family well-being and safety, alongside implementation of new modes of teaching and learning.

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Massachusetts COVID-19 information and resources web pages

The DESE COVID-19 webpage includes DESE specific updates, as well as links to the COVID-19
cross-agency website and other featured information. The cross-agency site includes a link to the MA Department of Mental Health (DMH) page that outlines resources and tips on Maintaining Emotional Health & Well-Being During the COVID-19 Outbreak.

❤️ Supporting Students' Behavioral and Mental Health and Wellness Grant (for school year 2020-2021)

DESE recently updated a competitive grant opportunity, Supporting Students' Behavioral and Mental Health and Wellness (Fund Code 336/613). All Massachusetts public school districts and collaboratives are eligible to apply for up to $110,000. Approximately $3.3 million in state funds are available. For more information, see the request for proposals. Applications are due June 12, 2020.

❤️ DESE-sponsored website: Massachusetts Tools for Schools

MA Tools for Schools (https://matoolsforschools.com/) is a clearinghouse of resources to support sustainable school improvement in Massachusetts. The MA Tools for Schools COVID-19 Resources page contains links to local and national resources for implementing multi-tiered systems of supports during this time, including slides and links mentioned on the Supporting Students' Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) and Mental Health Needs in the COVID-19 Era Webinar, offered by DESE and its partners Education Development Center (EDC), Transforming Education, and Walker Cares on March 31 and April 9.

❤️ Highlighted DESE Webinars

Numerous opportunities related to supporting student health and wellbeing were featured in the April 6th Commissioner’s Weekly Update. Feel free to sign-up to receive future Commissioner’s Weekly Updates. Examples of highlighted opportunities include the following.

- **Setting Up Effective District-Wide Systems to Support Students’ and Educators’ Mental Health Needs during COVID-19 – Webinar** (offered twice): This webinar will provide district leaders with practical guidance on how to put in place effective support systems which include: coordination of virtual SEL and mental health supports through a multi-tiered approach, establishment of online mental health referral systems, and use of technology-based mental health strategies. Registration for the April 17 & April 24 webinars (both 12:00-1:30pm) are open online. (Note: The two webinars will offer the same information; please register for one.)

- **Peer-Sharing Virtual Meetings** (dates/time still to be confirmed). To further support educators and student support staff across the Commonwealth to address students’ social,
emotional, and mental health needs, DESE and its partners plan on setting up facilitated peer-sharing meetings focusing on specific topics such as: supporting students’ SEL growth in the COVID-19 era, addressing students’ acute mental health needs, and promoting mental health and connectedness among school staff. If you or other educators in your district are interested in participating in a peer-sharing meeting, please fill out this survey with your contact information and topic(s) of interest to help inform offerings.

Safe Schools Program for LGBTQ Students

The Safe Schools Program for LGBTQ Students (a collaborative effort between DESE and the Commission for LGBTQ Youth) has developed and compiled resources for educators, students, and their families during this difficult time, including: free online webinars, weekly virtual GSA hangouts, and an extensive resource directory with information about online social groups, mental health support, educational supplements, and assistance with food or housing. Feel free to reach out to the Safe Schools Program via commission@ma-lgbtq.org and/or achievement@doe.mass.edu for help navigating these resources or for questions about supporting LGBTQ students.

DESE Family Engagement Specialist

DESE recently welcomed Olga Lopez (Olga.M.Lopez@mass.gov) as the new Family Engagement Specialist. She brings extensive experience in outreach, collaboration and providing technical assistance in the area of family engagement. She will be coordinating DESE’s family engagement efforts, including efforts to build internal and external capacity to support districts and schools in engaging with families. If you have questions or need support in engaging families during school closure feel free to contact Olga.

Cross-District Mental Health and Well Being Website and Calendar

School counseling and social emotional learning leaders from a number of Massachusetts school districts collaborated to create a Mental Health and Well Being site that includes many updates, resources, and a calendar of events to promote good mental health hygiene during school closure, eventual return and recovery from COVID-19.

Smoking, Vaping and COVID-19

In an advisory sent to medical professionals, educators, and parent and advocacy groups, Attorney General Maura Healey and Massachusetts General Hospital warn that smoking or vaping may put people into a higher-risk category, could make COVID-19 infections worse, and may
increase the spread of the virus. As Attorney General Healey emphasized, “Combatting the youth vaping crisis has never been more important, and we want the public to understand the heightened risks associated with smoking and vaping during this pandemic.”

Contact Us

If you have feedback on this newsletter, questions, or suggestions for future newsletters, please contact the Office of Student and Family Support at achievement@doe.mass.edu.

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