A message from the
Massachusetts Department of
Elementary and Secondary Education

December 2020

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (Department) is continuing to
develop and share this newsletter during the COVID-19 pandemic and throughout the
2020-2021 school year. As schools, districts, teachers, students, and families navigate an
especially challenging school year, we hope that these resources are helpful and welcome
any feedback. We wish you all a peaceful transition into the new year.

If you have any questions, concerns, or comments, please email the Office of Student and
Family Support at achievement@mass.gov.

Safe and Supportive Schools Framework & Self-Reflection Tool

We are pleased to announce the revised Safe and Supportive Schools Framework and
Implementation Guide and Self-Reflection Tool are available for use by all interested
schools. (You can email achievement@mass.gov to request a username and password, or
you can use “Toolu” and “TOOLp” as a shared username/password to look through a test
These updated resources are being piloted by this year’s Safe and Supportive Schools grantees, and we are seeking and welcome feedback on these versions from a broad range of stakeholders. The associated Essential Elements, woven throughout the resources, describe a foundation upon which to create a safe and supportive learning environment for students, staff, families, and the wider community that is based on local context, needs, available resources, and capacities. These elements focus on supporting all students, deepening understanding, advancing equity, exemplifying cultural responsiveness, and continually reflecting and adapting. The updates to these resources were informed by the Safe and Supportive Schools Commission, grantees, and others, and revisions process (still in final stages) was conducted in partnership with the BlueScope Group and The Skills Library.

Promising Recruitment, Selection, and Retention Strategies for a Diverse MA Teacher Workforce

We are pleased to announce the release of DESE’s, "Promising Recruitment, Selection, and Retention Strategies for a Diverse Massachusetts Teacher Workforce." This comprehensive, step-by-step guidebook is intended to support school and district efforts to increase and retain a diverse Massachusetts teacher workforce. The guidebook was developed collaboratively with TNTP and reflects current research, promising practices, and templates for school and district use. The guide will be posted soon to the Center for Strategic Initiatives website.

Racial Consciousness Institute #3

Online registration and dates are now available for the 3rd pathway (in January): Anti-Racist Advocates.

The Department is partnering with The Equity Imperative for virtual professional development opportunities throughout the 2020-2021 school year. Join us in a learning series to support the use of tools in your racial equity journey. This series is offered through five learning pathways (topic areas). Each learning pathway will have three virtual sessions (two hours each), aligned with Equity Imperative’s theory of action to Illuminate, Indicate, and Navigate.

Pathway #3: Anti-Racist Advocates. This virtual three session (2 hours each) pathway will support participants in seeing common pitfalls of leading equity-based work, and how best to navigate those pitfalls to keep the work alive. The dates for this pathway are January 14, 21, and 28. All sessions are Thursdays, from 8AM to 10AM.

For more details, see the online registration form. If you have any questions, please contact the Office of Student and Family Support via achievement@mass.gov.

Elementary School Principals PD and Networking - Book Discussion
The Elementary School Principals PD and Networking Series flyer is now available on our Early Learning website with more dates and details.

The Department's Early Learning Team and the Massachusetts School Administrators' Association (MSAA) is hosting a series of networking and professional development opportunities for elementary principals (Preschool-3rd grade) during the 2020-2021 school year. The theme for this year’s series is Creating a Caring Community: Caring for Ourselves and Our Staff Using a Trauma-Informed Lens.

As part of this year’s series, in January, we will be hosting a two-part book discussion on Unconscious Bias in Schools: A Developmental Approach to Exploring Race and Racism, by Sarah Fiarman and Tracey A Benson (January 20th and 27th; 3:00-4:30). If you would like to register for the book discussion(s), please complete the registration form by Wednesday, January 13, 2021.

On October 27th, we kicked off the 2020-21 Elementary Principals Professional Development Series, Creating a Caring Community: Caring for Ourselves and Our Staff Using a Trauma-Informed Lens with Dr. Nicole Christian-Brathwaite. We have included the link to the recorded session and have attached the slides that Dr. Christian-Brathwaite delivered during her keynote presentation. If you want to listen to the recorded session, please use c1fSd?c* when prompted to enter the access passcode.

Please contact a member of the Early Learning team (achievement@mass.gov) with any questions.

Early Learning Webinar Recordings Now Available

On December 2nd, elementary principal, Liz Garden provided a webinar entitled, Leading with Reading: Culturally Responsive Literacy. Liz’s presentation, along with embedded hyperlinks can be found here. We also recorded the webinar and the recording can be found here.

The Department’s Early Learning Team, in collaboration with our Early Childhood and Out-of-School Time workgroup, created Creating Developmentally Appropriate Learning Environments During the COVID-19 Pandemic for Early Childhood Programs (Preschool up to Grade 3) to provide support on how to offer instructional opportunities for younger students that meet the Department’s health and safety guidance while also being responsive to their developmental needs. On November 9th and 16th, a training series with Dr. Lisa Kuh, was held on topics related to this document. In Part I: Moving from Tub to Tray — Designing Classrooms and Materials for Independence, participants were introduced to ways to restructure classroom materials for independent, constructive use. Part II: Designing Environments for Independence, Engagement, and Relationships focused on preparing the social emotional environment.
Youth Mental Health First Aid Training

The Department is working with Walker to schedule additional Youth Mental Health First Aid (YMHFA) training sessions for 2021, and we are **taking requests for district-specific sessions for later this year**. You can sign up to be notified when additional sessions for individual sessions are scheduled and/or to make a request for a session to be held for your district through the [online registration page](#). The YMHFA training helps teachers and other school staff to recognize and support students who may be experiencing mental health or substance use challenges and/or may be in crisis, and if needed, to refer them to mental health services.

Health and Physical Education During COVID-19

The Department has partnered with Lighthouse Wellness & Health Education Consulting and is pleased to announce the remaining webinars of this professional learning series focused on supporting health and physical education teachers and administrators in delivering high-quality instruction during COVID-19, whether in person, remote, or hybrid. [Click here](#) for more information and to register for one or more of the following sessions. All are on Wednesdays and scheduled from 3:00 to 4:30 p.m.:

- **January 6**: Addressing Equity in Health Education
- **January 13**: Addressing Equity in Physical Education
- **January 20**: Teaching Health Education through a Trauma-Informed Lens
- **January 27**: Teaching Physical Education through a Trauma-Informed Lens.

Pinnacle Partnerships – Family Engagement related Sessions

Family Engagement is foundational to a healthy school community, especially in the midst of a pandemic. The Department has partnered with Pinnacle to work with schools and districts to harness the power of engaging families in culturally competent and innovative ways to help spread the message about Covid mitigation. Lunch & Learn (L&L) sessions (regional immersive workshop experiences) are offered in January, stemming from our Statewide L&L which occurred on November 30th. The dates and links to register are below (you can decide which region you want to join). **The sessions are all on Fridays; run from 12-1:30pm; and are open to Families, School Personnel, and Administrators.**

- **January 8**: WESTERN MA - [Online Registration](#)
- **January 15**: BOSTON/EASTERN MA - [Online Registration](#)
- **January 22**: SOUTHERN MA - [Online Registration](#)
- **January 29**: NORTHERN MA - [Online Registration](#)
Family-friendly help with mental health:
HandholdMA.org is a family-friendly website designed for Massachusetts parents who are worried about their school-aged children’s mental health. This site is designed to help families figure if their child’s behavior is something to worry about and if so, what next steps can they take.

NCSMH Upcoming Webinars:
The National Center (NCSMH) also has a number of upcoming free webinars, along with recordings from webinars that took place earlier this year. Examples of upcoming webinars include (all are Wednesdays, from 3-4pm):

- **January 6**: Trauma Responsive Care for Younger Students – online registration
- **February 3**: Addressing Systemic Racism: Creating Safe and Equitable Schools – online registration
- **March 3**: Safe and Equitable Schools: Tier II Interventions and Considerations – online registration

OPTIC Content Fellows Application Now Open:
DESE is convening a group of educators with expertise in culturally responsive practice to establish benchmark scores and exemplars of written feedback for teaching videos on the OPTIC professional learning platform (Online Platform for Teaching and Informed Calibration). OPTIC uses video-based observations to engage educators in collaborative discussions to calibrate on perceptions of great teaching. As content experts and skilled practitioners in culturally responsive practice, OPTIC Content Fellows will provide MA educators with important reference points as they engage in ongoing reflection and discussion about great teaching. Content Fellows will also support the development of a ‘look-for’ tool focused on observable elements of culturally responsive, anti-racist teaching. Fellows will receive a $2,000 stipend for their work. To apply, nominate an educator, or learn more, visit the application - due by midnight on Monday, December 28th. Contact EducatorDevelopment@mass.gov with any questions.