An Analysis of School Climate Interventions in Massachusetts

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Executive Summary

1. Introduction

In this paper, we evaluate school climates inside and outside the state of Massachusetts to determine cost-effective strategies for long-term improvements in the performance of struggling school districts. This paper begins with an analysis of current state law (Safe and Supportive Schools Act) and funding programs (Safe and Supportive Schools Grants) for creating safe and supportive school environments throughout Massachusetts. The paper also analyzes the process for applying for funding aimed at improving school climates. Our research suggests that while Massachusetts does a better job than most states in trying to provide positive school environments for its students, more can be done to address problems students face during school hours and at home.

All of the solutions we propose aim to reduce the effects of trauma, defined in this paper as a response to a stressful event that impairs one's ability to cope with the distressing emotions induced by the event, in order for students to have an environment conducive to learning and healthy social development. Our suggestions are generally organized by in-school problems, such as disciplinary and bullying policies, followed by out-of-school intersectional issues such as hunger, poverty, and race.

As far as the predominantly in-school issues are concerned, we highly recommend training teachers to (1) better identify and assist at-risk students in a productive way, (2) shift away from punitive responses to student infractions to responses that try to promote better behavior and reflection, and (3) implement evidence-based Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) programs in Massachusetts school districts. All three suggestions have areas of overlap given that the first two are components of SEL. There are multiple SEL programs available, but each

program focuses on the five tenets of teaching self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, productive student teacher relationships, and responsible decision-making. SEL programs have been shown to improve students' academic achievement, behavior, and coping skills. While SEL programs benefit students from all socioeconomic ranges, they are especially effective for students living in poverty and schools with lower academic performances.

Another in-school source of trauma that students face is bullying. While zero tolerance policies are the most popular, our research found evidence suggesting that diplomatic approaches are more effective for curtailing bullying, especially at the elementary school level before the behavior becomes habitual. We offer the Pikas Method, No Blame Approach, and Farsta Method in the bullying section of the paper as three approaches to resolve instances of bullying.

Three stressors we identified that are either primarily out-of-school issues or that involve external factors are poverty, food insecurity, and race-based discrimination. While school districts cannot directly affect the income levels of families, schools can increase the school readiness of young children from low socioeconomic status demographics by having free pre-K, kindergarten, and after-school early intervention programs. To offset the expense, these programs can be implemented specifically at schools with high populations of impoverished students. To address food insecurity issues, other school districts could follow the lead of the Lawrence school district by making breakfast and lunch free to students and providing take home dinners for food insecure students. Finally, the paper examines disciplinary policies across the state to see whether any discrimination to minority students is taking place. We conclude that while Massachusetts doesn't have a school-to-prison pipeline, Hispanic, black, and disabled students are more likely to receive out-of-school suspensions or other harsh disciplinary

measures than white students. We recommend training teachers and counselors to be more sensitive and patient in dealing with behavior issues of minority students.

2. Literature on School Climate

2.1 Understanding Student Trauma

Experts define trauma as a response to a stressful event that impairs one's ability to cope with the distressing emotions this event induces. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) explains that trauma is composed of 3 E's - the *event* that causes physical or psychological distress which an individual perceives as a severely distressing *experience*, and which results in adverse long-lasting *effects*.[1] Trauma can be understood as the summation of the stress-inducing event, the individual's experience of this event, and the resulting damaging effects. Exposure to distressing events is especially concerning in children, and can have a severe debilitating impact on development. According to Boston University Medical Center psychiatrist, Bessel van der Kolk, "Because children's brains are still developing, trauma has a much more pervasive and long-range influence on their self-concept, on their sense of the world and on their ability to regulate themselves."[2]

A traumatic experience may take the form of physical harm, emotional abuse, neglect, or emotional distress resulting from community violence or war, and children may be exposed to traumatic events at home, in their communities, or at school.[3] Each child reacts to trauma in a different way, and the severity of a child's response to trauma will vary depending on the nature of the traumatic event, the child's age, coping mechanisms, and support network.

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[1] "Trauma Definition" *Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration*. Last Modified December 10, 2012.
[2] DeAngelis, Tori. "A new diagnosis for childhood trauma." *Monitor on Psychology* 38, no. 3 (2007): 32.
[3] "Types of Traumatic Stress." *The National Child Traumatic Stress Network*. Accessed December 8, 2017.

Psychologists emphasize the importance of a support network in alleviating the harmful impact of childhood trauma: "The availability of social support is expected to act as a mitigating factor in the response to traumatic abuse. This is anticipated because those who do not have support are expected to feel less hopeful of achieving control over the aversive experiences."[4] Schools play a vital role in a child's community, and the support of a teacher or school administrator can significantly impact a child's recovery from trauma.[5]

2.2. Models of In-School Support for Traumatized Students

This section examines existing academic literature on different modes of approaching in-school support for at-risk students. The majority of literature agrees on the importance of teacher activism in identifying and making allowances for such students. Another common suggestion is the separation of at-risk students from other students, but this has the potential to cause social ostracization and ought to be approached with caution. Parental intervention ought to be utilized where possible, and student-driven learning projects have great potential for social-emotional learning.

A review of recent research into models of intervention with at-risk students finds that all primary modes of intervention either take place in-school or outside of school. In-school intervention is more traditional, including staff trainings, special curricula, and counseling. Out-of-school intervention often aims to address the root of a student's classification as "at-risk," involving parents and taking measures to heighten food security and healthcare

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[4] Carlson, Eve B., et al. "A conceptual framework for the long-term psychological effects of traumatic childhood abuse." *Child maltreatment* 2.3 (1997): 272-295.
[5] Carlson, Eve B., et al. "A conceptual framework for the long-term psychological effects of traumatic childhood abuse." *Child maltreatment* 2.3 (1997): 272-295.

accessibility, etc. The latter initiatives broaden into a school attempting to provide a social safety net, which in general ought to be addressed by legislation unrelated to schools, though for now there are several initiatives that can be taken on by schools that will be discussed later in the paper. However, it ought to be noted that in many cases, the social support programs that lead to more stability outside of school have been shown to have long-term, tangible benefits inside of school.[6]

Moving on to the in-school intervention methods, it is agreed upon by the majority of authors in this field that the first line of defense in detection and treatment of at-risk students is the teaching staff. According to Sitler in 2009, "Most teachers, K-college, know little about how to manage the classroom effects of trauma… developing a pedagogy of awareness can help a teacher to reframe perceptions and consequently help disengaged or difficult students reinvest in their learning."[7] Chapman, Buckley, Sheehan, and Shochet concluded that teacher training is a key part of effective intervention "to alter the classroom level environment through classroom management and interactivity."[8] Even in a study on the importance of parent engagement in schools, teachers held the responsibility of identifying families who ought to engage more with their children's education.[9] This strongly suggests that teacher trainings would be an effective, impactful, and relatively noninvasive mode of identifying and treating at-risk students.

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[6]Joe, S., E. Joe, and L. L. Rowley. "Consequences of Physical Health and Mental Illness Risks for Academic Achievement in Grades K-12." *Review of Research in Education* 33, no. 1 (2009): 283-309.
[7]Sitler, Helen Collins. "Teaching with Awareness: The Hidden Effects of Trauma on Learning." *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas* 82, no. 3 (2009): 119-24.
[8] Chapman, Rebekah L., Lisa Buckley, Mary Sheehan, and Ian Shochet. "School-Based Programs for Increasing Connectedness and Reducing Risk Behavior: A Systematic Review." *Educational Psychology Review* 25, no. 1 (2013): 95-114.
[9]Stormshak, Elizabeth A., Arin M. Connell, Marie-Hélène Véronneau, Michael W. Myers, Thomas J. Dishion, Kathryn Kavanagh, and Allison S. Caruthers. "An Ecological Approach to Promoting Early Adolescent Mental Health and Social Adaptation: Family-Centered Intervention in Public Middle Schools." *Child Development* 82, no. 1 (2011): 209-25.

Another common thread that was often suggested in conjunction with staff training was the separation of at-risk students from the rest of the student body through special classes or curricula; however, equally frequent were criticisms of this framework. Johnson argues that such isolated classes consistently feature lower educational merit, with less challenging lessons taught in less engaging ways – thus, the lower achievement often exhibited by at-risk students can be partially attributed to worse instruction.[10] Furthermore, the Schott Foundation shows that many types of curricula-based separation can be racially motivated and that black and Latinx students are often subjectively and incorrectly perceived as being less gifted than their white and Asian peers.[11] In a way, these separating programs create a self-fulfilling prophecy of sorts in which students expected to perform more poorly actually do perform more poorly, though not for the reasons that they were expected to in the first place. Jones outlines a thorough twelve-step in-school intervention strategy,[12] containing as a last step one that appears less frequently in other models: "12. A procedure for reintegrating students into the regular school." This is an important component of any plan as the type of special attention that is warranted in these cases could easily be stigmatized by the other students, which could have a deeply negative impact on its effectiveness. The concern in this case is that such a careful reintegration would likely require delicate and sensitive execution, and constructing such a program would require substantial resources.

A strategy that has found mixed success among students at varying degrees of risk is parent intervention, specifically implemented through three meetings between parents and a

[10] Johnson, Genevieve Marie. "Schoolwide Enrichment: Improving the Education of Students at Risk at Promise." *Teacher Education Quarterly* 27, no. 4 (Fall 2000): 45-61.

[11] Holzman, Michael. "A Rotting Apple: Education Redlining in New York City." *Schott Foundation for Public Education*, Schott Foundation for Public Education, 1 Apr. 2012.

[12] Jones, Vernon F. "Integrating Behavioral and Insight-Oriented Treatment in School Based Programs for Seriously Emotionally Disturbed Students." *Behavioral Disorders* 17, no. 3 (May 1991): 225-36.

trained school employee aimed towards establishing goals, analyzing progress, and giving

strategies towards improvement. Stormshak et al.[13] found that this approach was extremely

effective when it focused on alerting parents to the school resources available to them. More

parents utilized those resources, and their parenting abilities improved significantly, ultimately

causing a lowered risk of social isolation, antipathy, and substance abuse. However, this

strategy is likely to be ineffective among students at the highest risk, simply because their

families are often part of the problem.[14]

One promising social-emotional learning strategy with the potential to build

independence, motivation, and leadership in seriously emotionally disturbed students is the

implementation of student-driven learning programs based off of enrichment clusters.

According to Renzulli et al., "Enrichment clusters allow students who share a common interest

to meet each week to produce a product, performance, or targeted service based on that common

interest."[15] Essentially, students have the ability to design a project of interest and focus on it for

a dedicated amount of time each week. Such programming has demonstrated benefits for all

students, and a schoolwide implementation thereof inherently eliminates the chronic

underestimation of at-risk students by teachers.[16] Implementation of such a practice varies by

grade level. While Renzulli et al. suggest a more independent structure better suited to older

students, Johnson also includes a method incorporable for all grade levels. This model places

[13] Stormshak, Elizabeth A., Arin M. Connell, Marie-Hélène Véronneau, Michael W. Myers, Thomas J. Dishion, Kathryn Kavanagh, and Allison S. Caruthers. "An Ecological Approach to Promoting Early Adolescent Mental Health and Social Adaptation: Family-Centered Intervention in Public Middle Schools." *Child Development* 82, no. 1 (2011): 209-25.

[14] Ryan, Sarah M., Caroline L. Boxmeyer, and John E. Lochman. "Influence of Risk Factors for Child Disruptive Behavior on Parent Attendance at a Preventive Intervention." *Behavioral Disorders* 35, no. 1 (November 2009): 41-52.

[15] Renzulli, Joseph S., Marcia Lynne Gentry, and Sally M. Reis. *Enrichment clusters: a practical plan for real-world, student-driven learning*. Waco, TX: Prufrock Press, 2014.

[16] Johnson, Genevieve Marie. "Schoolwide Enrichment: Improving the Education of Students at Risk at Promise." *Teacher Education Quarterly* 27, no. 4 (Fall 2000): 45-61.

the burden more significantly on teachers, requiring them to keep a file on each student, cataloguing their interests and subsequently modifying and personalizing a flexible and broad curriculum to fit each student's passions. However, Johnson also shows evidence that this is not a burden at all: "Teaching is most satisfying when teachers cultivate and maximize student interest and ability. Teaching is most rewarding when teachers have the capability and power to respond to student interest by creative interpretation of curriculum" (59). This can be framed as a social-emotional learning strategy, one that allows for passion and collaboration to the benefit of all students involved.[17]

These different models for approaching the treatment of seriously emotionally disturbed and otherwise at-risk youth yield four policy recommendations. First, teachers at all levels must undergo training towards better identifying these students for treatment, rather than simply disciplining them for the misbehavior or lack of participation that can hint at their needs. Second, schools which elect to separate these students from the general school population for treatment must take comprehensive measures towards reintegrating them into the population without stigma. Third, attempts should be made to engage the parents of these students in a constructive rather than disciplinary way, though it is important that this effort exists as a part of a multi-prong approach as it can exclude some of the most in-need children. Finally, schools should establish student-driven learning programs available to all students, but particularly encouraged in the case of these troubled students in order to promote social-emotional learning and the beneficial qualities that come with it, as detailed further in this paper.

2.3. Description and Assessment of Social Emotional Learning

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[17]Ehret, Christian, and Ty Hollett. "Affective Dimensions of Participatory Design Research in Informal Learning Environments: Placemaking, Belonging, and Correspondence." *Cognition and Instruction* 34, no. 3 (2016): 250-58.

This section evaluates the effectiveness of social emotional learning and recommends methods for implementing social emotional learning programs in schools. It begins by defining social emotional learning and describing its key elements. Next, it reviews a few popular critiques of social emotional learning programs. It then reviews research of the outcomes of social emotional learning programs, finding that these programs improve both behavior and academic performance for all students. This section next discusses the current status of social emotional learning programs in six Massachusetts school districts and in other states. Finally, it reviews strategies for implementing and improving social emotional learning programs, focusing on school climate effects, school personnel training, and student emotional intelligence assessment. For each strategy, the report will discuss the mechanics of implementation and the associated benefits and costs.

Given the high correlation between social emotional learning and positive student behavior and academic achievement, many researchers and policymakers have concluded that social emotional learning programs effectively prepare students to achieve positive life outcomes.

2.3.1 Defining Social Emotional Learning

For the purposes of this report, social emotional learning (SEL) describes "the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions."[18]

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[18] "What is SEL?," CASEL, accessed November 8, 2017, http://www.casel.org/what-is-sel/.

This definition involves five key principles, which Desai *et al.* define.[19] First, SEL programs promote self-awareness. This means that students know their strengths and limitations and can act accordingly. Second, students learn self-management. They can maintain self-control and persevere. Third, SEL promotes social awareness. This enables students to understand and empathize with others. Fourth, SEL teaches students relationship skills. These include collaboration and conflict resolution skills. Finally, children learn responsible decision-making so that they can make ethical and safe choices throughout their lives.

2.3.2 Criticisms

Social emotional learning programs may raise a few concerns.[20] Government-sponsored SEL programs may be seen by parents as a political agenda that infringes on the socializing responsibilities of families. SEL may also be criticized for being unscientific, subjective, or a "fad." Finally, opponents worry that keeping SEL records for individuals may violate their privacy or harm their opportunities later in life, especially if too much focus is placed on SEL measures. The following section evaluates these concerns by presenting research on the effectiveness of SEL programs.

2.3.3 Effectiveness

Social emotional learning programs are associated with increased positive student behavior and academic achievement. Durlak *et al.* conducted a meta-analysis of 213 SEL programs involving 270,034 K-12 students and found that the students who participated in these programs were better off than those who did not participate.[21] SEL programs significantly

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[19] Desai, *et al*, "A Social Justice Perspective on Social-Emotional Learning," *National Association of School Psychologists* 43, no. 1 (September 2014): 14-16.

[20] Robbins, Jane, "Social-Emotional Learning, Is As Bad As It Sounds," *TownHall*, August 8, 2016.

[21] Durlak, *et al*, "The Impact of Enhancing Students' Social and Emotional Learning: A Meta-Analysis of School-Based Universal Interventions," *Child Development* 82, no. 1 (February 2011): 405-432.

improve students' social and emotional skills, attitudes, and positive social behaviors. The students had fewer behavior issues and less emotional distress than the control group. Academic performance also improved significantly: by 11 percentile points. SEL programs were found most effective when conducted by a teacher in a classroom, when implemented without difficulty, and when following the SAFE model (sequential, active, focused, and explicit). SEL programs are effective at all educational levels and in all settings.

Moreover, a second meta-analysis by Taylor *et al.* adds to these findings.[22] The study suggest that these positive effects of SEL programs continue over time. Researchers also find that SEL programs both promote positive behavior and prevent future antisocial behavior, including emotional distress and drug use. SEL programs may improve students' future social relationships, increase graduation rates and college attendance, and reduce arrests. Moreover, benefits of SEL programs are similar regardless of student race, socioeconomic status, or school location. In fact, children raised in poverty are at a higher risk for emotional and social difficulties, so SEL programs especially benefit those children.[23]

Social emotional learning programs have been shown to be economically effective as well. A 2015 report from the Center for Benefit-Cost Studies in Education at Columbia University examined six SEL programs and found that they all yielded substantial economic returns on investment.[24] The average return was 11:1 so that for every one dollar invested in these programs, 11 dollars were returned. These measured benefits included social outcomes, such as reductions in drug abuse, increased earnings, and reduction in healthcare spending,

[22] Taylor, *et al*, "Promoting Positive Youth Development Through School-Based Social and Emotional Learning Interventions: A Meta-Analysis of Follow-Up Effects," *Child Development* 88, no. 4 (July/August 2017): 1156-1171.
[23] McCormick, *et al*, "Context Matters for Social-Emotional Learning: Examining Variation in Program Impact by Dimensions of School Climate," *American Journal of Community Psychology* 56, no. 1-2 (June 2015): 101-119.
[24] Belfield *et al*, *The Economic Value of Social and Emotional Learning* (Center for Benefit-Cost Studies in Education, 2015).

because social emotional learning programs promote skills, attitudes, and behaviors that contribute to social improvement.

Social emotional learning programs are opportunities for students to learn skills, attitudes, and behaviors that lead to positive life outcomes. Students practice self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making. These social and emotional skills help students to persevere in school and in life, leading to greater academic success and fewer behavioral issues. These SEL programs may keep students engaged in school and reduce high-risk behaviors that jeopardize potential for success. SEL programs encourage safe and supportive school environments and are a potential disruptor of the problematic School-to-Prison Pipeline.

In response to the criticisms presented in the previous section, the research shows that social emotional programs provide worthwhile social skills and academic benefits to students, especially those with the least social supports. First, SEL is not a "fad," but an evidence-based intervention. Second, although teaching students social and emotional skills may traditionally be the job of the family, SEL programs benefit all students and are especially important for those whose families are underprivileged. The argument that SEL measures and records may have unintended consequences for student prospects later is a valid concern, and this concern is addressed by a later recommendation in this policy paper for SEL assessments.

2.3.4 Current Status of Local SEL Programs

The degree to which social emotional learning programs are prioritized varies in the Malden, Melrose, Reading, Stoneham, Wakefield, and Winchester school districts. A cursory content analysis surveying the districts' websites for references to social emotional learning,

emotional development, and behavioral health reveals disparities in the representation of SEL programs.[25] On one side of the spectrum, the Stoneham, Wakefield, and Winchester school districts have no mention of social emotional learning agendas on their websites. The districts of Malden and Melrose are somewhere in between in their prioritization of SEL programs. Malden promotes social emotional learning through parent and community involvement with its Family And Community Engagement Parent Advisory Council and Partnership for Community Schools in Malden programs. While these programs incorporate aspects of social emotional learning, they do not focus specifically on SEL and occur outside of school. Melrose goes a bit further in promoting SEL in its schools. The Melrose school district has a health and wellness program once per week for 40 minutes for all students in grades K-5 and requires one course on health and wellness for students in grades 6-8. The curriculum for these courses covers a broad range of health and wellness topics, including some SEL concepts. However, students receive this SEL instruction as part of one unit in the overall course and in parts spread over the years. The Reading school district does the most work with SEL programs in its schools. Its district website has an entire page dedicated to "Behavioral Health" with links to mental health hotlines and studies as well as research on SEL. The Reading district demonstrates a solid recognition of the importance of social emotional learning, but it is still necessary to ensure that programming is being implemented smoothly and not being overly conflated with mental health programming, which Reading also promotes.

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[25] "Winchester Public Schools," accessed November 8, 2017, http://www.winchesterps.org/;
 "Wakefield Public Schools: Inspire the love of learning," accessed November 8, 2017, http://wakefieldpublicschools.org/;
"Reading Public Schools," accessed November 8, 2017, https://www.reading.k12.ma.us/;
"Stoneham Public Schools," accessed November 8, 2017, http://www.stonehamschools.org/;
"Melrose Public Schools," accessed November 8, 2017, http://melroseschools.com/;
"Malden Public Schools," accessed November 8, 2017, https://maldenps.org/.

There is room for improvement of SEL programs within all six of these districts. The Stoneham, Wakefield, and Winchester school districts should be sure that they are prioritizing SEL in their schools. Creating a webpage on the district website devoted to SEL is not essential and certainly is not enough to prioritize it, but a webpage is one way to send a clear message to schools that SEL is important to the district. The Malden school district can improve by ensuring that the tenets of SEL are being taught and practiced within their schools and not only tangentially through optional community programs. The Melrose school district already has a framework in place for teaching SEL in its health and wellness curriculum. However, instruction in SEL concepts should follow the SAFE model.[26] That is to say that instruction should be Sequential, Active, Focused, and Explicit. Teaching SEL practices interspersed in years of health and wellness education dilutes the material, making it less sequential and explicit. Thus, Melrose's approach to SEL programming may not be efficient. Finally, the Reading school district, while a good example of prioritizing SEL, should ensure that their programs are evidence-based and evaluated and adapted regularly.

2.3.5 Current Status of Massachusetts SEL Programs

SEL standards are wide-ranging across the nation. While the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015 created "provisions in law that support SEL," including "a broader definition" of both "student success" and "professional development and learning," it still lies on the individual state to create policy that brings SEL policy to the forefront of their own educational standards.[27] In inspecting the similarities and differences between Massachusetts'

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[26] Durlak, *et al,* "The Impact of Enhancing Students' Social and Emotional Learning."
[27] "Federal Policy," *Casel,* Accessed on Dec. 3, 2017, http://www.casel.org/federal-policy-and-legislation/.

and other states' SEL policies, the best way to go about a fair comparison is to understand the

differences in the extent of the legislation passed in each state.[28]

It is well known that SEL improves students' learning and experience in school.[29] Yet,

academically-accepted, individualized SEL legislation that goes beyond a kindergarten education

level is still rare.[30] As previously mentioned, Massachusetts is one of just two states with a

designated 'Safe and Supportive Schools Framework,' but this framework only references SEL

once and does not set any effective standards around the emotional development of students as

they matriculate through Massachusetts' public school systems.[31]

Massachusetts does, however, have a series of standards around the development of

student's emotional well-being set forth in the 'Massachusetts Standards for Preschool and

Kindergarten.'[32] These standards extend into a series of recommendations for the implementation

SEL, dubbed the 'Guidelines on Implementing Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Curricula.'

[33] While these standards are important, Massachusetts does not have written legislation that

creates standards for SEL that extend beyond just preschool and early elementary school.[34]

Massachusetts, while progressive in guaranteeing SEL standards for preschool and early

elementary school, falls behind Maine, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Illinois, Missouri, and

[28] Ben Wieder, "State Education Policy," Education Writings Association, accessed on Nov. 26, 2017, https://www.ewa.org/reporter-guide/state-education-policy.

[29] Joseph A. Durlak et al., "The Impact of Enhancing Students' Social and Emotional Learning: A Meta-Analysis of School-Based Universal Interventions," *Child Development* 82, no. 1 (2011): 405.

[30] "What is Social and Emotional Learning?" *National Conference of State Legislatures,* Oct. 24, 2017, http://www.ncsl.org/research/education/social-emotional-learning.aspx#ma.

[31] Massachusetts General Laws Title XII, Chapter 69, Section 1P: Safe and Supportive Schools Framework, accessed Dec. 4, 2017. https://malegislature.gov/Laws/GeneralLaws/PartI/TitleXII/Chapter69/Section1P.

[32] "Social and Emotional learning, and Approaches to Play and Learning," *Massachusetts Standards for Preschool and Kindergarten,* June 2015.

[33] "Guidelines of Implementing Social and Emotional Curriculum," *Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education,* http://www.doe.mass.edu/bullying/SELguide.pdf. "What is Social and Emotional Learning?" *National Conference of State Legislatures.*

[34] "What is Social and Emotional Learning?" *National Conference of State Legislatures.*

Kansas in regards to the extension of SEL standards to both preschool and K-12 programs.[35] This does not necessarily mean that Massachusetts schools implement SEL standards at a lesser rate than any other state, as many schools implement SEL programs without state-sanctioned standards, but this does mean that schools are not required by law to address SEL practices, meaning that schools with fewer resources are less likely to have programs that touch upon SEL.

2.3.6 Strategies for Improving School Climate

The development and implementation of SEL programs is important. Desai *et al.* argue that there is a gap between the research on SEL and its implementation in schools.[36] SEL programs in schools should be evidence-based so that they may be effective. As noted above, Durlak *et al.* find that SEL programs are less effective if their implementation faced difficulty. For these reasons, strategies for social emotional learning programs must be weighed carefully. This section of the report presents and evaluates three strategies for SEL programs: targeting by school climate, school personnel training, and SEL assessments.

2.3.6.1 School Climate and SEL Targeting

Social emotional learning programs, while beneficial for *all*, show the greatest improvement in students raised in poverty and schools with poor school climate. For the purposes of this section, school climate encompasses "the norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures of the school." McCormick *et al.* conducted a study of the *INSIGHTS* program, a SEL program in 22 urban schools in New York City.[37] Their research found that schools with lower levels of leadership, accountability, and safety/respect before the SEL intervention exhibited the greatest

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[35] Ibid.
[36] Desai *et al.,* "A Social Justice Perspective on Social-Emotional Learning."
[37] McCormick *et al.,* "Context Matters for Social-Emotional Learning."

improvements in student reading and math outcomes after the program. This research is not directly applicable to other SEL programs in other schools, but it suggests that SEL programs have the most dramatic impacts where school climate is weakest. SEL programs still exhibit large benefits for schools with positive school climates, but improvement is greatest in schools without positive school climates. This finding suggests a mechanism for implementing SEL programming: target schools with weak climates or high concentrations of students of poverty first. If a school has weak leadership, poor interpersonal relationships, weak organization, poor accountability, low levels of safety/respect, or inadequate teaching and learning practices, it may benefit most from SEL intervention. Likewise, if a school has a high percentage of students who qualify for free or reduced lunch, SEL programs would be beneficial. This targeting could be introduced when selecting which schools receive Safe and Supportive School grants. The current criteria for applying for the Safe and Supportive School grants do not require that districts demonstrate weak school climates, impoverished student populations, or any other need-based criteria. Section 4.2 details the demographic characteristics of districts which have received grants. The median income of these districts is only slightly lower than the median income of Massachusetts as a whole. More can be done to target the grants to low-income districts.

This system of targeting schools with poor school climates and/or serving high-poverty areas for SEL programs has benefits and drawbacks. First, it allows more precise allocation of resources, especially if funding is a concern. It also promotes equity in education because it means greater improvement for students raised in poverty (often minority students). However, SEL programs have benefits for all students. Although the largest *growth* in academic outcomes are seen for students and schools that have limited social support, SEL programs show *absolute*

improvement for *all* students. Limiting SEL intervention to targeted schools should only be done if necessary.

2.3.6.2 Personnel Training

An effective SEL program relies heavily on school personnel. Smooth implementation improves a SEL program's effectiveness, yet there is a gap between SEL research and its implementation in schools. McKevitt surveyed 331 school psychologists on their knowledge of and experience with various SEL programs and found that school psychologists have limited awareness of many evidence-based SEL programs.[38] School personnel who make decisions about which SEL programs to implement in their schools need to know which programs are evidence-based or best serve the student body of their particular school. McKevitt finds that 71% of respondents rely on professional development activities to learn about effective SEL programs whereas only 27.8% rely on journal articles to learn about interventions. Thus, a good way to improve SEL intervention selection and implementation is to bring professional development activities in line with the research on evidence-based SEL programs (See supplementary materials in Section 7: Appendix for a list of research synthesis websites that provide a database for evidence-based SEL programs). Glenn Koocher, executive director of the Massachusetts Association of School Committees (MASC), informs us that there is currently a for-profit industry of consultants for SEL issues that, he argues, does not help schools improve. To ensure the concrete development of SEL programs in schools, we suggest Desai *et al.*'s framework for progress.[39] When selecting an evidence-based SEL program to implement in their schools, school personnel should pay attention to the cost-effectiveness of the program and whether the

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[38] Brian C. McKevitt, "School Psychologists' Knowledge and Use of Evidence-Based, Social-Emotional Learning Interventions," *Contemporary School Psychology* 16 (2012): 33-45.
[39] Desai *et al.,* "A Social Justice Perspective on Social-Emotional Learning."

program's intended audience aligns with their student body. School personnel should also develop clear standards, an implementation plan, and elicit feedback from staff, students, and the community. Moreover, school personnel's modeling of social-emotional skills is important for student learning. *Everyone* in the school, from students to administrators, should develop and practice positive social-emotional skills in order to build a positive school climate and model healthy behavior.

Professional development programs are a good way to familiarize school personnel with evidence-based SEL programs. Professional development can provide resources and strategies for choosing programs, implementing programs, and collecting and adapting to feedback. Training can also develop school personnel's own social-emotional abilities. Personnel training could be conducted in the form of online training modules or district-wide training courses for teachers, counselors, and/or administrators.

Training school personnel in selecting and managing SEL programs is largely beneficial, but incurs certain costs. Providing personnel with training and resources will facilitate the effectiveness of SEL interventions by ensuring effective, evidence-based programs are implemented in schools and that the implementation encounters fewer difficulties, making the program more effective overall. Professional development for SEL also officially encourages program implementation. Furthermore, personnel training can be a way to coordinate resources and programming across schools. Also, training can facilitate personnel's own social emotional learning, which would in turn promote positive school climates and provide role models for student behavior. However, professional development incurs the financial costs of developing and arranging trainings and time costs for school personnel.

<u>2.3.6.3 SEL Assessments</u>

SEL programs benefit from an evaluation system that provides feedback on program effectiveness. Stillman *et al.* discuss emotional intelligence (EQ) assessments that can be used to evaluate SEL programs and school climate.[40] When social-emotional measures are taken together with academic performance, conduct, and teacher and parent observations, they provide a focus for student development. EQ assessments can be used to determine social-emotional ability, guide further instruction, set goals, create personal plans over multiple years, and adapt the SEL program. These assessments can be used for student training and also for training educators. Teachers who develop social-emotional skills are more likely to encourage positive outcomes for students and to feel satisfied with their own work. School climate can also be assessed by students, teachers, parents, and administrators to promote positive adaptation. The Six Seconds Emotional Intelligence group has developed multiple EQ test-based assessments that may be useful for monitoring SEL in schools. Six Seconds offers assessments for students of ages 7-18 (SEI-YV), adults (SEI-AV), and school climate (EVS) that are normed and validated and provide useful feedback reports. For children younger than seven years of age, it may be possible for parents to help the child complete the self-report assessment. Alternatively, schools can use project-based assessments of students' social and emotional skills. For a further discussion of program-based alternative assessments, see Section 2.2.

EQ assessments are a promising tool for collecting feedback and adapting SEL programs, but they must be used with caution. EQ assessments can monitor student, teacher, and school social-emotional competencies and provide diagnostic measures to adapt the SEL program.

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[40] Stillman *et al*, "Strengthening social emotional learning with student, teacher, and schoolwide assessments," *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology* (2017), https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appdev.2017.07.010.

However, EQ assessments should not be relied on too heavily. Glenn Koocher, executive director of MASC, cautions against using data "as a weapon instead of a constructive tool." EQ assessments should be combined with other measures and observational data to get a picture of the overall performance of individuals, the SEL program, and the school. EQ assessments are also not intended to be accountability measures that determine student or teacher placement or quality. EQ assessments reflect one test in one instance, so caution should be exercised in drawing too many conclusions from the assessments, attaching high stakes to the assessment, or relying on only the assessment for subsequent decision-making.

2.3.7 Recommendations

This section offers four policy recommendations. First, if necessary, social emotional learning programs should be targeted at schools with poor school climate and/or high concentrations of students living in poverty because these schools and students exhibit the most growth resulting from a SEL intervention. Second, school personnel should be trained to select and implement SEL programs as well as to develop their own social-emotional skills. Third, EQ assessments should be employed to monitor student, teacher, and school performance and adapt SEL programs. Fourth, the state of Massachusetts should establish SEL standards for all K-12 students, focusing on expanding their already developed standards for preschool and early elementary students into higher levels of education.

2.4. Analysis of Anti-Bullying Programs

Anti-bullying research is varied, but meta-analysis of scholarly articles shows that school programs reduce bullying by 20-23% in schools.[41] State education policy will have the largest

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[41] Ttofi, Maria and D. Farrington. "What Works in Preventing Bullying: Effective Elements of Anti-Bullying Programmes." Journal of Aggression, Conflict and Peace Research 1, no. 1 (2009): 13-24.

impact through teacher training. Evidence suggests that teachers tend to underestimate the extent of bullying or to disregard it as just a phase.[42] Teachers also must be vigilant and actively searching for bullies, since the data indicate that children are unlikely to report bullying to adults, especially as they get older.[43] In order for teachers to fully understand bullying, it is essential that this information be presented so that they can work against these tendencies.

There are also several general preventative strategies teachers can employ constantly in their classrooms. Most studies suggest that bullies have below average self-esteem.[44] As a result, it is vital for teachers to help build their students' self-esteem and refrain from creating competitive classroom environments. Teachers can reduce bullying through the promotion of positivity and cooperation in classroom activities.[45, 46] They can also empower their students, who are more likely to witness bullying, to stand up to bullies rather than remain bystanders, especially as they get older.

In response to specific instances of bullying, there are three specific anti-bullying techniques for teachers that have found success and ought to be incorporated in teacher trainings: (1) The Pikas method of shared concern, (2) the No Blame approach, and (3) the Farsta method.[47]

The Pikas method involves training teachers or therapists in conflict mediation and convincing students to use the trained professionals as resources. It has four main tenets for

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[42] O'Moore, Mona. "Critical Issues for Teacher Training to Counter Bullying and Victimisation in Ireland." Aggressive Behavior 26, no. 1 (2000): 99-111.
[43] O'Moore, A. M., C. Kirkham, and M. Smith. "Bullying Behaviour in Irish Schools: A Nationwide Study." The Irish Journal of Psychology 18, no. 2 (1997/01/01 1997): 141-69.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Johnson, D. W., & Johnson, R. T. (1987). Learning together and alone: Cooperative, competitive, and individualistic learning, 2nd ed. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
[46] Cowie et al. "Cooperation in the Multi-Ethnic Classroom: The Impact of Cooperative Group Work on Social Relationships in Middle Schools" 1994.
[47] Salmivalli, Christina, Ari Kaukiainen, and Marinus Voeten. "Anti-Bullying Intervention: Implementation and Outcome." British Journal of Educational Psychology 75, no. 3 (2005): 465-87.

dealing with bullies: (1) do not demonize the bully suspects; (2) consider the bullying as a conflict between the parties and elicit the archetype of a mediator through your behavior; (3) prepare the summit meeting between those involved by shuttle diplomacy, in which the bully would help the victim to feel better; (4) seal the agreement with a communication contract, often with an agreement to refrain from telling parents about past misbehavior.

The No Blame approach, developed and tested by Maines and Robinson, focuses on the victim's feelings rather than accusations against the suspected bully. In doing so, it attempts to elevate compassion and consideration as values throughout the school community. Rather than rehashing altercations, it tries to move forward with a solution to situations surrounding bullying. There are seven steps: (1) Interview with the victim: talk to victim about his/her feelings, but do not question him/her about the incidents directly; (2) Convene a meeting with the people involved: teacher arranges to meet with the people who were involved (minus the victim); (3) Explain the problem: teacher tells them about the way the victim is feeling; (4) Share responsibility: the teacher does not attribute blame, but states that s/he knows the group is responsible and can do something about it; (5) Ask the group for their ideas: each member of the group is encouraged to suggest a way in which the victim could be helped to feel happier; (6) Leave it up to them: the teacher ends the meeting by passing on the responsibility to the group to solve the problem; (7) Meet them again: about a week later the teacher discusses with each student, including the victim, how things have been going.

The Farsta method is actually a specific implementation of the Pikas' method. It involves a few specialized professionals intervening immediately in any instances of bullying using Pikas'

method. It emphasizes keeping parents out of the mediation process and normally involves a separate support structure for victims of bullying.

If teachers are presented all of this information, as well as examples and situations to help understand it, they will be better at preventing and responding to bullying. In terms of a policy proposal, a statewide standardized training would be ideal, but it would also be beneficial if funding were granted to schools in order to train teachers and implement these research-tested methods.

2.5. Comparisons with Other States

For the purpose of comparing Massachusetts' policy on school climate legislation, this section will be broken into two categories. First, it will cover Massachusetts' policy on Social and Emotional Learning standards (SEL), one of the most integral parts of creating a healthy school climate. Secondly, it will dive into other programs implemented by Massachusetts and other states that don't necessarily reference SEL, but provide similar results.

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL):

The task of analyzing Massachusetts' policy on SEL in comparison to other states is rather simple. While Massachusetts does have legal educational standards for SEL in preschool and kindergarten, the state fails to set standards for SEL education in late-elementary, middle school, or high school grade levels, meaning that Massachusetts is not up-to-date with the most advantageous educational standards.

Other programs:

It is more challenging to compare programs implemented across all 50 states that address

general improvement to school climate. This is due to the large range of programs, different

methods of collecting data, and different factors that play into each individual school climate,

among many other issues. While not addressing SEL directly, many of these programs have still

proven successful in making improvements to school climate.[48]

Massachusetts took a first step in building healthier school climates with the passage of

the 'Safe and Supportive Schools Framework' in 2014.[49] This legislation most notably defines a

safe and supportive school as the following:

> "School that foster[s] a safe, positive, healthy and inclusive whole-school learning
>
> environment that (i) enables students to develop positive relationships with adults
>
> and peers, regulate their emotions and behavior, achieve academic and
>
> non-academic success in school and maintain physical and psychological health
>
> and well-being and (ii) integrates services and aligns initiatives that promote
>
> students' behavioral health, including social and emotional learning, bullying
>
> prevention, trauma sensitivity, dropout prevention, truancy reduction, children's
>
> mental health, foster care and homeless youth education, inclusion of students
>
> with disabilities, positive behavioral approaches that reduce suspensions and
>
> expulsions, and other similar initiatives."[50]

In support of this definition, the framework established "a self-assessment tool to help

schools create their action plans" on improving school climate, a 'Safe and Supportive Schools

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[48] "School Climate and Improvement: A Snapshot of Legislative Action," *The Council of State Governments Justice Center,* https://csgjusticecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/NCSL-School-Climate-Brief.pdf.
[49] Massachusetts General Laws Title XII, Chapter 69, Section 1P: Safe and Supportive Schools Framework.
[50] Ibid.

Grant Program,' and a 'Safe and Supportive Schools Commission' to oversee the implementation of the 'Safe and Supportive Schools Framework,' including the development of a similar framework by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.[51]

As of 2013, only thirteen states had policy in place that pushed schools "to create policies and procedures to improve school climate."[52] While this number has likely grown since the last available study, Massachusetts' effort with the 'Safe and Supportive Schools Framework' should be praised for its progressive stance on the importance of school climate in a successful and comprehensive education. When considering the various facets of programs that address school climates, it's best to split the programs up into three categories of legislation: alternative education, school improvement plans, and general plans.[53] While Massachusetts has taken strides with their 'Safe and Supportive Schools Framework,' it's important to consider the other programs that also establish quality learning environments. According to The Council of State Governments, Massachusetts currently has legislation in place that addresses alternative education and school improvement plans. Regarding alternative education, Massachusetts "requires school principals and headmasters to ensure that short-term suspended students have the opportunity to make up any coursework or credit they missed," as well as a grant program given to school districts to help grow alternative education facilities, not too dissimilar to the grant allocation program discussed in *Section 4.1*.[54] Regarding school improvement plans (SIPs), Massachusetts requires each school to "adopt a SIP that is consistent with school performance

[51] "Safe and Supportive Schools," *Helping Traumatized Children Learn,* https://traumasensitiveschools.org/get-involved/safe-and-supportive-schools/; "Grants and Other Financial Assistance Programs: FY2014," Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.
[52] "School Climate and Improvement: A Snapshot of Legislative Action," *Council of State Governments Justice Center*.
[53] Ibid.
[54] "School Climate and Improvement: A Snapshot of Legislative Action," *Council of State Governments Justice Center*.

goals" annually. In reference to general plans for school climate, although it is not referenced in the aforementioned report by The Council of State Governments, the 'Safe and Supportive Schools Framework' would likely qualify as a general plan to improve school climate.

While Massachusetts does an excellent job at covering all three sections of school climate measurement, there are improvements that can be made judging by the policies of other states. In M.G.L. c. 71, § 37H¾ of Massachusetts legal code, section 53.10 states that a "principal may use in-school suspension as an alternative to short-term suspension for disciplinary offenses."[55] Current legal code, though, fails to establish an effective precedent that would allow for a student to seek alternative educational facilities if punished with a long-term suspension lasting over ten school days.[56] In comparison to legal precedents set forth in states like Arkansas, Colorado, Virginia, California, Indiana, Washington, and many more, Massachusetts fails at establishing effective support for students experiencing suspension or expulsion.[57] Take, for example the 2013 bill, HB 1500 of Virginia, which established "appropriation for regional alternative education centers for expelled and suspended students."[58] In regards specifically to this one aspect of school climate analysis, Massachusetts fails in comparison to other states in the establishment of effective and equitable education systems.

Therefore, this report recommends that the state of Massachusetts further fund the aforementioned grant program developed specifically under MASS. ANN. LAWS, ch. 69, § 1N, which makes available grants to expand alternative learning initiatives. Furthermore, Massachusetts should legally require that students who have been expelled or suspended for over

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[55] Massachusetts Education Laws and Regulations, section 53.10: In-School Suspension under M.G.L. c. 71, § 37H¾, Accessed November 27, 2017. http://www.doe.mass.edu/lawsregs/603cmr53.html?section=all.
[56] Ibid.
[57] "School Climate and Improvement: A Snapshot of Legislative Action," *Council of State Governments Justice Center*.
[58] Ibid.

a ten-day period of time be placed in alternative education facilities, guaranteeing that all students have access to a quality education and can either graduate from or rejoin their classes in a healthy, supported way.

3. Student Background and School Climate

3.1. Race-Based Traumatic Stress and the School-to-Prison Pipeline

3.1.1 Understanding and Combating Race-Based Traumatic Stress

This section focuses on racially-based traumatic stress. According to Robert T. Carter, author of *The Counseling Psychologist*, racially-based traumatic stress refers to the emotional pain or stress one may feel after experiencing or witnessing acts of racism and discrimination.[59] The physical and emotional manifestations of racially-based traumatic stress—including, for example, suspicion, aggression, substance abuse, sense of foreboding, among others[60]— may vary and may manifest differently based on an individual's unique circumstances.

According to a document entitled *Addressing Race and Trauma in the Classroom: A Resource for Educators*, age, in particular, plays a major role in one's experience of racially-based trauma, with preschoolers, school-age children, and teenagers presenting very different symptoms of stress. For example, preschoolers may experience physical difficulties, including trouble sleeping and eating. School-age children may experience feelings of anxiety for their own security, and for the safety of their friends and loved ones. Teenagers may experience anxiety as well, though their anxiety may be more complex than the anxiety

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[59] R. T. Carter, "Racism and psychological and emotional injury: Recognizing and assessing race-based traumatic stress." *The Counseling Psychologist* 35(1) (2007), 13-105.

[60] L. Comas-Díaz, "Racial trauma recovery: A race-informed therapeutic approach to racial wounds," in *The cost of racism for people of color: Contextualizing experiences of discrimination*, (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2016), 249-272.

experienced by their younger peers.[61] However, while each of these age groups may experience racially-based traumatic stress differently, there are a number of strategies schools can adopt to combat the phenomenon and its repercussions at large.

The rest of this section explores strategies that can be used to combat racially-based traumatic stress within schools and communities.

3.1.1.1 Counselor and Educator Training

The document, *Addressing Race and Trauma in the Classroom: A Resource for Educators*, recommends that teachers and counselors educate themselves about historical and institutionalized racism, and take time to reckon with their own biases and prejudices. This suggestion is hinged on the theory that teachers knowledgeable about the societal factors that make racially-based traumatic stress circumstantially possible will be better equipped to engage with students experiencing complex emotions and trauma. After all, racially-based traumatic stress is deeply historical in nature and cannot be separated from the institutions that enable it.[62]

One strategy that schools can adopt is that of extensive school counselor and teacher training, through which adults working in educational environments learn how to appropriately and effectively react to situations influenced or instigated by racially-based traumatic stress. These trainings can guide adults through de-escalation and communication strategies, and equip them to support students who are dealing with complex emotional issues and anxieties. For example, the Treatment and Services Adaptation Center (TSAC), which seeks to promote and support trauma-aware schools, offers a variety of programs that schools can adopt in order to

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[61] National Child Traumatic Stress Network, Justice Consortium, Schools Committee, and Culture Consortium. "Addressing Race and Trauma in the Classroom: A Resource for Educators," (Los Angeles, CA, and Durham, NC: National Center for Child Traumatic Stress, 2017), http://www.nctsn.org/.
[62] Ibid.

educate their administrators: these include a *Psychological First Aid—Listen, Protect, Connect* (PFA-LPC) program, which prepares adults and school leaders to support students who have experienced trauma. According to the TSAC website, the program focuses on a "five-step crisis response program" that was "developed in response to a series of school shootings in the 1990s." The toolkit is particularly equipped to prepare school staff to support students coping with violence or danger-induced trauma.[63]

TSAC also offers a *Cognitive Behavioral Intervention for Trauma in Schools (CBITS)* program—with the ultimate goal of supporting students dealing with post-traumatic stress and other conditions—which calls for interaction between parents and educators over the course of about fifteen discussion sessions. CBITS has been used with both teenagers and school-aged children, and—like the PFA-LPC program—is of particular use in communities impacted by violence in some capacity.[64] Trainings of this kind—offered by TSAC, or a program with a similar ethos—will equip and empower educators to navigate situations influenced by racially-based traumatic stress with compassion.

3.1.1.2 Wellness Centers

Schools charged with educating students who are coping with racially-based traumatic stress may also benefit from the creation of "wellness centers" as an alternative to strict discipline. Arrangements of this type have been employed at other schools, including Crocker College Prep in Louisiana, recognized in a 2017 NPR article for the success of its wellness center program. In the article, "When Schools Meet Trauma With Understanding, Not

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[63] National Child Traumatic Stress Network, "Psychological First Aid—Listen, Protect, Connect," *Treatment and Services Adaptation Center*, accessed December 5, 2017, http://traumaawareschools.org/.
[64] National Child Traumatic Stress Network, "Cognitive Behavioral Intervention for Trauma in Schools," *Treatment and Services Adaptation Center*, accessed December 5, 2017, http://traumaawareschools.org/.

Discipline," authors Mallory Falk and Eve Troeh write that "[at Crocker,] teachers send disruptive students to a room called the wellness center for a meditative time-out that's not supposed to be punishment."[65] Wellness centers permit teachers to address disciplinary infractions without resorting immediately to strict disciplinary measures, allowing for a certain amount of nuance in their interactions with students who may be acting out due to racially-based traumatic stress rather than their own will.

3.1.1.3 Community Reconciliation

These in-school strategies may be coupled with school-community partnerships that echo the "restorative justice" precedent modeled by Truth and Reconciliation Commissions (TRC). In 2016, the American Psychological Association Public Interest Directorate's blog published a piece about TRCs and racially-based traumatic stress, suggesting that students, parents, teachers and school administrators, and community leaders come together to discuss the unique factors at play in their communities.[66] The Massachusetts State Legislature could support initiatives such as these by subsidizing TRC events and by requiring communities with disproportionate suspension rates of students of color to organize Truth and Reconciliation Commissions to brainstorm potential, community-specific solutions.

While there is no simple, singular answer to the complex problems created by racially-based traumatic stress, schools may best support impacted students via a threefold approach, in which (1) school employees are given additional emotional training, (2) disciplinary procedures are restructured to include wellness centers, and (3) communities are encouraged

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[65] Mallory Falk and Eve Troeh, "When Schools Meet Trauma With Understanding, Not Discipline," NPR.
[66] Dawn Henderson and Alexis Lunford, "We Need to Talk About How Race-Related Trauma Hurts Black and Brown Youth in Schools," *Psychology Benefits Society* (blog). Entry posted August 29, 2016.

and—after a point—required to organize Truth and Reconciliation Commissions to discuss racially-based traumatic stress.

3.1.2 School Climate and the School-to-Prison-Pipeline

This section of the report describes the interaction of race-based traumatic stress with the school-to-prison pipeline, the school climate that creates the pipeline, and psychological consequences of such a pipeline on students. It also analyzes school districts in Massachusetts with a high concentration of students of color and students who are economically disadvantaged to see whether a school-to-prison pipeline is prevalent in the state's schools. A school climate that creates a school-to-prison pipeline causes serious race-based trauma in a school district, as well as a sense of fear in the student population.

<u>3.1.2.1 Understanding the School-to-Prison Pipeline</u>

Teaching Tolerance, a social justice-oriented online resource center for educators, describes the pipeline as "policies that encourage police presence at schools, harsh tactics including physical restraint, and automatic punishments that result in suspensions and out-of-class time are huge contributors to the pipeline… The school-to-prison pipeline starts (or is best avoided) in the classroom. When combined with zero-tolerance policies, a teacher's decision to refer students for punishment can mean they are pushed out of the classroom—and much more likely to be introduced into the criminal justice system."[67] In short, the school-to-prison pipeline is the process in which students are systematically funneled into prison due to zero tolerance policies, low socioeconomic status, and out-of-school suspensions.

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[67] "The School-to-Prison Pipeline." *Teaching Tolerance*, 8 Aug. 2017, www.tolerance.org/magazine/spring-2013/the-schooltoprison-pipeline.

The pipeline disproportionately affects African American and Latinx students as well as students with disabilities in underserved school districts. Byron Price, in his article *Humanizing Schools: Breaking Down the School-to-Prison Pipeline,* writes that "a great deal of the children funneled into the criminal justice system have learning disabilities, histories of poverty, abuse or neglect, and would benefit from additional educational and counseling services, says the nonpartisan, not-for-profit advocating individual rights. However, a more disturbing finding by the ACLU is that children are punished and pushed out by strict policies that criminalize minor infractions of school rules, while high-stakes testing programs encourage educators to push out low-performing students to improve their schools' overall test scores."[68] Therefore the pipeline is inextricably linked to race, both in how students are perceived by others and how they come to perceive themselves.

The socioeconomic status of the community is also a major contributing factor to the development of the pipeline. According to research conducted by the American Civil Liberties Union, one cause of the pipeline is low-performing, under-resourced schools: "For most students, the pipeline begins with inadequate resources in public schools. Overcrowded classrooms, a lack of qualified teachers, and insufficient funding for 'extras' such as counselors, special education services, and even textbooks, lock students into second-rate educational environments. This failure to meet educational needs increases disengagement and dropouts, increasing the risk of later court involvement."[69] Underserved schools in low socioeconomic

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[68] Price, Byron E. "Humanizing Schools: Breaking Down the School-to-Prison Pipeline." *The Huffington Post*, TheHuffingtonPost.com, 26 Feb. 2013.
[69] "Locating the School-to-Prison Pipeline." *aclu.org*, American Civil Liberties Union, 2008, www.aclu.org/files/images/asset_upload_file966_35553.pdf.

areas that implement zero tolerance policies create an environment susceptible to forming a school-to-prison pipeline.

Another factor is zero tolerance punishment. Zero tolerance disciplines students without considering other areas of the student's life. The ACLU finds that "lacking resources, facing incentives to push out low-performing students, and responding to a handful of highly-publicized school shootings, schools have embraced zero-tolerance policies that automatically impose severe punishment regardless of circumstances."[70] These zero tolerance policies destroy the opportunities that students could get through school, by permanently marking them as "trouble-makers" and actively harming their education through suspensions.[71] Therefore the student develops an adversarial relationship with the school and their experience in education is little more than preparation for their experience in the penal system. Students in schools with a school- to-prison pipeline climate are more likely to be distrustful of adults and cynical toward justice, in addition to a number of other psychological consequences.[72]

3.1.2.2 The School-to-Prison Pipeline in the Context of Massachusetts

This section answers this question: does Massachusetts have a school-to-prison pipeline? Although out–of-school suspensions are not a common practice, African American students, economically disadvantaged students, and students with disabilities are disciplined at a higher rate than others in Massachusetts. According to statistics provided by the Massachusetts

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[70]"Locating the School-to-Prison Pipeline." *aclu.org*, American Civil Liberties Union, 2008, www.aclu.org/files/images/asset_upload_file966_35553.pdf.

[71] "Opportunities Suspended: The Devastating Consequences Of Zero-Tolerance And School Discipline." *Advancement Project*, Advancement Project and The Civil Rights Project, 21 June 2000.

[72] National Child Traumatic Stress Network, Justice Consortium, Schools Committee, and Culture Consortium, "Addressing Race and Trauma in the Classroom: A Resource for Educators," (Los Angeles, CA, and Durham, NC: National Center for Child Traumatic Stress, 2017), http://www.nctsn.org/.

Department of Elementary and Secondary Education for the 2015-16 school year, overall in the state, 2.9% of students disciplined were given an out-of-school suspension. Breakdown of the overall percentage shows that:

- 6.9% of African American students, 5.9% of students with disabilities, and 5.7% of Hispanic students who were disciplined were given an out-of-school suspension.

- 5.6% of students disciplined who were economically disadvantaged received an out-of-school suspension.

- 9% of African American students, 5% of Native American students, 4% of Hispanic students, 3% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander students, 2% of white students, and 1% of Asian students were disciplined in the 2015-16 school year.[73]

While the numbers themselves are, thankfully, relatively low, the large disparities in the rates of suspension between races are highly alarming.

A school closely studied was Roxbury Preparatory Charter, a district that serves grades 5-9. It is a Level 1 school (performing at or above state level) with a student population of 1,306, broken down as follows:

- 56.4% African American and 40.7% Hispanic;

- 56% economically disadvantaged and 15.5% with a disability;

- 28% were disciplined and, of those disciplined, 28% were administered an out-of-school suspension;

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[73] "School and District Profiles." *School and District Profiles*, Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, profiles.doe.mass.edu/ssdr/default.aspx?orgcode=04840000&orgtypecode=5&=04840000&.

- 43.1% of disciplined students with disabilities received an out-of-school suspension; 28.8% of African American students who were disciplined had an out-of-school suspension; and 27.7% of Hispanic students who were disciplined were suspended.[74]

Overall, the school has rates that are substantially and disturbingly above the state average.

Most of the other schools with a high number of economically disadvantaged students and students of color did not use out-of-school suspensions frequently, such as Boston, Holyoke, and Lawrence districts. Not only do the Boston, Holyoke, and Lawrence school districts each have high populations of economically disadvantaged students and Hispanic and/or African American students, they are also low performing (Level 3 or below), which makes them susceptible to a school-to-prison pipeline even though strict disciplinary policies do not seem to be in place.

According to Mike Males, a sociologist specializing in criminal justice, the number of youth crime and arrests in America has declined since 1996.[75] An informative table from his paper is included below.

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[74] Ibid.

[75] Males, Mike. "Plummeting Youth Crime Demands New Solutions, Thinking." *Juvenile Justice Information Exchange*, 9 Oct. 2017, jjie.org/2017/10/02/plummeting-youth-crime-demands-new-solutions-thinking/comment-page-1/.

-47% IOWA
-51% NEBRASKA
-54% LOUISIANA
-56% NORTH DAKOTA
-61% SOUTH CAROLINA
-61% SOUTH DAKOTA
-61% GEORGIA
-63% PENNSYLVANIA
-63% ARKANSAS
-66% COLORADO
-67% MARYLAND
-67% NORTH CAROLINA
-67% ALABAMA
-68% MICHIGAN
-69% WISCONSIN
-69% NEW HAMPSHIRE
-70% OKLAHOMA
-71% ALASKA
-71% MAINE
-72% MINNESOTA
-72% UTAH
-74% RHODE ISLAND
-75% MASSACHUSETTS
-76% VIRGINIA
-77% WEST VIRGINIA
-77% ARIZONA
-77% IDAHO
-78% CONNECTICUT
-79% HAWAII
-79% NEVADA
-79% TEXAS
-80% OREGON
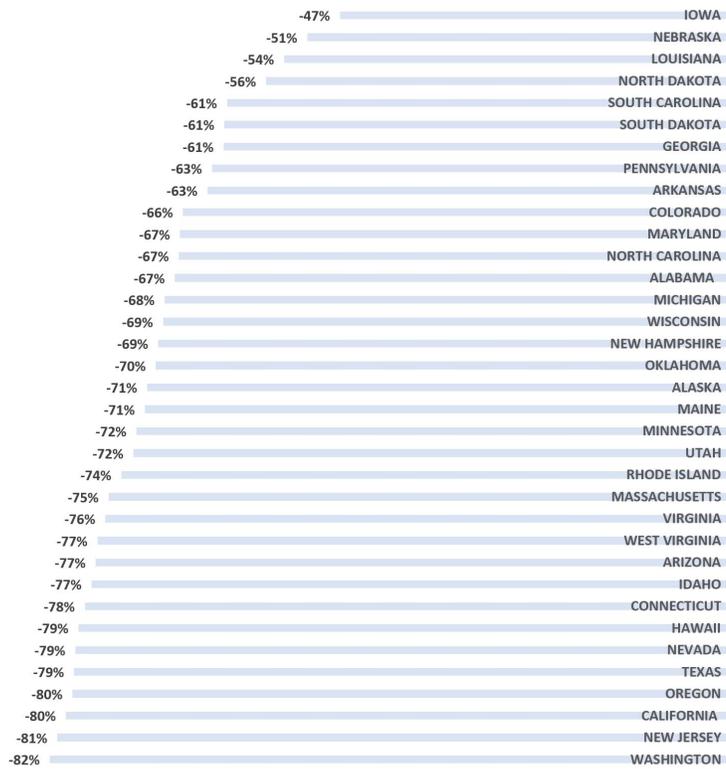-80% CALIFORNIA
-81% NEW JERSEY
-82% WASHINGTON

Figure 1. Declining rates of criminal arrests of youth (under age 18) by state, 2016 v 1996

According to the table, Massachusetts' criminal youth arrests have declined by 75%. If a school-to-prison pipeline was a huge issue, there would not be such a huge decline in youth arrests. However, the limitation of this data is that we do not see the socioeconomic, race, and gender breakdown of youth arrest rates.

Although the school-to-prison pipeline is not a major issue in the Massachusetts school system according to this research, there are still some at-risk schools that meet all of the criteria to potentially form a pipeline, such as the Roxbury Preparatory Charter, Boston, Holyoke, and Lawrence school districts. There are also groups of students disproportionately disciplined, such

as African American students. Also, some groups of students are more likely to receive an out-of-school suspension, such as African American students and students with disabilities. While Massachusetts should be proud of its status relative to other states, it should remain vigilant in combating poor school climates which threaten to betray the promise of quality education for all.

3.1.3 Conclusion

Racially-based traumatic stress represents a major point of intersection in school climate and student background. Students affected by racially-based traumatic stress carry their trauma from home to school and vice versa, and may suffer in institutions that fail to understand the plethora of emotional and behavioral responses that accompany racially-based traumatic stress. These students may ultimately find themselves caught up in the school-to-prison pipeline, their needs going unmet, and their cries for help met with punishment rather than compassion. In combating both racially-based traumatic stress and the school-to-prison pipeline, nuance is necessary above all else. Students must not only be, but *feel*, listened to—and their teachers and guidance counselors must be well versed in both the history of racial oppression and tension in this country, as well as in strategies for de-escalating stress reactions.

3.2. Food Insecurity and Behavioral Problems

Hunger is a debilitating and traumatic experience. Not knowing where your next meal is coming from is a constant source of stress, anxiety, and fear. As of 2015, in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, 19.2% of households with children are affected by food insecurity, and in those households with children under the age of six, 20% suffer from food insecurity. As of

2015, over 4% of Massachusetts homes had very low food security while almost 1 in 10 were food insecure.[76] However, these are not the numbers that are truly frightening. As of 2015, of those households that had children and were headed by a single woman, 35.3% suffered from food insecurity. The federal government defines "very low food security" to be "multiple indications of disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake,"[77] which is to say that there is in no way a sufficient amount of food available to a person or household.

Food insecurity is a traumatic experience. To build off the definition given earlier in this paper, hunger is an event that causes both physical and psychological distress and studies have proven that it can have devastating effects on children in school.[78] Children that come from food insecure homes are much more likely to act out in school than their well-fed peers.

Ask a teacher or a principal or anyone who works with children, and they will say that hungry children act out more often. Not only do students that are food insecure act out more often, but they are more likely to score lower on tests.[79] In one study, hungry and at-risk for hunger students were shown to be twice as likely as their well-fed peers to have impaired functioning and behavioral issues.[80] The question that a state such as Massachusetts must answer is how to create a safer school environment. One part of that answer must address the food insecurity of students. Addressing this will lead to a sharp decrease in behavioral issues among students and will help to create a safer school environment that is more conducive to learning.

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[76] Worcester County Food Bank. Accessed November 27, 2017. https://foodbank.org/. Retrieved from: https://foodbank.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/2015-status-report.pdf

[77] "Definitions of Food Security." USDA ERS - Definitions of Food Security. Accessed November 27, 2017. https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/definitions-of-food-security/.

[78] Whitaker, Robert C., Shannon M. Phillips, and Sean M. Orzol. "Food insecurity and the risks of depression and anxiety in mothers and behavior problems in their preschool-aged children." *Pediatrics* 118, no. 3 (2006): e859-e868.

[79] Winicki, Joshua, and Kyle Jemison. "Food insecurity and hunger in the kindergarten classroom: its effect on learning and growth." *Contemporary economic policy* 21, no. 2 (2003): 145-157.

[80] Murphy, J. Michael, Cheryl A. Wehler, Maria E. Pagano, Michelle Little, Ronald E. Kleinman, and Michael S. Jellinek. "Relationship between hunger and psychosocial functioning in low-income American children." *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry* 37, no. 2 (1998): 163-170.

To know what works and what does not, Massachusetts should look to its schools and school districts that are addressing the needs of their students in new ways that are showing positive results. One of these school districts is Lawrence. In a district where more than 80% of students have been designated "High Needs" and 64.9% have been labeled "Economically Disadvantaged,"[81] Lawrence has had to find creative solutions to the problems that its students face. One of those problems is food insecurity. The school district recognized that hungry students are more focused on where their next meal will come from than on reading, writing, and arithmetic. Lawrence is a school district where breakfast and lunch are free to all students. According to Anne Marie Stronarch, the chief operating officer who oversees the Nutrition Department, 48% of students regularly take part in breakfast and 77% take part in lunch. This year, the district implemented another new idea - a dinner program at the high school level. The school district has partnered with such organizations as the Boston Food Bank to send backpacks full of food home with students over the weekend and has even opened up a mobile market, open to all families within the school system, which gives out 40 pounds of food per family. Mrs. Stronarch said that after the implementation of these programs, the school district saw a sharp decrease in the occurrence of behavioral issues. Districts like Lawrence are taking steps to ensure that their students have a safe and supportive school environment, but without the support of the state, these programs will not reach their full potential.

As Mrs. Stronarch conveyed, it is getting harder and harder to keep programs such as the ones mentioned above going without state funding. We recommend that Massachusetts provide funding to public school districts to be used specifically to implement food security programs

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[81] "Massachusetts School and District Profiles." Contact Information - Lawrence (01490000). Accessed November 27, 2017. http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/general/general.aspx?topNavID=1&leftNavId=100&orgcode=01490000&orgtypecode=5.

such as mobile markets, backpack food, take home dinners, or any other such programs as a school district sees fit to (1) reduce the effect that hunger has on a student's life and (2) create a safer and more supportive school environment in which behavioral issues relating to food insecurity are effectively addressed and substantially reduced.

3.3. Socioeconomic Status and Student Performance

Poverty permeates many aspects of citizen life, including that of education. According to the American Psychological Association's (APA) Socioeconomic Status Office, the high school dropout rate among persons 16–24 years old was highest in low-income families (11.6%) compared to high-income families (2.8%). According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2014), individuals within the top family income quartile are 8 times more likely to obtain a bachelor's degree by age 24 as compared to individuals from the lowest family income quartile.[82] Numerous other statistics would also show the obvious gap in educational attainment by socioeconomic status. Poverty is shown to dramatically impact the academic future of young people.

Yet, data suggests that much of the difference can be attributed to events that happened long before even high school. For example, according to the APA "poor households have less access to learning materials and experiences, including books, computers, stimulating toys, skill-building lessons, or tutors to create a positive literacy environment."[83] Further research shows that socioeconomic status hits students hardest in terms of school readiness. Studies suggest that children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds fare worse in cognitive skills, social knowledge, vocabulary level, and other important aspects of school.[84] Alongside that,

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[82] "Education and Socioeconomic Status." American Psychological Association. Accessed October 31, 2017. http://www.apa.org/pi/ses/resources/publications/education.aspx.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Aikens, N. L., & Barbarin, O. (2008). Socioeconomic differences in reading trajectories: The contribution of family, neighborhood, and school contexts. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 100,* 235-251.

poverty is in most cases a force of trauma on young students as they have to deal with hunger, switching homes, lack of materials, unstable family life, and other factors associated with a low socioeconomic status.[85] The combined problems of trauma, lack of materials, and lower skill levels put slow SES students at a severe disadvantage entering the system that schools are not prepared to accommodate.

However, there are many programs that aim to fight the problems associated with school readiness, mostly surrounding *early intervention.* The details of the programs vary, but one prominent example is the HighScope learning approach.[86] The program focuses on engaging children before school in academic processes. The program specializes in "active participatory learning" that sharpens decision making skills and cognitive ability. Uniquely, the program trains the families in preparing the child for school. A study found that adults at age 40 who underwent the preschool program had higher earnings, committed fewer crimes, were more likely to hold a job, and were more likely to have graduated from high school than adults who did not have a preschool education. Unfortunately, the program is expensive for those in lower socioeconomic situations and therefore largely unavailable.

In terms of addressing the problem of school readiness, Massachusetts lags far behind other states. Currently, Massachusetts has no requirement for school districts to even have a pre-K option. Due to budget constraints, this leaves many school districts starting off at kindergarten. Many school districts that do have pre-K have additional fees associated with attendance that may hinder poorer families. Even worse, Massachusetts does not require school

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[85] Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family Health, Committee on Early Childhood, Adoption, and Dependent Care, Section on Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics, Shonkoff, J. P., Siegel, B. S., Dobbins, M. I., ...Wood, D. L. (2012). Early childhood adversity, toxic stress, and the role of the pediatrician: Translating developmental science into lifelong health. *Pediatrics*, *129*(1), e224-31. doi:10.1542/peds.2011-2662

[86] Belfield, C. R., Nores, M., Barnett, W. S., & Schweinhart, L. J. (2006). The HighScope Perry Preschool Program: Cost-benefit analysis using data from the age-40 follow-up. *The Journal of Human Resources*, *41*(1), 162 –190.

districts to supply free full-day kindergarten. On top of that, kindergarten attendance is not

mandatory. This leaves students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds who are already behind

with the possibility of not starting school until 1st grade.

The state needs to pass legislation focused on improving early intervention programs. In

an ideal world, all school districts would supply pre-K programs and mandate full-day

kindergarten attendance. However, there are serious concerns about the affordability of such a

large mandate.[87] Therefore a more targeted approach is more reasonable. We believe the state

should provide funding for schools in lower socioeconomic areas to pioneer their own early

intervention programs, like HighScope, for struggling children and families. This funding could

naturally be scaled up or down based on the available resources, but whatever funding is

allocated to these programs would likely have substantial effect.

4. Existing Safe and Supportive School Funding and Protocol

4.1. State Level Safe and Supportive Schools Legislation

Recent research into positive school climates has sparked a nationwide trend towards

embracing safe and supportive environments for public schools. The U.S. Department of

Education currently provides grants to state educational agencies to support both the

measurement and promotion of interventions intended to improve school safety under its "Safe

and Supportive Schools" program.[88] As of October 2013, 13 states had passed their own

legislation encouraging schools to take steps to foster more positive school climates, which

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[87] "Universal Pre-K in Massachusetts: Let's start the conversation." BostonGlobe.com. February 06, 2015. Accessed December 09, 2017.
[88] "Safe and Supportive Schools." U.S. Department of Education. September 3, 2014. Accessed December 04, 2017. https://www2.ed.gov/programs/safesupportiveschools/index.html.

targeted areas such as bullying and harassment, substance abuse, gender identity and equality, and emotional and behavioral health.[89] Massachusetts proved itself a leader in this area through the passage of the Massachusetts Safe and Supportive Schools Framework Law in 2014.

Massachusetts defines a 'safe and supportive school' as one that fosters a "safe, positive, healthy and inclusive whole-school learning environment that: enables students to develop positive relationships with adults and peers, regulate their emotions and behavior, achieve academic and non-academic success in school and maintain physical and psychological health and well-being."[90] This is achieved by school-wide programs that promote behavioral health, including "social and emotional learning, bullying prevention, trauma sensitivity, dropout prevention, truancy reduction, children's mental health, foster care and homeless youth education, inclusion of students with disabilities, positive behavioral approaches that reduce suspensions and expulsions and other similar initiatives."

The Massachusetts Safe and Supportive Schools Framework Law mandates the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to develop a framework for schools to incorporate these types of initiatives consistent with the Behavioral Health and Public Schools Framework developed by a task force in 2009.[91] This framework was organized into three tiers: 1. Fostering the emotional well-being of students through school-wide safe supportive environments; 2. Preventive supports and services that enable early intervention to prevent the development of identified behavioral health symptoms and other barriers to school success; and 3. Intensive coordinated care for students demonstrating significant needs. The framework

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[89]"School Climate and Improvement: A Snapshot of Legislative Action." Council of State Governments Justice Center. February 2014. Accessed December 4, 2017.
[90] Massachusetts General Laws Title XII, Chapter 69, Section 1P: Safe and Supportive Schools Framework. Accessed December 4, 2017.
[91]"The Behavioral Health and Public Schools Framework." Trauma Sensitive Schools. 2010. Accessed December 4, 2017.

targeted professional development, redesigned school protocols, and community and family engagement as helpful mechanisms for achieving the goals established in the three tiers.

The Massachusetts law also requires the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to create a self-assessment tool for schools to use, and to provide technical assistance to schools on the implementation and assessment of their new frameworks. This comes in the form of regional trainings, model protocols, and administrative support facilitated by the Safe and Supportive Schools Commission, also created under the 2014 law. This commission aids schools by proposing services, recommending training programs and identifying federal funding sources available.[92]

The Massachusetts law also provides Safe and Supportive Schools Grants of up to $10,000 per selected school. Schools receive funding through their respective districts. The main requirements of the grants include finalizing and implementing an action plan to improve school climate, and periodically assessing the plan's progress. In Fiscal Year 2017, the program received 47 proposals and recommended 18 for funding.[93] One of the $10,000 grants was awarded to the Melrose Public School System, which falls within Senator Jason Lewis's district (5th Middlesex). Melrose intends to use the funding to expand training and professional development for middle school teachers and staff.[94] According to Melrose Veterans Memorial Middle School Principal Brent Conway, the school will be focusing on "how teachers, parents

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[92]"Safe & Supportive Schools." Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. October 11, 2017. Accessed December 04, 2017. http://www.doe.mass.edu/sfs/safety/?section=commission.

[93]"Grant Allocations & Awards: FY2017, Fund Code: 335." Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. November 22, 2016. Accessed December 04, 2017. http://www.doe.mass.edu/grants/2017/awards/335.html.

[94]"Melrose Middle School receives $10K grant." Melrose Free Press. January 31, 2017. Accessed December 04, 2017. http://melrose.wickedlocal.com/news/20170131/melrose-middle-school-receives-10k-grant.

and staff can most effectively work in a systems method with students to develop an organized and consistent plan to meet the social and emotional needs of young adolescents."[95]

While Massachusetts and Minnesota[96] appear to be the only states with designated Safe and Supportive Schools Acts, all other states have taken some legislative measures to incorporate Social/Emotional Learning into their education departments. According to research from the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, all 50 states have legislated "free-standing learning goals" with developmental benchmarks for social and emotional skills for preschoolers.[97] However, only 11 states have such policies for K-12 education (Connecticut,[98] Idaho,[99] Ohio,[100] Massachusetts,[101] Pennsylvania,[102] Vermont,[103] and Washington[104]), and of these 11, only 4 (Illinois,[105] Kansas,[106] Maine,[107] and West Virginia[108]) continue into high school.[109] The goals in these policies focus on benchmarks such as communication, problem solving, information analysis, and responsible decision-making.

[95]"Melrose Middle School receives $10K grant." Melrose Free Press. January 31, 2017. Accessed December 04, 2017. http://melrose.wickedlocal.com/news/20170131/melrose-middle-school-receives-10k-grant.

[96]"Safe and Supportive Schools Act." Minnesota Department of Education. 2017. Accessed December 04, 2017.

[97]"State Scan Scorecard Project." CASEL. 2017. Accessed December 04, 2017. http://www.casel.org/state-scan-scorecard-project/.

[98]"K-3 Social, Emotional, and Intellectual Habits Documents." Common Core Standards in Connecticut. Accessed December 04, 2017.

[99] "Idaho Infant Toddler Program." Idaho Department of Health and Welfare. Accessed December 04, 2017.

[100]"Ohio's New Learning Standards: Kindergarten through Grade 3." Ohio Department of Education. June 2015. Accessed December 4, 2017.

[101] "Massachusetts Standards for Preschools and Kindergarten: Social and Emotional Learning, and Approaches to Play and Learning." June 2015. Accessed December 4, 2017.

[102]"Early Learning Standards." Pennsylvania Early Learning. 2014. Accessed December 04, 2017.

[103]"Vermont Early Learning Standards." Vermont Agency of Education. August 2015. Accessed December 4, 2017.

[104]"Washington State Early Learning and Development Guidelines." Washington State Department of Early Learning. 2012. Accessed December 4, 2017.

[105]"Illinois Learning Standards: Social/Emotional Learning." Illinois State Board of Education. Accessed December 4, 2017.

[106]"School Counseling - Social, Emotional and Character Development." Kansas State Department of Education. 2016. Accessed December 04, 2017.

[107]"Understanding Maine's Guiding Principles." Maine Department of Education. Accessed December 4, 2017.

[108]"West Virginia Manual for Expected Behavior in Safe and Supportive Schools." West Virginia Department of Education. Accessed December 04, 2017.

[109]"State Scan Scorecard Project." CASEL. 2017. Accessed December 04, 2017. http://www.casel.org/state-scan-scorecard-project/.

4.2. Analysis of Grant Allocation in Massachusetts

The Safe and Supportive Schools Grants (FC 335) are broken down into two categories: action planning (Category A) and school-based implementation (Category B). Category A grants are intended to provide funding (in the form of teacher stipends, consultants, substitutes, and materials) for what is essentially background research into a school's climate with regards to safe and supportive learning. This involves convening a team of teachers, nurses, counselors, parents, or other stakeholders and completing the <u>Behavioral Health and Public School Framework and Assessment Tool</u>, providing recommendations for school and district areas to prioritize for improvements.[110] The ultimate outcome of a Category A project is an action plan that addresses leadership, professional development, access to resources and services, academic and nonacademic activities, school policies, procedures and protocols, and collaboration with families. Category B grants fund the implementation of those action plans, which are required as part of the application. Funding may be used for school- and district-based implementation coordinators, consultants, substitutes, evidence-based programs, and materials. Neither grant category permits funding to be used for electronics or construction.

The grant application process is rather lengthy, with a deadline in early October. Districts must provide an entire budget template for the coming fiscal year, with budget narratives describing each item. For Category A grants, districts must describe their current environment and areas for improvement, including current school-wide initiatives that promote safe and supportive learning, current methods for collecting and using school climate data, and detailed plans for how school leadership as well as staff, student, and family input will be included in the

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[110]"Grants and Other Financial Assistance Programs: FY2014." Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. 2014. Accessed December 04, 2017. http://www.doe.mass.edu/grants/grants14/rfp/335.html.

process of creating a safe and supportive environment. Category B applications require explanations of the strengths and weaknesses for each of the six framework sections of the Behavioral Health and Public School Framework, as well as action plans, project timelines, and the intended leader and rationale behind each proposed activity.

The Massachusetts Department of Education has about $230,000 available to support these grants, and 75% of the funds are awarded through Category A. Applicant districts may apply for up to $20,000 total with a maximum of $10,000 per school, and each district can only apply to one of the two categories. In 2015 and 2016, $662,553 were awarded to 28 different districts.[111]

The districts awarded grant funding do not differ significantly in terms of demographics from the average school districts in Massachusetts. For example, among districts awarded funding, the median household income was $63,689.50, as opposed to $67,846 for the entire state.[112,113] The median district awarded funding was 89.2% white, while the median district in the state is 81.65% white. The charts below show the demographics of the recipient school districts. For a table with information about each school district, please see Appendix Item 2.

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[111] "Grants and Other Financial Assistance Programs: FY2016." Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. 2016. Accessed December 04, 2017. http://www.doe.mass.edu/grants/2016/awards/335.html; "Grants and Other Financial Assistance Programs: FY2017." Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. 2017. Accessed December 04, 2017. http://www.doe.mass.edu/grants/2017/awards/335.html.

[112] Note: we were not able to find the median household income information for the charter schools that received grant funding: City on a Hill Charter School Dudley Square, City on a Hill Charter School New Bedford, Berkshire Arts and Technology Public School (Adams).

[113] "Massachusetts School District Demographic Profiles." Proximity One. 2013. Accessed December 04, 2017. http://proximityone.com/ma_sdc.htm.

Median Household Income of Districts Receiving Grant Funding

Demographics of Districts Receiving Grant Funding
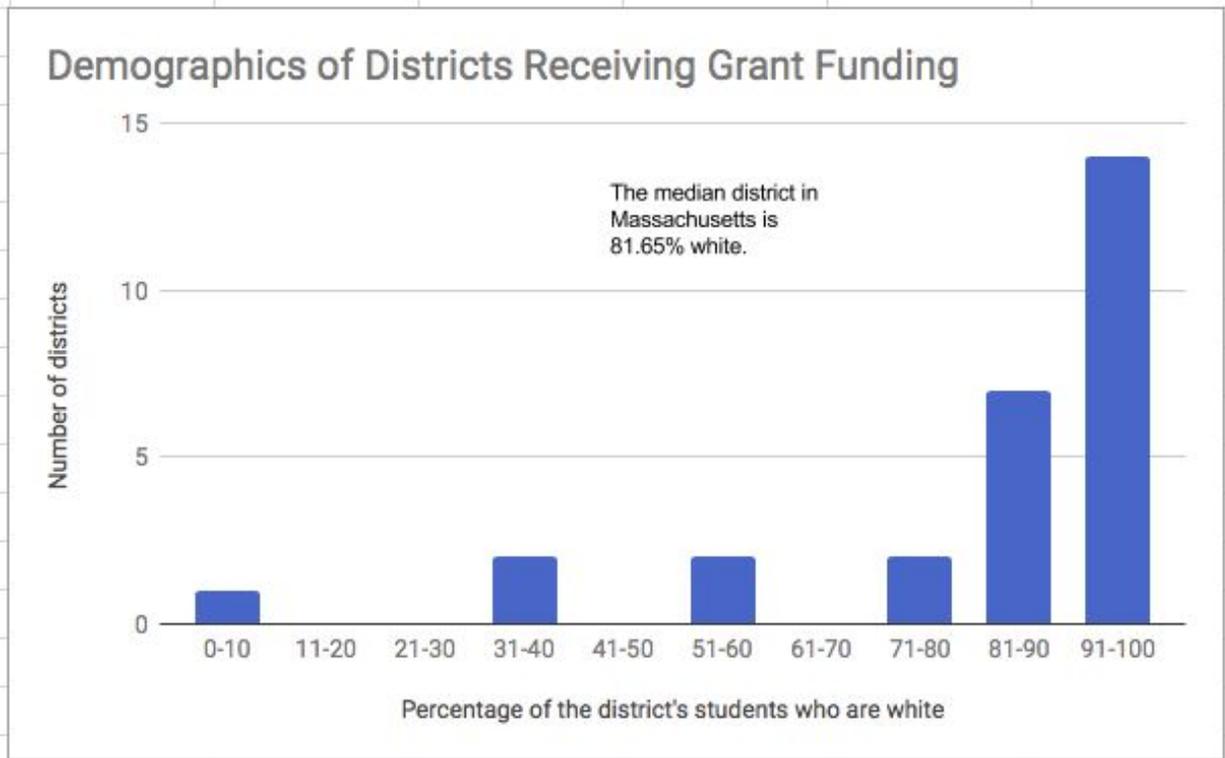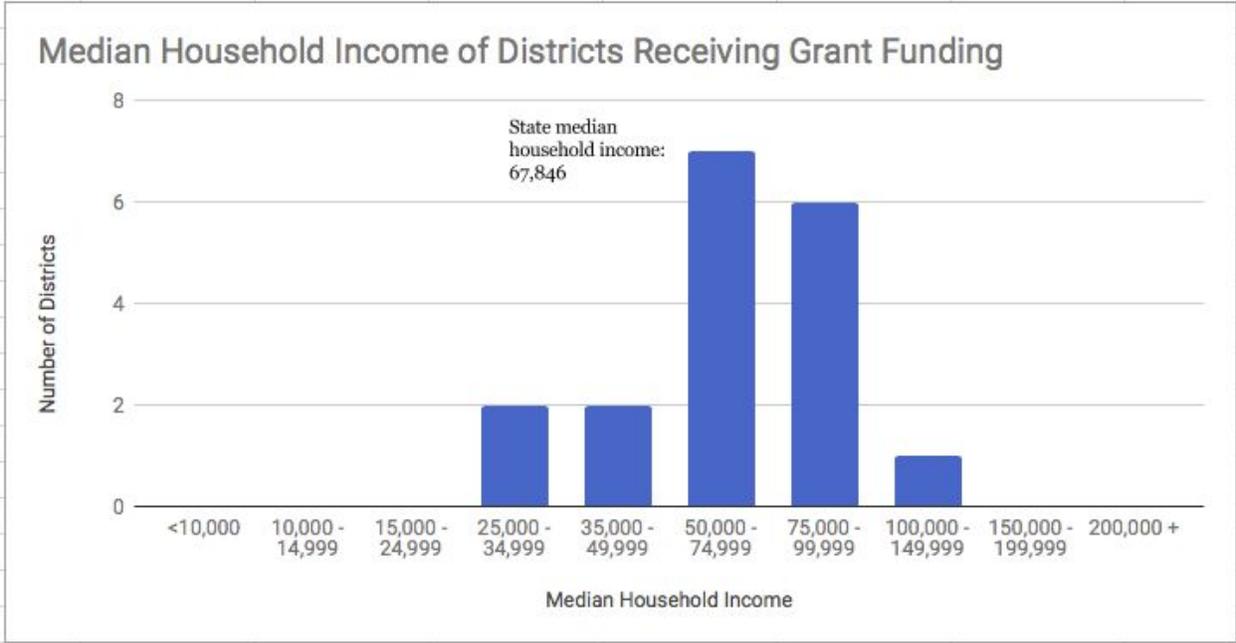
5. A Conversation with Sara Burd

Sara Burd is a leader in the implementation of Social Emotional Learning programs in Massachusetts schools, having worked as director of Social Emotional Learning at Reading Public Schools and now at Arlington. On November 17th, she was able to answer a few of our questions by email. The questions and answers are included in their entirety below:

- *What have been the main setbacks for implementing "safe and supportive school" (SASS) initiatives in school districts you have worked in?*

SB: There is an overall, field-wide lack of clarity in the terminology that unifies this work. Trauma sensitive, anti-bullying, SafeSpaces, Safe and Supportive, and the list grows... Being able to speak about the work you wish to undertake is a non-negotiable, and that often takes the most time, and is the most informal or qualitative. Second, there are rarely existing structures in schools that allow the work to permeate and anchor in existing cultures. The work may be focused on policies, or PD (professional development), but there is a lack of clear system-wide supports and processes that are necessary to make the work effective and long-standing.

- *What could more funding for "safe and supportive school" programs be used for? How can more money be used most effectively?*

SB: Systems work. There are endless programs, curricula, trainers, consultants, tools, strategies, etc. We have a bottleneck between the providers of these resources and the consumers of these resources. There is no clear process or guidance for leaders to identify the best suited resources for their community and you end up often with fractured supports/resources and slow moving implementation, or partial implementation as a result. We need a leader litmus test that is quick and easy to use and embeds within what they are already doing on a day-to-day basis.

- *Keeping in mind budget and resources, what is your vision for trauma sensitive schools in Massachusetts?*

SB: Two-fold... 1- is that there would be more readily available avenues for the existing inquiry-based models, courses, resources, trainers, etc., to be widely distributed across the state to all communities (perhaps with regional communities of practice to become hubs for other communities) . 2- is that there would be a trauma sensitive schools "attachment" or "addendum" that would allow schools that are undertaking an alternative SASS approach--Positive Behavior Interventions and Support (PBIS), Social Emotional Learning (SEL), RC, RJ, etc.--to cross walk the TSS practices and attributes onto their existing work without needing to build it from the ground up.

- *If you have implemented these interventions or seen them implemented, what have been the most notable benefits?*

SB: More effective staff time, class time, early intervention, better use of resources, outcome data improvement, identification of disproportionate discipline /learning, unified vision, energetic staff, etc.

- *Do you have any policy recommendations regarding the implementation of trauma informed teaching in the state?*

SB: Not at the moment!

6. Summary of Recommendations and Conclusion

Summary of Recommendations

Professional Development Programs for Teachers

- Implement extensive teacher and school counselor training, equipping them to navigate racially-based traumatic stress.
- Provide teacher training to ensure that teachers can identify and treat at-risk students.

- Professional Development in SEL resources and principles

School Support and Structure

- Create "wellness centers" in schools as an alternative to discipline.

- Consider the creation of "Truth and Reconciliation Commissions" in communities struggling with significant amounts of racially-based traumatic stress.

- Avoid separating at-risk students from the general population and, if separation is necessary, reintegrate them with care.

- Educate parents about the school and community resources available to them

- Implement project-based SEL program.

- Create K-12 SEL standards that can be integrated into existing curricula.

- Offer funding to school districts for food security programs.

Grant Allocation and Evaluation

- Simplify Safe and Supportive Schools grant applications and deadlines to make grants more accessible to all school districts.

- Target grants to the most needy districts, those of lower socioeconomic status, high rates of behavioral issues, or other indicators of poor school climate.

- Evaluate SEL programs with EQ assessments or team-based activities, but don't use that information as a punitive measure.

Conclusion

The goal of this paper was to identify factors that contribute to poor school climates and cost effective strategies to combat them. In conducting our research, we found that mitigating the stressors students experience and improving their social-emotional competence greatly improve their academic and behavioral performance. Some stressors, such as food insecurity and poverty, can't be completely addressed by school systems, but schools can still reduce the effects they

have on students, especially low SES students. Our largest area of focus was on SEL because we believe it is a very cost effective way to not only help students perform better in school, but also cope with school environmental problems better. We realize some suggestions, such as creating free pre-K and kindergarten classes can be costly, and other solutions, such as removing zero-tolerance policies, might not be popular with parents, but by pinpointing a wide range of problems and potential solutions, we hope to provide a variety of ways to improve school climates in Massachusetts.

7. Appendix

Item 1: Supplementary Materials for Section 2.3

The following is excerpted from McKevitt:[114]

Research Synthesis Websites Consulted for Program Identification

• Blueprints for Violence Prevention: http://www.colorado.edu/cspv/blueprints/

• Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning: http://www.casel.org/

• Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention: http://www.ojjdp.gov/mpg/

• Office of Safe and Drug Free Schools:

 http://www.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/exemplary01/exemplary01.pdf

• Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, National Registry of

 Evidence-based Programs and Practices: http://nrepp.samhsa.gov/

• What Works Clearinghouse: http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/

Note. All websites are accurate as of September 28, 2011.

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[114] McKevitt, "School Psychologists' Knowledge and Use of Evidence-Based, Social-Emotional Learning Interventions."

Item 2: Table Describing the Recipients of Safe and Supportive School Grants, for Section 4.2

School District	Amount Awarded	Median Household Income	% White
Arlington Public Schools	31,100	83,740	86.5
Barnstable Public Schools	23,160	62,671	90.4
Berkshire Arts and Technology Charter Public School (Adams)	4,490		71.9
Boston Public Schools	154,890	52,433	56.9
Brimfield Elementary School District	7,950	74,355	99.1
City on a Hill Charter Dudley Square (Boston)	2000		3.2

City on a Hill Charter New Bedford	2000		34.5
Chelsea Public Schools	22,032	39,710	58.4
Clinton Public Schools	30,000	58,553	88.9
Fall River Public Schools	10,000	35,814	89.2
Framingham Public Schools	20,000	64,708	75.1
Gill-Montague Regional School District	18,600	43,532	91.7
Groton-Dunstable Regional School District (Groton)	8,500	114,221	95.7
Holyoke Public Schools	70,000	34,496	85.4
Lawrence Public	10,000	32,337	31.2

Schools			
Leominster Public Schools	19,976	56,582	86.2
Melrose Public Schools	10,000	80,136	92.3
Milton Public Schools	18,460	96,352	82.5
Newburyport Public Schools	20,000	76,148	95.2
North Adams Public Schools	18,730	35,020	93.0
Northampton Public Schools	20,000	51,018	86.6
Quaboag Regional School District	24,000	57,301	96.7
Reading Public Schools	10,000	97,645	96.0
Saugus Public	10,000	68,658	92.8

Schools			
Tantasqua Public Schools (Fiskdale)	9,865	70,000	96.6
Triton Regional School District	50,000	66,347	98.2
Whitman-Hanson Public Schools (Whitman)	20,000	78,732	94.7
Wilmington Public Schools	16,800	92,398	94.8
Total	662,553		