



HOW DOES MASSACHUSETTS SUPPORT STUDENTS' SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL, AND ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT (SEAD)?

SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL, AND ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT (SEAD) IS A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO SUPPORTING STUDENTS' DEVELOPMENT AND LEARNING THAT IS INTEGRAL TO ENSURING POSITIVE OUTCOMES IN SCHOOL AND BEYOND.

Schools must ensure students experience healthy development and rigorous learning. Unfortunately, students of color, students from low-income backgrounds, and other underserved students often do not have positive learning experiences. There are six key policy issues that state leaders can implement to create equitable and safe learning environments that promote positive SEAD for all students. School and district leaders should:

- 1 Develop inclusive school discipline and dress code policies
- 2 Provide meaningful professional development and supports for all adults in schools
- 3 Ensure equitable access and support for success in rigorous and culturally sustaining curricula
- 4 Engage students, families, and communities as full partners
- 5 Provide access to integrated wraparound services and supports
- 6 Diversify the educator workforce

While many of these policy areas are led at the local level, state leaders can support local leaders with three key levers:

- 1. Prioritize policies that impact SEAD in state goals. In doing so, state leaders can set the expectation for local leaders to implement SEAD with an equity lens
- 2. Provide evidence-based, equity-focused guidance and sufficient funding to ensure local leaders have the necessary resources to meet these goals
- 3. Make data publicly available so advocates and local and state leaders can make informed decisions about what works and how to improve

Notes on implementation

State actions set the stage for districts and schools to implement strong practices that holistically support students' social, emotional, and academic development. However, there is a wide range of implementation at the local level. Some states may have strong policies that are not yet being implemented with fidelity at the district level, and some districts may choose to implement strong policies and practices despite a lack of policy or guidance from the state level. If your school district is not fully implementing the policies discussed below, you can ask district leaders what they are doing to meet or surpass the expectations set forth by the state.

District leaders looking to implement better practices can utilize the tools available from the Alliance for Resource Equity (ARE), a partnership between Ed Trust and Education Resource Strategies, which categorizes the student experience into [10 "dimensions of equity."](#) ARE's toolkit includes a diagnostic tool that is organized around "key questions" and how to identify problem areas. It also includes practical guidebooks that offer actions to address these problems. Under each section below, relevant key questions from the ARE diagnostic tool and guidebooks are highlighted for district leaders and advocates who want to improve policies and practices at the local level.



HOW DOES MASSACHUSETTS SUPPORT SEAD THROUGH SCHOOL DISCIPLINE?

TOO OFTEN, HARMFUL SCHOOL DISCIPLINE PRACTICES AND DRESS CODES HAVE BEEN USED TO DAMAGE STUDENTS' SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL, AND ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT. As such, students of color and students with disabilities are disproportionately excluded from school and miss opportunities to learn and develop holistically. States can influence [district and school disciplinary actions](#) by setting clear goals to reduce disparities and overuses in discipline, ensuring a strong set of data is publicly transparent, and adopting more positive approaches to discipline, such as restorative justice.

Bright spots

Massachusetts stands out as doing positive work in school discipline by...

- [Setting clear and equity-centered goals](#) that aim to decrease the use of exclusionary discipline and reduce disparities in discipline
- Setting policies and providing resources that...
 - Ensure the [state education agency has staff](#) to support districts with technical assistance and implementation for positive discipline practices
 - [Ensure students do not experience physical harm in schools](#) by banning corporal punishment and having sufficient, explicit parameters around restraining students
 - [Require district leaders to consider of alternative forms of discipline](#) before imposing long-term suspensions and expulsions, as well as ban discriminatory codes of conduct and hair and grooming codes

- [Provide guidance](#) for co-developing clear, student-centered codes of conduct aligned with a restorative justice approach, and provide funding as well as external resources for guidance to implement positive discipline in schools
- [Provide funding as well as free opportunities for professional development](#) in implementing positive discipline
- Collecting and publicly reporting data that is disaggregated by student groups and shows the categories of the offenses, distinguishes types of punishments in addition to lengths of punishments, and identifies the number of students suspended or expelled more than once

How to improve

Massachusetts still has much to improve, however, and should prioritize...

- Setting policies and providing resources that...
 - Prohibit harmful discipline policies, including the use of exclusionary discipline for non-violent offenses, subjective or minor offenses, or for young learners
- Ensuring publicly reported data can be cross-tabulated to show the intersections of identities in discipline data.

Key question for district leaders:

[Does each student experience a safe school with transparent, culturally sensitive, and consistently enforced rules and discipline policies?](#)



HOW DOES MASSACHUSETTS SUPPORT SEAD THROUGH PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT?

TO EQUITABLY SUPPORT STUDENTS' SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL, AND ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT, EDUCATORS MUST HAVE THE SKILLS TO CREATE CULTURALLY AFFIRMING ENVIRONMENTS, BUILD RELATIONSHIPS WITH THEIR STUDENTS, AND SUPPORT STUDENTS' ACADEMIC SUCCESS. They must also have mindsets geared toward anti-racism. [Professional development](#) (PD) ensures that educators learn these mindsets and skills. States should encourage and support districts to provide [high-quality](#) and relevant [professional learning opportunities](#), especially in asset-based pedagogies (e.g., culturally responsive practices); diversity, equity, and inclusion; adult social-emotional learning (SEL) or adult mindsets; and strategies and approaches for evidence-based, equity-focused, systemic SEL for students.

Bright spots

Massachusetts stands out as doing positive work in professional development by...

- [Setting clear and equity-centered goals](#) that clearly articulate a vision for professional development with an aim of addressing adult mindsets and SEL, and providing the skills necessary to support students' well-being
- Setting policies and providing resources that...
 - [Provide a network of intermediary organizations](#) for providing high-quality professional development on creating safe and supportive learning environments

- [Provide guidance to districts](#) on creating professional development structures that promote collaboration among educators
- Include [professional standards for teachers](#) in creating safe and collaborative learning environments that value diversity
- [Require educators to demonstrate mastery](#) of a combination of skills and knowledge needed to equitably integrate and support social, emotional, and academic development

How to improve

Massachusetts still has much to improve, however, and should prioritize...

- Setting policies and provide resources that...
 - Require preparation programs to provide training that improves educator mindsets, such as diversity, equity, and inclusion training, or anti-bias/anti-racism training
 - Require educators to demonstrate mastery of a combination of skills and knowledge needed to support students' SEAD for licensure renewal or recertification
 - Ensure the state education agency has staff to support district leaders with identifying and funding high-quality professional development
- Collecting and publicly reporting data that shows educators' perceptions of professional development offerings at the district level

Key questions for district leaders:

[Does each student have access to strong teachers?](#)

[Does each student have positive relationships with staff and other students?](#)

[Is each student enrolled in a school and attending classes that are racially/ethnically and socioeconomically diverse?](#)



HOW DOES MASSACHUSETTS SUPPORT SEAD THROUGH EDUCATOR DIVERSITY?

ACCESS TO A RACIALLY AND CULTURALLY DIVERSE TEACHER WORKFORCE IS BENEFICIAL FOR ALL P-12 STUDENTS, PARTICULARLY FOR STUDENTS OF COLOR, WHO OFTEN THRIVE IN CLASSROOMS LED BY TEACHERS WHO [SHARE THEIR RACIAL AND CULTURAL BACKGROUNDS](#). Educators of color are more likely to have [higher expectations for their students of color](#). Students of color and White students also [feel cared for and academically challenged by teachers of color](#). Additionally, research shows that Black students who have at least one Black teacher are [less likely to drop out of school and more likely to enroll in college](#), and [teacher-student racial matches affects social, emotional, and academic skills](#). By working to diversify the educator workforce and retain diverse educators, schools will foster a sense of belonging and challenge students to thrive.

Bright spots

Massachusetts stands out as doing positive work in educator diversity by...

- [Setting clear and equity-centered goals](#) that are developed with local stakeholder input and support for the goals
- [Setting policies and providing resources](#) that...
 - [Invest in loan forgiveness and reimbursement programs](#) through the teacher diversification grant to attract students of color into preparation programs
 - [Adopt rigorous program approval standards](#) to compel teacher preparation programs to recruit and graduate candidates of color
 - [Provide competitive grants](#) to districts to support schools and district efforts to strengthen and diversify teacher recruitment and retention programs
 - [Encourage and support partnerships between districts and teacher preparation programs](#) to provide licensure pathways for educators on emergency licenses, a large percentage of whom are educators of color
 - [Invest in diversifying the superintendent pipeline through the Influence 100](#), a fellowship program that supports educators who desire to move into the superintendent role
 - Invest in high-retention pathways to teaching and in [opportunities for teachers of color to grow and develop in their abilities](#) and their qualification for leadership roles
- Collecting and publicly reporting [school-level data](#) on the racial demographics of the educator workforce and retention rates of educators of color, as well as the [makeup of candidates](#) attending in-state teacher preparation programs annually

How to improve

Massachusetts still has much to improve, however, and should prioritize...

- Setting policies and providing resources that...
 - Interrogate licensure policies for racial bias and adopt licensure policies that increase diversity while maintaining quality and rigor
 - Invest in preparation programs that prepare a high number of teachers of color, including minority-serving institutions (MSIs)
 - Invest in an induction and mentoring program that provides at least two years of support for new teachers
- Collecting and publicly reporting data that shares the makeup of candidates completing in-state teacher preparation programs annually

Key questions for district leaders:

[Does each student have access to strong teachers?](#)

[Does the teacher workforce reflect student diversity?](#)



HOW DOES MASSACHUSETTS SUPPORT SEAD THROUGH RIGOROUS AND CULTURALLY SUSTAINING CURRICULA?

IN ORDER TO THRIVE, STUDENTS MUST BE CHALLENGED AND ENCOURAGED TO MEET HIGH EXPECTATIONS. This means students should have access to [rigorous, deeper learning](#) and [culturally sustaining](#) curricula. When students can both see themselves in the work and feel their teachers challenging them to excel, what follows is a stauncher belief in themselves to reach their goals.

Bright spots

Massachusetts stands out as doing positive work in rigorous and culturally sustaining curricula by...

- [Setting clear and equity-centered goals](#) that call on districts to equitably enroll students in advanced coursework
- Setting policies and providing resources that...
 - [Provide guidance for schools and districts](#) to adopt culturally sustaining curricula across some core subjects
 - [Provide guidance for schools and districts](#) to select standards-aligned curricula
- [Collecting and publicly reporting data](#) on high school advanced coursework enrollment and success that is disaggregated by course type, and shows both enrollment and success rates for students

How to improve

Massachusetts still has much to improve, however, and should prioritize...

- Setting clear and equity-centered goals that identify the need for curricula to be both rigorous and culturally sustaining, and identify specific actions that must be taken to equitably enroll students in advanced coursework
- Setting policies and provide resources that...
 - Ensure the state education agency has staff available to support districts with implementation of culturally relevant or culturally sustaining curricula
 - Require automatic enrollment in advanced coursework in high school
 - Provide guidance on how to select culturally sustaining curricula that is aligned to learning standards, and provide a review process for determining whether curricula meet these criteria

Key questions for district leaders:

[Does each student have access to teaching practices that are engaging, culturally relevant, and standards-aligned?](#)

[Does each student have access to high-quality and culturally relevant curriculum and instructional materials?](#)

[Is each student enrolled in courses that set them up for success in college and a meaningful career, including equal access to advanced courses?](#)



HOW DOES MASSACHUSETTS SUPPORT SEAD THROUGH STUDENT, FAMILY, AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT?

[STRONG PARTNERSHIPS](#) BETWEEN EDUCATORS, STUDENTS, FAMILIES, AND COMMUNITIES ARE ESSENTIAL FOR SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL, AND ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT. When educators engage the communities they serve, they gain a deeper understanding of their students, including their strengths, identities, and needs. This fortifies relationships with students and [increases students' academic success](#). It is also important that school leaders ensure that the voices of students of color and their families, and those from low-income and other marginalized backgrounds, are [centered in policy and practice decisions](#).

Bright spots

Massachusetts stands out as doing positive work in student, family, and community engagement by...

- [Setting clear and equity-centered goals](#) that include family and community engagement in the strategic objective of increasing the quality of instruction, and supporting students' social and emotional learning, health, and safety.
- Setting policies and providing resources that...
 - [Create a statewide office for student, family, and community engagement](#) that supports schools and districts to engage with families and communities
 - Offer comprehensive training and development to educators in student, family, and community engagement, and include this topic in [teacher evaluation rubrics](#)
 - [Provide detailed guidance](#) for schools and districts to successfully engage students, families, and communities throughout the P-12 continuum and accounts for the needs of frequently marginalized student and family populations
 - [Provide guidance](#) that links family and community engagement to student learning
 - Ensure student voice is included in state-level decisions by having a [student advisory council](#)
 - Ensure family and community voice is included in state-level decisions by having a [parent and community education and involvement advisory council](#)
 - Include student, family, and community engagement in [teaching standards](#) and [school leader standards](#)
- [Collecting and publicly reporting state-level data](#) on student perceptions of school climate with the VOCAL survey

How to improve

Massachusetts still has much to improve, however, and should prioritize...

- Setting clear and equity-centered goals that provide a clear plan that details how districts can use evidence-based practices for engagement
- Setting policies and providing resources that...

- Provide guidance that identifies evidence-based strategies to support student learning with family and community engagement and on partnering with community organizations to accelerate learning
- Requiring training in student, family, and community engagement for teacher certification and leader certification
- Collecting and publicly reporting school-level data that shows disaggregated information about student, family, and community engagement

Key questions for district leaders:

[Does each student attend a school that actively and meaningfully engages families?](#)

[Does each student who needs targeted social-emotional support receive it?](#)

[Does each student who needs targeted physical and mental health supports receive it?](#)

[Does each student who needs targeted family support receive it?](#)



HOW DOES MASSACHUSETTS SUPPORT SEAD THROUGH WRAPAROUND SERVICES?

MULTI-TIERED OR INTEGRATED SYSTEMS OF SUPPORT (MTSS) — ALSO KNOWN AS WRAPAROUND SERVICES — PROVIDE STUDENTS WITH ACCESS TO RESOURCES TO OVERCOME ACADEMIC AND NON-ACADEMIC BARRIERS TO SUCCESS. [MTSS are frameworks](#) that districts and schools can use to [connect services](#) to students. When schools identify and provide targeted supports to each student, when the health and well-being of students are met, and when efforts are made to ensure students feel they belong, students can better engage in schools.

Bright spots

Massachusetts stands out as doing positive work in wraparound services by...

- Setting clear and equity-centered goals that [encourage schools to adopt MTSS](#) and explicitly prioritize developing and implementing MTSS for students with the highest needs
- Setting policies and providing resources that...
 - [Provide guidance](#) for districts and schools to develop and fund evidence-based MTSS
 - [Expressly authorize school districts](#) to bill for services delivered to all Medicaid-enrolled students without requiring services to be documented in an IEP or IFSP
 - Provide health and housing support, including [oral health supports](#) to students and information for supporting [students experiencing homelessness](#)
 - Prohibit [lunch-shaming for unpaid meal debt](#)
 - Require early childhood education programs to provide meals or snacks that meet nutrition guidelines for [licensing](#)

- Include a [comprehensive anti-bullying policy](#) that explicitly names groups of students most likely to be bullied and harassed
- Support [transgender K-12 students](#) in participating in athletics and using facilities based on gender identity
- Collecting and publicly reporting data that [requires districts and schools to conduct system-level needs assessments](#)

How to improve

Massachusetts still has much to improve, however, and should prioritize...

- Setting policies and provide resources that...
 - Create a council or commission to coordinate interagency services for children and youth with a clear initiative of advancing race equity
 - Increase access to nutrition by requiring all schools to participate in the National School Lunch Program and the School Breakfast Program
 - Require districts to monitor the progress and impacts of multi-tiered or integrated support systems for continuous improvement, including using student data to inform decisions
 - Mandate school counseling for all grades with no greater than the 250:1 ratio recommended by the American School Counselor Association
- Collecting and publicly reporting data that requires schools and districts to conduct student-level needs and strengths assessments, and measure and report on the fidelity of implementation of multi-tiered or integrated systems of support

Key questions for district leaders:

[Does each student who needs targeted social-emotional support receive it?](#)

[Does each student who needs targeted physical and mental health supports receive it?](#)

[Does each student who needs targeted family support receive it?](#)