# Creating Positive Learning Environments:
Recommendations and Resources to Support the Social Emotional Well-being of Students, Staff, and Families

August 20, 2020

MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF
ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY
EDUCATION

Welcome! A Few Housekeeping Items Before We Begin

As you arrive, please edit your name to include your district/LEA/organization (Your First/Last Name, District/LEA)

- To do this, right click on the 3 dots in the upper right corner of your picture. You should see the option of renaming yourself.
- If you called in via your phone and are on the computer, click on "More" or "…" next to your name and select "Merge Audio."
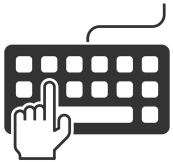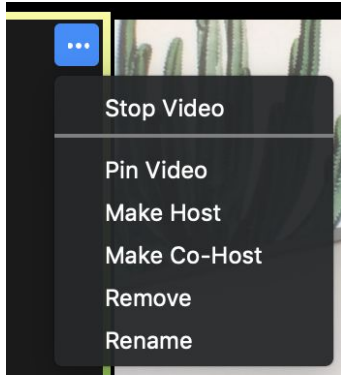
Send questions via chat to **Andrea Ricotta, DESE** at any point during the session.

During and after today's session, access the padlet at http://bit.ly/ma-sel-reopening to share (and receive) more ideas from other participants.

Just kidding!

At this point, we know 90% of you probably identify with this guy.

Brené Brown on FFTs (Fear of First Time)

This pandemic experience is a massive experiment in collective vulnerability. We can be our worst selves when we're afraid, or our very best, bravest selves. In the context of fear and vulnerability, there is often very little in between because when we are uncertain and afraid our default is self-protection. We don't have to be scary when we're scared. Let's choose awkward, brave, and kind.

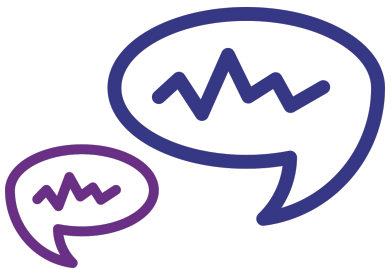**And let's choose each other.**

Session Agenda
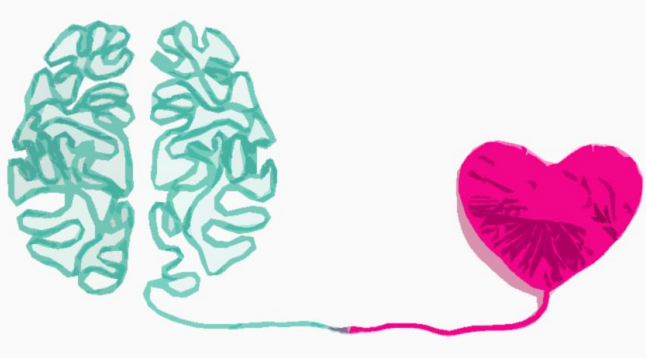

1) Unpacking the SEL recommendations

2) Q&A and upcoming supports

3) Breakout discussions

Parity & Interdependence of Physical and Emotional Safety

Equity & Racial Justice
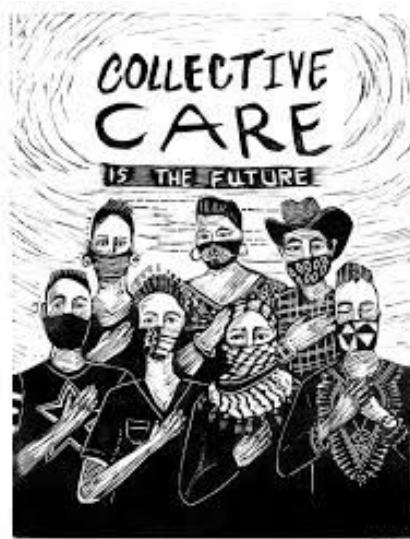
Collective Care

Document Organization (http://www.doe.mass.edu/covid19/on-desktop.html)

3 Sections ⟶ *Each Containing*   **More Specific Topics of Focus**

(1) **Bolstering Tier 1 for All**

(2) **Preparing to Address Increased Tier 2 & 3 Needs**

(3) **Mobilizing Around the Work**

➔ Brief Description

➔ Key Recommendations

➔ Equity-Related Planning Questions

➔ Relevant Resources

Topics of Focus

1a. Engaging Families as Partners

1b. Supporting Staff

1c. Re-envisioning School Culture and the Conditions for Learning

1d. Strengthening Key Social Emotional Skills & Mindsets

1e. Cultivating Positive Behavior

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

Recommendation Examples & Tips

- Create interactive videos for how new procedures will work (arrival, dismissal, hand washing, lunch, etc.). Since families will, for the most part, not be able to enter buildings, take pictures or create a short video of what classrooms and the school environment will look like (live Zoom or pre-recorded); update regularly to show how the school year is progressing.
- Schedule virtual "Meet the Teacher" meetings before school. Provide a slideshow template that includes SEL support.
- Offer family support groups either in-person (while maintaining social distancing and mask wearing) or virtually via zoom. Provide both synchronous and asynchronous trainings on remote learning platforms and instruction.

- Identify 2-3 key SEL competencies that are most critical in the current context (possibly relationship building, self-awareness, and self-management). Be sure to use culturally responsive lens.
- Work with students/families to identify the specific skills and behaviors that reflect their values and are most important to practice and strengthen.
- Use creative strategies to reinforce relationship building across student cohorts/remote vs in-person students (e.g., peer-wheels).

Topics of Focus

Recommendation Examples & Tips

2a. Building Upon Your System of Tiered Supports

- Survey teachers within 5-10 days about students who seem to be adapting vs. not adapting well or not participating in remote learning to help get an initial sense of the demand/scale of need.
- If there's a surge in need, identify and train a cadre of people (paraprofessionals, older students, adult/parent volunteers), who can help with some supports (technology use barriers, tutoring, remote learning support or mentoring, etc.).
- Revisit your resource map of Tier 1, 2, and 3 supports. Check in with providers to make sure you have the latest information on virtual services.
- Take a flexible approach to tiering needs and supports.

2b. Supporting More Intensive Mental Health Needs

- Prepare staff to know what to look for through professional development such as Psychological First Aid training.
- Consider sharing mental health resource information with all families (helps to reduce stigma and support students/families that may not have been on the radar pre-COVID).
- Be sensitive about the framing/language used (e.g., mental health vs wellness or family support).
- Strategically leverage student support personnel to assist/coach classroom educators and/or provide whole school programming (e.g., basic grief management techniques).

Topics of Focus

3a. Leveraging an Effective Teaming Structure

3b. Using Data to Focus Energy and Efforts

3c. Articulate the Roles of Key Stakeholders Before and After School Reopens

Recommendation Examples & Tips

- Avoid silos by ensuring various teams (school leadership teams, teacher grade-level teams, reopening subcommittees, etc.) have appropriate decision making authority and lines of communication to leadership.
- Consider folding in new members to reflect diverse voices and key perspectives.
- Develop a protocol and train teams to examine all decisions with an equity lens and unpack possible disproportionate impacts.

- Consider what data you already have and/or could be fairly nimbly collected (e.g., relationship mapping)
- Be thoughtful about how/when to assess student progress and needs (i.e., take strengths based approach, include student voice, try not to overwhelm with assessments as soon as school begins)
- Don't assess if you're not prepared to address!

3c. Articulate the Roles of Key Stakeholders Before and After School Reopens

It is critical to have clear expectations of how all members of the school community may engage in this work before and after school reopens. This should include not only administrators, teachers, and student support staff, but also students and families. The chart below outlines possible priority actions for each stakeholder group before the school year begins and during the first weeks and months of the school year. It can also be used as a template for future planning.

District Administrators	School Administrators	Classroom Educators	Student Support Personnel	Family Partners/Leaders	Students
Before the school year begins					
Set up/identify district-wide SEL/mental health planning teams as part of reopening efforts	Set up school-wide SEL/mental health planning teams (coordinated with district-wide teams)	Participate in district- and/or	Participate in district- and/or school-wide SEL/	Talk to your children, in age-appropriate	Talk to your family about your hopes,
Identify existing SEL/mental health-related data, identify data gaps, and consider adding data collection tools and protocols (including staff, student, and family	Coordinate data collection tools and protocols with distri office				

District Administrators	School Administrators	Classroom Educators	Student Support Personnel	Family Partners/Leaders	Students
During the first weeks and months of the school year					
Emphasize to all administrators and educators the critical role that SEL and mental health play in the district's reopening plan (e.g., fostering positive relations with students, families, and each other)	Echo district leaders' emphasis on SEL and mental health as critical ingredients of school reopening plans	Check in with students about how they are adjusting to the "new reality" throughout the day	Examine data from SEL assessments and mental health screeners to identify challenges among student populations and ensure that supports are in place to address those needs	Continue to check in with your children about their hopes, excitement, and challenges with the "new reality"	Communicate the challenges and successes that you or your peers are having as you acclimate to the "new reality"
Communicate to the community about the SEL	Continue to support school-wide SEL and mental health teams. Help the teams continue to re-assess	Communicate, model, and reinforce positive behavior expectations	Work with classroom teachers and other educators to inform and	Celebrate your children's successes with returning to school	Pay extra attention to peers who might be struggling, offer them support, and if

Top Recommendations for District & School Leaders

From Section 1: Bolstering Tier 1 Supports for all Students, Staff, and Families

1a. Engaging Families as Partners: *Maintain strong two-way communication with families prior to and during the school year using culturally and linguistically responsive practices.*

1b. Supporting Staff: *Stay connected with staff and help to manage uncertainty.*

1c. Re-envisioning School Culture and the Conditions for Learning: *Allocate a structured period of culture-building time as school first opens.*
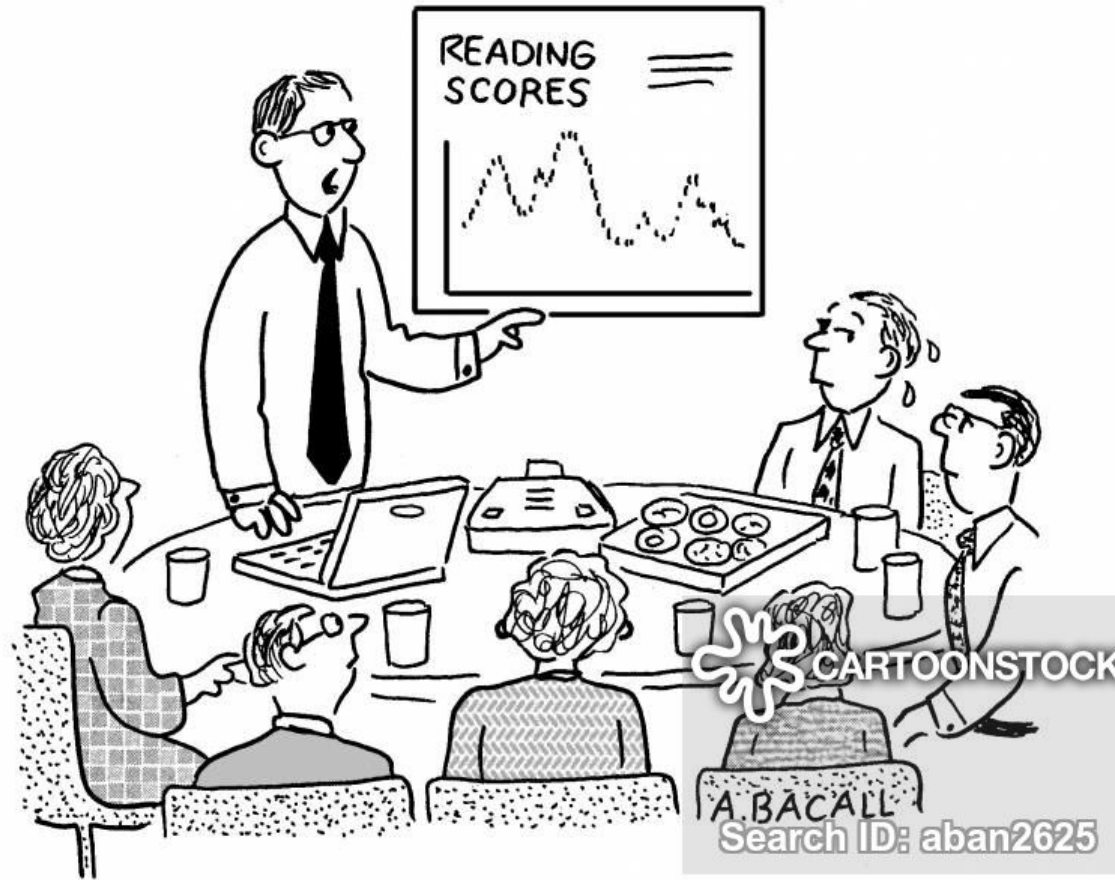
From Section 2: Preparing to Address Increased Tier 2 & Tier 3 Needs

2b. Supporting More Intensive Mental Health Needs: *Assume and plan for an increase in mental health needs and adjust methods of delivery accordingly.*

From Section 3: Mobilizing Around this Work

3c. *Articulate the Roles of Key Stakeholders Before and After School Reopens*

Q&A

"I believe all the donuts are filled with custard.
Are there any other questions?"

MTSS Academies:

MA currently offering 8 multi-year professional learning opportunities for school and district teams focused on:

- Culturally Responsive Leadership Practices
- Culturally Responsive Teaching
- Inclusive Instruction/UDL
- Tiered Literacy
- Tiered Math
- **PBIS**
- Social Emotional Learning & Mental Health
- **Systemic Student Support**

For more information:
http://www.doe.mass.edu/sfss/prof-dev/
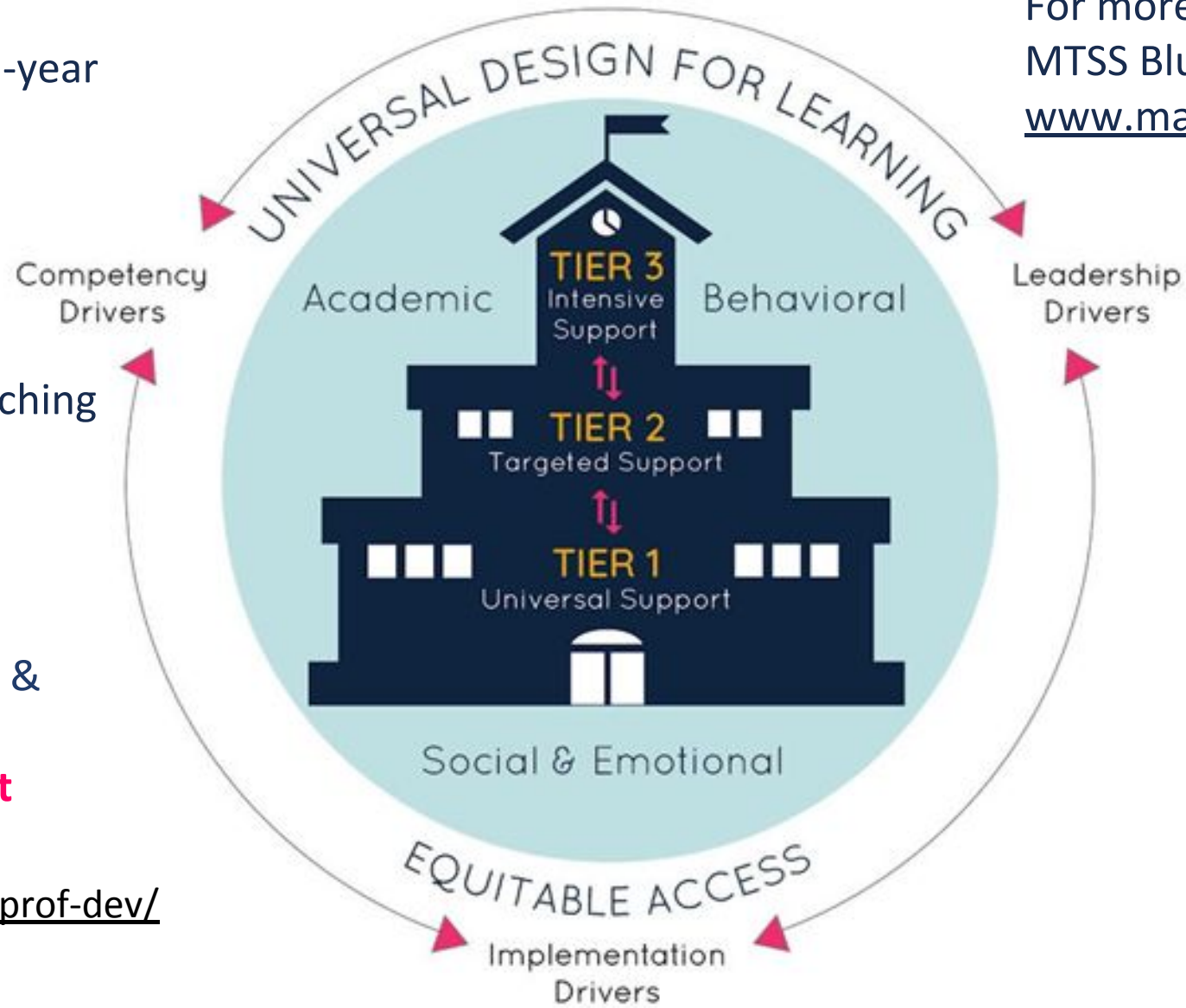
For more information on MA's MTSS Blueprint & resources:
www.matoolsforschools.com

Additional Resources: Cross–Agency, DESE, and District–Sponsored

MA Cross-Agency

The Commonwealth's primary hub for "Everything you need to know about COVID-19 in Massachusetts": COVID-19 cross-agency website

The MA Department of Mental Health (DMH) outlines resources and tips on Maintaining Emotional Health & Well-Being During the COVID-19 Outbreak.

Resources to find services and make referrals, such as:
https://massachusetts.networkofcare.org/mh/
https://www.mabhaccess.com
https://www.413cares.org/

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MA DESE

Primary hub for agency resources and updates related to COVID-19:
http://www.doe.mass.edu/covid19/

MA Tools for Schools COVID-19 Resources contains links to the materials and recordings from recent webinars as well as local and national resources for implementing multi-tiered systems of supports during this time.

The agency also sent a newsletter to 1,400 people who had signed up for it, with select updates related to holistic supports & enrichment, including efforts to help strengthen social emotional competencies, health & safety during school closures.

The Department also recently disseminated a resource toolbox (in 17 languages) for families with children with disabilities, which includes information and resources that can help support families' and children's mental health and more.

District
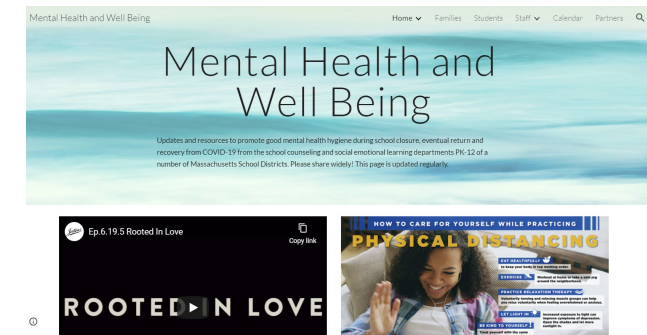
Updates and resources to promote good mental health hygiene during school closure, eventual return and recovery from COVID-19 from the school counseling and social emotional learning departments PK-12 of a number of Massachusetts School Districts.

https://sites.google.com/arlington.k12.ma.us/mentalhealthandwellbeing/

Let's Break Out!

- Based on the preferred topic you identified (i.e., family engagement, staff support, universal SEL, re-envisioning culture, cultivating positive behavior, increased mental health needs), we'll be sending you to a room with ~7-10 other participants

- Possible prompts for discussion (we'll put these in the chat):
  - What strategies are you implementing/planning for related to this topic?
  - What questions or challenges would you like to pose to the group?

- Feel free to record ideas in the padlet: http://bit.ly/ma-sel-reopening

- To get things rolling, perhaps ask the person whose first name is closest to the letter "z" to share an idea or question

- The session is scheduled to end at 1pm but you are welcome to continue longer if you're having a good conversation

THANK YOU

We will send a link to the recording and PowerPoint

Rebecca Shor, Director, Systems for Student Success Office

☎ 781.338.3559   ✉ rebecca.shor@mass.gov

🏠 www.doe.mass.edu   🏠 75 Pleasant Street, Malden, MA 02148

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