**Introduction to a Process for Schools to become more safe and supportive.**

The goal of the self-reflection process outlined in this document is to catalyze a reflective and creative inquiry-based, year-long or multi-year process to create and enhance a school's work to become more safe and supportive for the entire school community (including but not limited to: students, staff, families, and community partners). This process enables schools to identify their most pressing local priorities and create action plans that can be incorporated into School Improvement Plans to address these priorities. When taken on by multiple schools in the same district, this work can also inform and enhance district improvement plans.

*What is a Safe and Supportive School?*

A safe and supportive school is one that welcomes, supports, and engages all students to learn deeply, grow, and thrive. It promotes and ensures that students experience a learning environment that is equitable, culturally responsive, and trauma sensitive. Massachusetts Safe and Supportive Schools Framework Law (G.L., c. 69, s.1P) defines a safe and supportive school as follows:

Schools that foster **a safe, positive, healthy & 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.

*Other related initiatives may include but are not limited to LGBTQIA (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, intersex, and asexual) alliances or other similar groups, inclusion of English language learners, substance use prevention and recovery, and more.

*Essential Elements of a Safe and Supportive School*

The Safe and Supportive Schools Commission and its partners reviewed research, interviewed experts from Massachusetts and around the country, and consulted with parents and students in order to uncover common themes and essential characteristics from many initiatives that are foundational to creating a safe and supportive school. We refer to these cross cutting themes as the "Essential Elements" of a safe and supportive school. While every school is unique and no two schools will create a safe and supportive learning environment in exactly the same way, these Essential Elements are foundational through any and all schools' initiatives.

Continuously reflecting on the Essential Elements while using the four phase process described below in this document helps staff to develop an increasing familiarity with what a safe and supportive school is, evaluate their current school's status, and create an action plan that identifies their priorities and establish a vision of what safe and supportive means for their school.

The **Essential Elements** broadly relate to the following areas and are described in further detail below:
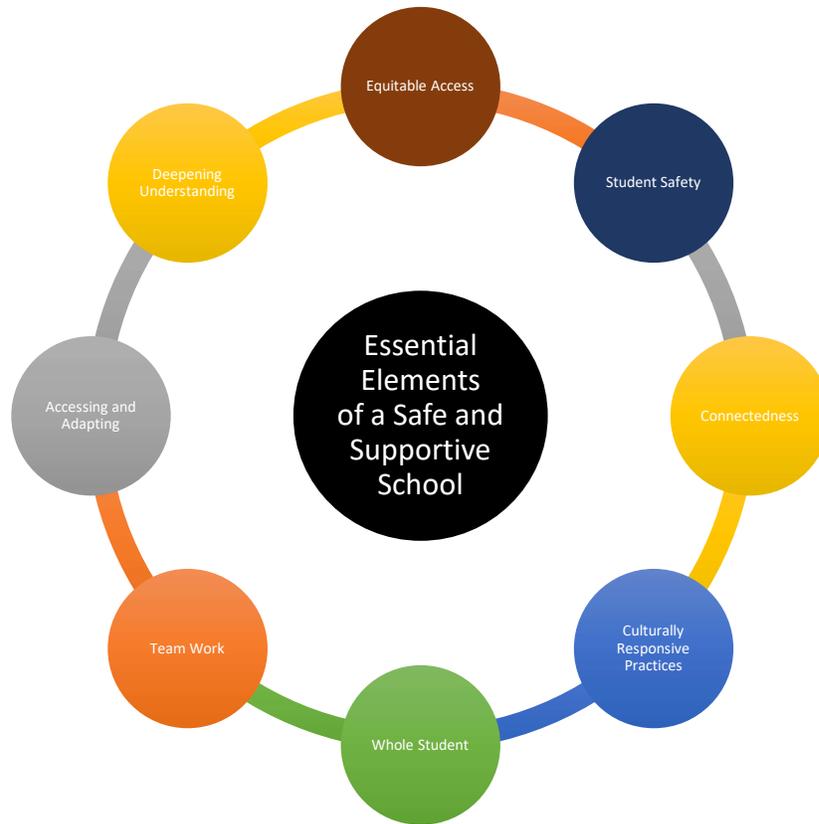


1. **Deepening administrator/staff understanding** of the need for a safe and supportive schools and the need for a whole school approach that values the expertise of educators and includes the voices of students and families.

2. **Supporting all students to feel safe-**physically, socially, emotionally, behaviorally and academically.

3. **Holistically supporting the whole student to:**
   o form positive **relationships** with adults and peers,
   o manage and **self-regulate** their emotions and behaviors,
   o develop a sense of **competency** and academic success, and
   o experience **physical health and well-being**.

4. **Explicitly connecting students to the school community** and providing them with multiple opportunities to learn and practice newly developing skills.

5.  Building staff capacity to **develop culturally responsive practices that dismantle implicit biases and systemic inequalities in order to create** learning environments that welcome, include, and support all students to deeply learn, grow, and thrive.

6.  **Promoting equitable access, opportunities and outcomes** for **all** students to ensure they are engaged and challenged to achieve their fullest potential.

7.  **Supporting the school staff's capacity to work together as a team** with a sense of shared responsibility for every student.

8.  **Helping the school staff assess and adapt** to the ever-changing needs of students and the surrounding community.

*Integrating Services and Aligning Initiatives*

Creating an environment where all students can be successful requires that staff infuse these Essential Elements into all the activities of the school, both at the school-wide level and at the level of individual and group services. This includes academics, bullying prevention, drop-out prevention, social skill development, positive discipline, truancy prevention, and more. Even many school-wide programs related to positive discipline or social emotional learning do not always connect to or reinforce one another or do not become embedded in the culture of the school. Many important initiatives that could make a school safe and supportive often remain stand-alone programs or in competition with one another for resources. For this reason, the Massachusetts legislature called for a tool that could help integrate these many initiatives. As described in the process outlined in this tool, reflecting on school operations, programs, and practices using the Essential Elements as a lens can allow school staff to find new ways to make the existing initiatives mutually reinforcing and integrate services to better meet the multi-faceted holistic needs of children.

| In Practice: |
| --- |
| For example, one Massachusetts school was able to align its work on trauma-sensitivity with its work on positive behavior supports through deepening its understanding of the importance of helping students feel safe. Staff recognized that the practice of using behavior charts with clips that are moved to reflect students' current status as having "good" or "bad" behavior, tracked on a board at the front of the class, was a potentially humiliating experience for some students. By reflecting critically on the element of student safety, the staff modified its practice instead to teaching students to internalize the concepts of self-regulate using the Zones of Regulation strategies. This new way of addressing behavior aligned the goal of teaching students the skills of self-regulation (positive behavior, social emotional skills) with the goal of creating classroom spaces that are safe (trauma-sensitive). Importantly, students were better able to remain in the classroom. This is just one of many examples of how the Essential Elements can help make initiatives compatible with each other. |

*Phases in the Process of Creating a Safe and Supportive School*

The four phases outlined below describe a process a school can undertake, on a continuous basis, to reflect on and address priorities for improvements related to safe and supportive learning environments.

- Phase I: Engage in a **learning** process to deepen understanding of what a safe and supportive school is, the importance of a school-wide approach, and how to prepare for effective self-reflection. An in-depth understanding of the Essential Elements is the goal of this phase.

- Phase II: Engage with the **self-reflection tool** by reviewing school data, staff, student and family urgencies, and how the school operates in order **to clarify the priorities of the school community.** The goal of this phase is to determine what is most urgent to address in order to become safe and supportive.

- Phase III: Develop a safe and supportive school **action plan,** informed by staff input, school data, and voices of families, students, and community partners - where actions in the plan are guided by the Essential Elements. The goal of this phase is to create actionable steps to help a school move towards becoming more safe and supportive.

- Phase IV: Incorporate safe and supportive actions into the **school improvement plan**. The goal of this phase is to integrate the actions needed to become safe and supportive into the school's continuous improvement plans to ensure that this process is ongoing and enduring and that measures of progress are included.

**Phase I. Deepening Learning:**

School leadership guides a process of increasing awareness among staff to create a knowledge base of understanding. Deepening understanding is critical to engaging in this process and is best accomplished through reflecting together on how the school helps or hinders students, staff and families to feel safe and supported. Leaders, along with a group of dedicated educators (staff in multiple roles) who are enthusiastic about this work can work to clarify the Essential Elements as the broader staff engage in this process, and provide materials and resources to help staff shift mind sets. This shift can be supported with resources such as speakers, video clips, book study groups, leadership summits, principles of effective practice for integrating student services, facilitators, etc. This learning process that moves staff toward the deepening understanding includes discussing and analyzing the Essential Elements of a safe and supportive school, recognizing the critical role they play as a foundation for learning. It also includes recognizing how the Essential Elements can help to integrate the many initiatives or programs the school may already be implementing to improve its capacity to be safe and supportive.

For information about Department of Elementary and Secondary webinars, conference materials, and in person networking opportunities check for updates to the Safe and Supportive Schools Grant webpage. Other professional development providers can be found DESE's PD page. The Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative also has a number of resources available.

*After training or study sessions with the whole staff, consider using a survey to ask staff:*
- *1) how the Essential Elements resonate with staff,*

> - *2) what ideas staff have about weaving the Essential Elements into the school, including if and where they may already be in place,*
> - *3) what barriers do staff see to weaving the Essential Elements into the school.*

*Steering Committee*

As interest builds around creating a safe and supportive schools, the school's efforts significantly benefit from the focused attention of a leadership group or steering committee, often led by the principal, to help guide and support the many tasks that lie ahead. The formation of the steering committee can mark the transition from an informal coalition to a more formal working group. This steering committee, or work group, is ideally continuously learning and sharing learning with the rest of the staff. The steering committee collaborates closely with, and works on behalf of, the whole school community, utilizing the self-reflection tool, strategizing, continually reporting back to staff, families, and students to solicit input, and obtaining approval of the planning the steering committee has undertaken. The steering committee can also ensure that planning and actions stay focused on the Essential Elements of a safe and supportive school.

Once the action plan is agreed upon, the steering committee assists with decisions about incorporating relevant goals in the school (and if appropriate, the district) improvement plan.

*Composition of the Steering Committee*

The steering committee should be led by a school leader and may be composed of staff who volunteer to participate, those selected by leadership, student and family representatives, district personnel, and others (see "In Practice" below for examples of steering committee compositions). Among those who may be invited to participate or who choose to participate in the steering committee are teachers and other staff members who have demonstrated a strong interest in building a safe and supportive school. As the initiative progresses, the committee may decide to expand membership, perhaps by including a representative from each grade level or by issuing an open invitation to staff. The steering committee attempts whenever possible to incorporate multiple perspectives in its makeup, including racial and ethnic diversity, as well as staff at different points in their careers.

| In Practice: | | |
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| *Schools and districts have created steering committees composed of combinations of the following:* | | |
| **Administrators** | | |
| Principal/Director Dean of Students Administrative Assistant/Secretary | Assistant Principal Superintendent | Director of Curriculum and Instruction Assistant Superintendent |
| **Teachers, Instructional Staff, and Students** | | |
| Teacher(s) Instructional/Classroom Coach | Special Education Teacher(s) Student(s) | Teaching Assistant(s)/ Paraprofessional(s) |
| **Specialists and Coordinators** | | |
| School Adjustment Counselor Curriculum Coordinator School Psychologist Board-Certified Behavioral Analyst Director/Leader of Humanities Substance Abuse Coordinator | Nurse Health and Wellness Coordinator Learning/Instruction Specialist Clinician Diversity Coordinator | Guidance Counselor Special Education Coordinator/Liaison Director of Community Engagement/Outreach Family Liaison Occupational Therapist |
| **Other School Partners** | | |
| Parent(s) Community members Faith Leaders | Social Worker Counseling Center | 21st Century Site Coordinator Business Owners |

### Phase II. Identifying Priorities Using the Self-Reflection Tool

The objective of this phase is to determine priorities to be addressed in the action planning phase. There are several data sources to draw from as part of this self-reflection tool that will provide valuable information to help identify a common set of priorities:

Stage A) Reviewing data the school already collects (e.g., achievement data, discipline data, attendance, demographics, etc.)

Stage B) Gathering and reviewing input from families, students, and staff

Stage C) Examining school operations *(i.e., Leadership; Professional Development; Access to Services; Teaching and Learning; Policies, Procedures, and Protocols; and Collaboration with*

*Families)*

Stage D) Soliciting staff responses to the post-learning survey questions in Phase 1 (*how the Essential Elements resonate with staff; what ideas they have about how the Essential Elements are and can be better woven into the school; and what barriers they see to being able to do so*).

After completing the 4 stages listed above, the steering committee is better poised to identify the school's urgent priorities and share them with the whole staff, as well as students and families, and seek approval and receive feedback.

**Stage A. Review school data by whole school and subgroup.**

Gather and analyze available data related to:
- Educator evaluation
- Disciplinary incidents,
- Attendance,
- Bullying,
- Achievement,
- Family engagement,
- Substance use and misuse,
- Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) results,
- Student climate and other school survey results (student as well as family and staff surveys),
- Student connectedness data, and
- Any other available sources (i.e. Positive Behavioral Intervention System, School Wide Informational System data)

To the extent possible, disaggregate data by race, ethnicity, gender, language, and disability.[1]

The Early Warning Indicator System (EWIS) is another source of data to consider reviewing.

Ask questions about the data:
- Who do we seem to be serving least well (individual students, as well as trends with subgroups, for example related to housing instability, English language learners, students in foster care, economic status, etc.)?
- Are all of our students connected to the school? How can we know who is not connected?
- What does this tell us about our work to become a more safe and supportive school for all students?
- Are all subgroups of students represented in this data?
- Is the data representative of the school community (e.g., if using family survey results – to what degree did a representative sampling of families respond, and how can you know or not know)? If not, are there additional sources of data to consider using?

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[1] Aspen Institute Pursuing Social and Emotional Development Through a Racial Equity Lens: A call to Action Pg. 1

What does the data tell us? Develop a summary that synthesizes what has been learned from the analysis of the data, and keep this summary in mind as you work through the following stages/phases of the self-reflection tool.

**Stage B. Review information available from students and families**

This stage of the process provides an opportunity to examine already available information related to family and student engagement. Consider what survey data or other written information is available that shares students' and families' thoughts, ideas, concerns, etc. Additionally, analyze the questions asked, the format in how surveys are given, and the frequency of when they are given. What information is available from all families, and especially vulnerable families? What are we hearing generally from students and families about their interests, feedback, ideas, and concerns? Make note whether the information you are receiving is representative of all students and families the school serves (e.g., by race/ethnicity, economic status, languages spoken, students in foster care or with housing instability, grandparents and single parents or other caregivers, etc.). Information gleaned from whatever sources of family and student voice are currently in place will be very useful as the self-reflection process starts. However, track where there are gaps in information or where the information that has been collected may reflect implicit bias, and keep these limitations in mind as you use the data throughout the following stages/phases of the self-reflection tool. In addition, many schools work closely with community partners, and their input would also be valuable in identifying priorities to be addressed based on what they know to be concerns and interests among families and students in the community, as well as their experience with the school staff, leadership, and community.

Think through how the gaps in information you have identified, (e.g., missing family voice, or missing the voice of vulnerable students) can be addressed through concerted efforts in the upcoming years, i.e., identifying additional strategies as needed to effectively engage all stakeholders (including students and families) to inform action planning and engage in ongoing evaluation of progress.

**Stage C. Examine School Operations** using the self-reflection tool

Examine core school operations to understand the role they may play in supporting or posing barriers to the creation of a safe and supportive school. Each operation *(i.e., Leadership; Professional Development; Access to Services; Teaching and Learning; Policies, Procedures, and Protocols; and Collaboration with Families)* is listed below with specific examples to consider.

**Use this self-reflection tool to catalyze a deep discussion and structure your reflections on the current status of your school. This is not meant to be an exhaustive list of actions or characteristics that define a safe and supportive school, but rather is a review of whole school operations to support the identification of local priorities.**

This outline of school operations is designed to facilitate self-reflection by the steering committee. The results can then be synthesized, shared and discussed with the larger school community, as they relate to what needs to be addressed in the action plan. The goal is to provide a process for

looking at all the operations in a school to assist schools with identifying current priorities and needs, while noting key areas of strength to build on, as well as areas of concern related to becoming a more safe and supportive school.

At the end of each section, there is a set of questions designed to facilitate discussion. A note-taker will be very helpful here. If desired, using the accompanying link, schools can self-assess (self-rate) the degree to which each practice is: U=Unsure if this is in place; 1=Not at all in place; 2= Partially in place; 3=Mostly in place; or 4=fully in place. While the primary goal is to generate good discussion, using the rating scale can be helpful for informing action planning and for tracking progress over time.

## A. Leadership, Infrastructure, and Culture
*Click on the triangle to the left of each numbered item to view example practices*
1. *Alignment* – safe and supportive schools actively work to align, enhance, and develop initiatives, missions, and visions that incorporate the Essential Elements.
   a. A clear vision, mission, and strategic plan provide the foundation for integrating social, emotional, and academic development throughout preK-12 education.
   b. School-wide initiatives, policies and procedures are aligned and integrated
2. *Staff input and collaboration* – Safe and supportive schools offer multiple opportunities for staff to be included and collaborate in the operation of the school.
   a. Staff have a voice and are included in decision making processes
   b. Staff are routinely engaged in identifying and addressing school-wide priorities
   c. Staff effectively work together and feel that they are working towards common goals
   d. There is common planning time set aside for staff to inform safe and supportive school efforts (e.g., for professional development, for ensuring equal access to resources, consideration of teaching practices that enhance learning in a safe and supportive way to engage stakeholders)
3. *Data use* – safe and supportive schools use data to support their efforts
   a. Ongoing data analysis, including input from students and families, informs the action planning and implementation process
   b. There is a system for continuous improvement that includes goal setting and measuring the extent to which goals are met
   c. Monitoring progress promotes continuous improvement in the integration of social, emotional, and academic development.
4. Staff recruitment and retention – Safe and supportive schools actively recruit, retain, and support staff that are diverse and committed to improving safe and supportive efforts
   a. Potential applicants (in and outside of the school) who have demonstrated commitment to creating a safe and supportive school are actively recruited (to hire)
   b. Potential applicants (in and outside of the school) who reflect the diversity of the students and families in the school, and who value and will leverage the multiple identities of all students served are actively recruited (to hire)
   c. There are supports in place to address the personal impact on staff, related to what can be experienced as job stress and anxiety and other challenges

5. *District involvement* – safe and supportive schools are supported by district and school administration
   a. Leadership positions dedicated to the integration of social, emotional, and academic development strengthen and speed its implementation[2]
   b. High-level district personnel actively and consistently participate in the development and implementation of district plans that coordinate and support the allocation of resources to meet the needs of schools
6. *Student-centered* – safe and supportive schools focus on improvements for all students
   a. Staff recognize that all children can be successful and that students' learning and school challenges can be addressed through strengthening universal practices as well as individual and small group supports.
7. *Laws and Regulations* – safe and supportive schools use the Essential Elements when addressing regulations and laws related to safe and supportive activities
   a. As required by state Student Discipline Regulations, 603 CMR 53.14, the principal periodically reviews discipline data by selected student populations, including but not limited to race and ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, English language learner status, and student with a disability status. The principal assesses the extent of in-school suspensions, short- and long-term suspensions, expulsions, and emergency removals under 603 CMR 53.07, and the impact of such disciplinary action on selected student populations. The principal determines whether it is necessary or appropriate to modify disciplinary practices due to over-reliance on expulsion, or in-school or out-of school suspension, or emergency removals, or the impact of such suspensions, removals, and expulsions on selected student populations compared with other students.

*QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION: What does our discussion tell us about the role our school's leadership, infrastructure and culture can play as we work to become a safe and supportive school? Go back to the data analysis and discuss what implications there may be related to the role of leadership, infrastructure and culture in light of the data. What does this say about to what degree "we are all on the same page?"*

B. **Professional Learning Opportunities**
*Click on the triangle to the left of each numbered item to view example practices*
   1. *Collaboration* – safe and supportive schools encourage staff collaboration and incorporate time for staff to meet on a regular basis
   2. *Ongoing Staff Development* – safe and supportive schools utilize professional development practices that are inclusive of all staff regardless of the stage in their career, are ongoing, and work to continuously develop staff's skills.
   3. *District Level Involvement* – safe and supportive schools are supported by district policy to allow for effective professional development.
      a. PLOs are supported by school and district administration with sufficient time and resources
   4. *Student Centered* – safe and supportive schools use professional development to ensure that practices are focused on the whole student

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[2] First three are from: https://assets.aspeninstitute.org/content/uploads/2018/03/CDE-Practice-Base_FINAL.pdf,

a. Staff have adequate professional development and support to develop the understanding that challenging behavior can be an indicator of a student's unmet need or not fully developed social-emotional skill, and that a negative or punitive response to the behavior may only serve to distance the student from school

b. Staff have adequate professional development and support to help students to feel safe and connected to adults and peers in the school community and help students practice their skills through the building, after school, and summer programming (e.g. cafeteria, playgrounds, hallways, etc.)

c. Staff have adequate professional development and support to the whole child

d. Staff have adequate professional development and support to use universal design for learning

e. Professional and collegial support for integrating social, emotional, and academic dimensions of learning enhances educators' effectiveness in the classroom.

f. Adults model social and emotional skills in their interactions with students and other adults.

g. Social, emotional, and academic development flourishes when everyone in the school is involved.[3]

> *QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION: What does our discussion tell us about what professional development is needed for us to become a safe and supportive school? Go back to the data analysis and discuss what implications there may be for Professional Learning Opportunities in light of the data. What does this say about to what degree "we are all on the same page?".*

## C. Access to Resources and Services

*Click on the triangle to the left of each numbered item to view example practices*

1. *Coordination with School and Community Based Services* – safe and supportive schools coordinate the services provided to students in and out of school.

   a. The school considers ways to implement [principles of effective practice for integrating student supports](), which include*: Whole School, Whole Child, Mindset, Confidentiality, Collaboration, Coordination, Access to Services, and Partnering with Families*

   b. The schools has identified and mapped services within the building and understands where strengths and gaps are in necessary services.

   c. The school has identified and mapped available community based resources and services including an understanding of sources of funding (e.g., covered by MassHealth or private insurance, partially reimbursed to the community through the School Based Medicaid Program, etc.), readily access those available services, and makes efforts to create access when needed

   d. The school has shared its goals and common language related to safe and supportive schools with community partners including support for social, emotional, and academic development

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[3] Last three from: https://assets.aspeninstitute.org/content/uploads/2018/03/CDE-Practice-Base_FINAL.pdf

    e. Existing collaborations with community providers are readily accessed and responsive to student/family needs

    f. Staff has regular access to assistance from mental health providers in responding appropriately and confidentially to families

    g. School personnel and community providers maintain ongoing and regular communication about mutual goals, including student progress, respecting confidentiality where appropriate

    h. School personnel are aware of barriers to access to community resources and work to reduce and eliminate these barriers

    i. Needed services beyond those readily available in the community are identified and efforts made to create access

2. *Clinically, linguistically, developmentally, and culturally appropriate services* – safe and supportive schools ensure that all services provided are clinically, linguistically, developmentally, and culturally appropriate.

    a. Students in need of additional resources and services, including but not limited to mental health services, from school or community-based or other providers have access to clinically, linguistically, developmentally, and culturally appropriate services

    b. The school has identified community-based resources and supports to assist with linguistically and culturally sensitive communication

3. *Procedures for accessing services and transitions* – safe and supportive schools have policies and procedures to help all students access services when needed and transition back to school or the classroom appropriately.

    a. Policies describe how, when, and where to refer families for mental health supports; and staff actively facilitate and follow through in supporting families' access to trauma-competent mental health services

    b. Staff are familiar with how to make a referral to a community agency/support

    c. Access exists to trauma-competent services for prevention, early intervention, treatment, and crisis intervention

    d. Protocols exist for helping students transition back to school from other placements

> *QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION: What does our discussion tell us about what resources, supports and services need to be in place for students, families, and staff for us to become a safe and supportive school? What does this say about to what degree "we are all on the same page?" Go back to the data analysis and discuss what implications there may be for Access to Resources and Services in light of the data.*

## D. Teaching and Learning that fosters Safe and Supportive Environments
*Click on the triangle to the left of each numbered item to view example practices*

1. *High Expectations and Universal Design for Learning* – safe and supportive schools have high expectations for all students and implement universal design for learning (UDL)

    a. .Rigorous achievement goals for all students are consistent across the school

    b. Information is presented and learning is assessed using multiple modes in all classrooms.

2. *Data Use* – safe and supportive schools use data to inform teaching and learning
   a. Qualitative and quantitative data are used to consider how to improve outcomes for ALL students
3. Consistency – safe and supportive schools have consistent expectations and predictable schedules.
   a. School contains predictable and safe environments (including classrooms, hallways, playgrounds, and school bus) that are thoughtfully planned and attentive to transitions and student's sensory needs.
   b. Schedules of lessons, instructions, and planned activities are clearly communicated and reviewed regularly.
   c. Staff are consistent with behavioral expectations and use common language and procedures to address student issues.
   d. Activities are structured in predictable and emotionally safe ways.
4. *Evidence Based* – safe and supportive schools use evidence based instructional approaches and curriculum.
   a. Social skill instruction is based on a proven curriculum and is woven into classroom learning in a meaningful way.
5. *Student Centered* – safe and supportive schools are student centered.
   a. All students feel connected to the classroom, have positive relationships with adults and peers, and see their race, cultural background and/or identity reflected in people and examples included in their textbooks and/or class materials
   b. All staff consider the role that trauma may be playing in learning difficulties at school.
   c. Students' strengths and interests are encouraged and incorporated throughout the school day (and during out-of –school time as well, where appropriate).
6. *Positive Behavioral Supports* – safe and supportive schools use positive behavioral supports.
   a. Opportunities exist for students to learn and practice regulation of emotions and modulation of behaviors.
   b. Classrooms employ positive supports for behavior.
   c. Opportunities exist for learning how to interact effectively with others.
   d. Opportunities exist for learning how to plan and follow through on assignments.
   e. Explicit instruction in social and emotional competencies provides students with a foundation for further development.
7. *Communication* – safe and supportive schools have procedures for communication between staff
   a. Ongoing confidential collaborations for individual students is available when needed
8. A process is in place to provide transition age planning and services to students.
9. Teachers deliberately embed the social and emotional dimensions of learning into academic learning.

10. Creating inclusive and caring classroom and school culture deepens and enriches students' social and emotional competencies.[4]

> *QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION What does our discussion tell us about what strategies for teaching and learning need to be in place for us to become a safe and supportive school? What does this say about to what degree "we are all on the same page?" Go back to the data analysis and discuss what implications there may be for Teaching and Learning in light of the data.*

## E.  Policies, Procedures and Protocols

*Click on the triangle to the left of each numbered item to view example practices*

1. *Consistency* – safe and supportive schools have policies, procedures and protocols that are equitable and unbiased.
    a. School policies ensure that the school is a safe, predictable learning environment for *all* students.
    b. School policies articulate and support unbiased norms and values, and provide clear expectations for how members of our school community—students and adults--- interact with each other.
    c. The school regularly examines its policies, procedures and protocols to ensure that they are having the intended effect, are being utilized fairly and equitably across the school, and that they do not marginalize or have a negative effect on subpopulations of students.
2. *Collaboration and Communication* – safe and supportive schools collaborate with all staff, students, and families when establishing and implementing policies, procedures, and protocols
    a. Students are actively involved in collaboratively developing classroom and school rules.
    b. Policies, procedures and protocols are in place to ensure that best practices related to communication, including communication with community providers about individual students, are clear and are used by all staff to maintain confidentiality for all students and families.
    c. Parents/caregivers have access to the school's policies, procedures and protocols in multiple forms (electronic vs. paper) and languages.
3. *Relationships* – safe and supportive schools help everyone to build strong positive relationships
    a. School policies support students' connection to the school community and foster positive relationships among both students and teachers.
4. *Positive Behavioral Supports* – safe and supportive schools integrate positive behavioral supports in policies, procedures, and protocols
    a. Discipline policies are based on the understanding that a restorative rather than a punitive approach to discipline helps students maintain their connection to the school, not break it.

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[4] Last three are from: https://assets.aspeninstitute.org/content/uploads/2018/03/CDE-Practice-Base_FINAL.pdf

b. Discipline policies are based on best practices that include a progressive continuum that focuses first on prevention and skill building for all students, and moves slowly to disciplinary action only as a last resort. As required by the state's state Student Discipline Regulations, 603 CMR 53.14, in every case of student misconduct for which suspension may be imposed, a principal shall exercise discretion in deciding the consequence for the offense; consider ways to re-engage the student in learning; and avoid using long-term suspension from school as a consequence until alternatives have been tried. Alternatives may include the use of evidence-based strategies and programs such as mediation, conflict resolution, restorative justice, and positive interventions and supports.

c. Discipline policies and protocols incorporate the goal of responding to student behaviors by supporting students to take responsibility for their actions through learning skills to prevent the actions from recurring, and using restorative practices to maintain/restore the student's connection to the classroom and school community.

5. *Student Centered* – safe and supportive schools establish policies, procedures, and protocols that are student centered.

a. School policies promote holistic approaches to students, including an understanding of factors or unmet needs that may underlie students' behavioral challenges (e.g., trauma, disability, etc.)

b. Policies are in place to safeguard individual student safety and to ensure an appropriate response when safety concerns arise due either to home or community circumstances.

c. Clear policies and procedures are in place that address how to respond to individual student safety concerns, such as suspected abuse and neglect, family safety when there is domestic violence, and when there may be harassment

6. *Bullying Prevention* – safe and supportive schools create and implement appropriate policies, procedures, and protocols related to bullying prevention and intervention.

a. Policies, procedures and protocols related to bullying incorporate best practices that support effective implementation of bullying prevention and intervention, such as clear anti-bullying policies that are agreed on and understood by the entire school community. Appropriate consequences that are based on an understanding of the motivation for the bullying and are nuanced, flexible, and responsive to each incident and each aggressor, balancing the need for accountability with the need to teach appropriate behavior

b. Policies, procedures and protocols related to bullying incorporate best practices that support attention to the safety of the target, including the need to restore a sense of safety to the target after an incident and to prevent further incidents.

> QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION: *What does our discussion tell us about what policies, procedures and protocols need to be reviewed, revised, or created for us to become a safe and supportive school? Go back to the data analysis and discuss what implications there may be for Policies, Procedures and Protocols in light of the data. What does this say about to what degree "we are all on the same page?"*

**F. Family Engagement**

*Click on the triangle to the left of each numbered item to view example practices*

1. *Collaboration* – safe and supportive schools collaborate with all staff and all families
   a. All school leaders and staff work to ensure that families experience the school as a safe, welcoming and inclusive community.
   b. Schools are flexible and develop creative solutions that can prevent barriers to individual families developing a strong partnership with their child's teacher(s), enabling collaborative educational planning and joint problem-solving.
2. *Data* – safe and supportive schools collect and use data to inform their family engagement strategies

   a. The school tracks its success at engaging *all* families.
   b. The school uses surveys, meetings, and other creative means to invite families to share their input and concerns.
3. *Authentic Partnership* – safe and supportive schools create authentic partnerships between staff and families.
   a. There is a process and structure in place, with multiple and varied opportunities to ensure that family participation in the school community happens in a meaningful and consistent way, and that authentically engages families as essential partners.
   b. *All* families are empowered to participate as partners in every facet of the education and development of their children.
   c. Parents, families, and caregivers are partners in extending social, emotional, and academic development.
   d. Community service and service learning enable young people to exhibit and strengthen their social, emotional, and academic competencies.[5]
4. *Capacity Building* – safe and supportive schools build the capacity of staff and families
   a. All staff share an understanding of implicit bias and its potential impact on creating positive, effective and supportive interactions with families.
   b. The school staff and leaders are knowledgeable about and build strong connections with the communities and neighborhoods in which its families reside.
   c. The school provides information to help caregivers understand their children's learning trajectory (and guidance on how to make sense of the information it provides).
   d. The school actively solicits caregivers' input about their children and supports caregivers to be strong advocates for their children's education.
5. *Supporting the Diverse Needs of Families* – safe and supportive schools support all families
   a. *All* families are continuously invited to participate in the school community, and in making important decisions about the school, and ensures that family voices are as representative of all families as possible; this likely requires moving beyond more typical engagement strategies to ensure that all families are included.
   b. The school ensures that families' voices are valued and that their culture and family identity are honored.

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[5] Bottom three from: https://assets.aspeninstitute.org/content/uploads/2018/03/CDE-Practice-Base_FINAL.pdf

c. Strategies to involve families are tailored to meet individual family needs, and include flexibility in selecting meeting times and preferred means of contact, and ensuring availability of interpreters and translated materials (at group meetings as well).

6. *Communication* – safe and supportive schools communicate effectively with all families
   a. Procedures are in place to ensure that teacher-family communication occurs on a frequent and consistent basis, is designed to build positive relationships - not just share information, can accommodate a variety of families' schedules, and includes translation services when appropriate.
   b. All communications with and regarding families respect the bounds of confidentiality.
   c. The school serves as a resource for individual families regarding information about and referrals to community support resources.
   d. The school articulates clear expectations for the role the caregivers can play in supporting their children's learning

> QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION: *What does our discussion tell us about what we need to do to ensure that families are active partners for us to become a safe and supportive school? Go back to the data analysis and discuss what implications there may be for Family Engagement in light of the data. What does this say about to what degree "we are all on the same page?"*

### Stage D. Synthesizing the data to identify priorities

At this point, it is time to synthesize all the data that has been reviewed from:

      1) Regular school data collection;
      2) Family and student voices;
      3) Staff post-learning survey responses; and
      4) Review of school operations.

The synthesis begins by asking these guiding questions:

➢ How does the school-wide data align with our reflection on school operations?
➢ What inconsistencies are we seeing?
➢ Is there variation in responses across staff and families/students?
➢ What are the commonly held priorities that have emerged from the self-reflection process?

Once a set of priorities have been identified, the Steering Committee considers the following:

➢ How will we convey what we've learned in this self-study to the rest of the staff?
➢ How will we get staff input about the priorities we have identified and build momentum for action planning?

### Step III. Action planning using the Essential Elements of a Safe and Supportive School

Once staff have weighed in and endorsed the priorities, it is time to focus on discussing the actions the school will take to address these priorities. For example, if communication among staff needs addressing, staff might come up with many creative ideas for addressing this issue (examples?). To help inform whether the school is moving in the direction of a safe and supportive school, the school can use the Essential Elements as a lens to reflect on the priorities and the identified actions.

The guiding questions below are adaptations of the Essential Elements of a safe and supportive school. Putting them in question form will help with the process of reflecting on whether and how the decisions and actions the school chooses to take are aligned with the Essential Elements. Using these questions will help align initiatives as staff begins to see ways to infuse the Essential Elements into all the programs and initiatives in use in the school.

Guiding questions: How will addressing a given priority or taking a particular action:

- **Deepening administrator/staff understanding** of the need for a safe and supportive schools and the need for a whole school approach that values the expertise of educators and includes the voice of students and families?

- **Supporting all students to feel safe -**physically, socially, emotionally, behaviorally, and academically?

- **Holistically supporting the whole student to:**
    form positive **relationships** with adults and peers,
    manage and **self-regulate** their emotions and behaviors,
    develop a sense of **competency** and academic success, and
    experience **physical health and well-being** ?

- **Explicitly connecting students to the school community** and providing them with multiple opportunities to learn and practice newly developing skills?

- Building staff capacity to **develop culturally responsive practices that dismantle implicit biases and systemic inequalities in order to create** learning environments that welcome, include, and support all students to deeply learn, grow, and thrive?

- **Promoting equitable access, opportunities and outcomes** for **all** students to ensure they are engaged and challenged to achieve their fullest potential? [6]

- **Supporting the school staff's capacity to work together as a team** with a sense of shared responsibility for every student?

- **Helping the school staff anticipate and adapt** to the ever-changing needs of students and the surrounding community?

**Step IV Integrating the Action Plan into a larger School and District Improvement Planning Process (using Planning for Success)**

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[6] To make substantive progress toward improving educational equity, education leaders need to tackle inequity with race in mind-or through a racial equity lens-and at multiple levels individual, institutional and societal. Aspen Institute Pursuing Social and Emotional Development Through a Racial Equity Lens: A call to Action Pg. 2