

## The M.A.S.S. Racial Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion STRATEGY

**“M.A.S.S. REDI”**

[HERE](#)

The M.A.S.S. Racial Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy (M.A.S.S. REDI) is an organization-wide, long-term strategy of the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents (M.A.S.S.) designed to ensure that every school in Massachusetts learns to model the anti-racist, inclusive practice required for every adult and student to learn and thrive.<sup>1</sup>

### THE WHY

We are called to action NOW! The pandemic has laid bare deep racial inequities in jobs, housing, health and schools that must be addressed. So, too, have the assaults on George Floyd, Breanna Taylor and countless other men and women of color. We face, too, coarse and disrespectful public discourse, deep polarization, and assaults on democracy. As educators, we see these challenges through the lens of students and families. We know we must be guided by our own moral compass. We know there are no easy answers. We know the work will look different in every district because the context in every district is different. We know, too, that the work is urgent in every district. Finally, we know that we need the support and guidance of trusted colleagues to navigate the struggle for racial equity, diversity and inclusion in our districts.

For years, superintendents across Massachusetts - and across the nation - have been working to bring greater racial equity, diversity, and inclusion to their districts. Yet, despite our earnest work, we have too little progress to show for those efforts.<sup>2</sup> We need a new approach: a long-term, state-wide, superintendent-driven strategy to address the systemic racism and cultural barriers in our schools that cause opportunity and achievement gaps and prevent so many students and adults from knowing they, too, belong and will thrive. Class, gender, gender identity, language, ethnicity and race can no longer be the determinants of success that they are for too many children (and adults).

Just as this new approach cannot shy away from the enduring effects of systemic racism, it must not place responsibility for addressing individual acts of bias and institutional racism on the shoulders of educators of color. Their voices are critical, and their voices must be amplified by the voices of every white district and school leader, including those leading districts that currently serve predominantly white students and their families. It is the responsibility of every superintendent to examine the policies, procedures and practices that contribute to a culture of exclusion and inequity - and then advocate for the changes required to ensure equity and inclusion for every student. As superintendents, we need to be open to understanding both the struggles of our brothers and sisters of color, and also how we may

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<sup>1</sup> See [HERE](#) for definitions of key terms M.A.S.S. uses to describe this work

<sup>2</sup> See [HERE](#) for 26 examples of inequitable outcomes and opportunity gaps for students of color that persist today in Massachusetts

be perpetuating institutional racism through the curriculum we teach, the conversations we are afraid to have, and the structures, policies and practices we continue that systematically marginalize and thwart opportunities for students of color.

Racism remains a persistent, pernicious presence throughout the Commonwealth. The often gaping achievement and opportunity gaps we see in our schools are the symptoms of something deeper. Unconscious bias and structural racism are their underlying cause. Recent graduates of color have described painful experiences in our school of exclusion, low expectations, and overt and covert bias and racism. So, too, have educators of color. At the same time, emboldened white nationalists have taken to the airwaves and social media with renewed vigor. That both the victim and the perpetrator of the murder of George Floyd could have been graduates of our schools gives urgency to us all: for those of us serving a majority of Black, indigenous and people of color (BIPOC) and those serving very few. We cannot graduate another generation of students who perpetuate racism, intentionally or not. Staff and students of every race in every school need to develop their racial literacy: the ability to name and examine the effects of implicit bias and structural racism on society, institutions and people. The work is urgent in every district.

Developing our individual and collective will and skill to challenge racism in all its forms must be at the heart of this work. The will and skill honed to become more effective anti-racist leaders will be the foundation for addressing our districts' other important issues of equity, diversity and inclusion, including those arising from differences in gender, ability, sexual orientation, language, and gender identification.

## **THE WHAT**

In October 2020, the M.A.S.S. Executive Committee unanimously adopted ambitious and all-encompassing overarching **goals for the work:**

“In order that all of our students can learn and thrive in schools that model anti-racist practice, diversity, and inclusion:

- We will empower M.A.S.S. to do the hard, internal work needed to complete its journey to become an exemplary anti-racist, diverse, and inclusive organization, and
- M.A.S.S. will prioritize anti-racist practice and inspire, encourage, guide and support all MA superintendents and assistant superintendents to learn what they need to learn in order to lead the work their districts need to do to become exemplary anti-racist public schools.”

The next month, the Massachusetts Association of School Committees (MASC) gave support for this endeavor when it adopted its own [MASC Anti-Racism Resolution](#) calling on all school districts to “guarantee that racist practices are eradicated, and diversity, equity, and inclusion is embedded and practiced for our students, families, faculty and staff”.

## THE HOW

### Organizational Structure

In November 2020, M.A.S.S. developed an [organizational structure](#) to drive its racial equity, diversity, and inclusion work forward. The Executive Committee called for a **Standing Committee of the Executive Committee** and a **Planning Committee** to support the work of the Standing Committee. Both include superintendents and assistant superintendents.

#### The Standing Committee

The [25-member Standing Committee](#) has met monthly since November 2020. It is composed of eight at-large and ex-officio members of the Association, as well as representatives of: the Association's eight Roundtables and Professional Development Committee; the Urban Superintendents Network; M.A.S.S. Officers, staff and programs including the *New Superintendents' Induction Program* and *Assistant Superintendent Leadership Seminars*; the Massachusetts Association of School Committees (MASC); and *Influence 100* (DESE's program to support and enlarge the pipeline for superintendents of color in Massachusetts).

The primary responsibilities of the Standing Committee are:

- Establish goals and monitor progress for two strands of work:
  - Support and direction for District Anti-Racism Learning and Leadership
  - Support and direction for internal M.A.S.S. Anti-Racism work
- Develop and endorse shared language and core resources
- Decide focus and structure for support & learning, e.g., mid-winter, Exec Institute, Roundtables

#### The Planning Committee

Supported by a three-member planning team, the [15-member Planning Committee](#) has met monthly since November and is composed of both superintendents and assistant superintendents. Five of its members also serve on the Standing Committee to ensure effective coordination and communication. Its primary responsibilities are:

- Plan Standing Committee Agendas
- Research Anti-Racism Frameworks & Resources
- Recommend shared language and core resources
- Research Structures & Supports for Implementation
- Recommend focus and structures for support and learning
- Recommend and Support Feedback Structures & Systems

The work of the committees is supported by a three-member planning team and is being shared with M.A.S.S. membership - and feedback sought - through the M.A.S.S. Newsletters, Roundtables and

all-member convenings including the Mid-Winter and Spring Conferences and the Summer Executive Institute.

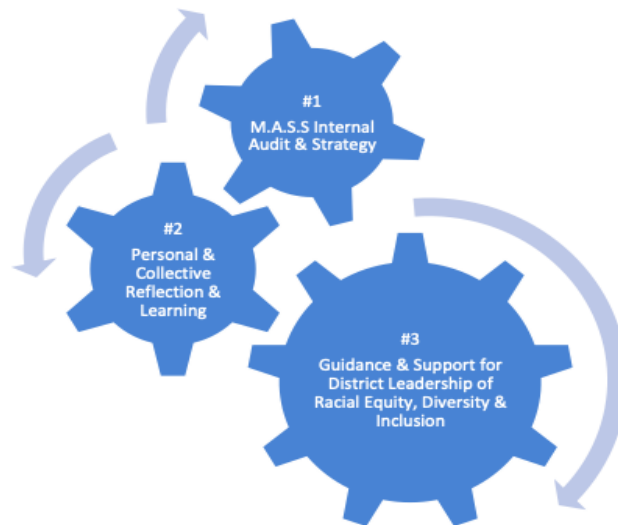
### The Strategy and Roadmap

The urgent, long-term work ahead to achieve the M.A.S.S. goals will require a strategy and roadmap - one that will evolve as M.A.S.S. leaders, superintendents, assistant superintendents and other partners embark on it and learn as we travel. Together, we will continually assess the successes and failures we experience and make the changes needed to ensure that our journey has a real and enduring impact on the experience of children and adults in the Commonwealth’s public schools.

We recognize that the urgency of addressing racial equity, diversity and inclusion work demands that M.A.S.S. “build the airplane as it is flown.” That said, M.A.S.S. is working now to secure resources for a comprehensive equity audit of M.A.S.S. policies, practices and programs. Supported by external expertise, the equity audit is intended to provide the foundation for a focused short- and long-term strategic plan for achieving racial equity, diversity and inclusion in the Commonwealth’s schools. That strategic plan will guide revisions and refinements to the roadmap outlined below.

We are now planning three simultaneous, mutually reinforcing tracks of work. Completion of all three tracks is required if we are to achieve substantial and tangible results for students.

### Three Simultaneous, Mutually Reinforcing Tracks of Work



### **Track #1 M.A.S.S. Internal Racial Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Audit and Strategy Development**

We in M.A.S.S. will be reaching our destination when: A transparent, organization-wide equity audit has been completed and a strategic plan is being implemented, reviewed and revised, as needed, to achieve racial equity, diversity and inclusion in the Commonwealth’s schools.

For M.A.S.S. itself to achieve its goal of becoming “an exemplary anti-racist, diverse and inclusive organization”, its officers, staff and members will need to assess current governance structures and policies, as well as all of its operations, professional learning programs, and services to identify where they fall short of that goal. M.A.S.S. will engage external expertise and support to help design and implement the audit process to identify gaps between current and desired state. The audit will lead to the development of a strategic plan that will define the details of what its goal of “prioritizing anti-racist practice” will mean for M.A.S.S. mission, governance, culture, operations and programs going forward.

<b>M.A.S.S. PROGRAMS, POLICIES &amp; PRACTICES TO BE EXAMINED</b>				
<u>Mission, Governance &amp; Values</u>	<u>Operations</u>	<u>Professional Learning and Convening</u>	<u>Programs</u>	<u>Other</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Executive Committee</li> <li>● Committees               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Legislative</li> <li>○ Professional Development</li> <li>○ REDI</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Roundtables</li> <li>● USN (Urban Supt Network)*</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Budget</li> <li>● Hiring</li> <li>● Vendors</li> <li>● Communication</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Summer Institute</li> <li>● Mid-Winter Conference</li> <li>● Spring Conference</li> <li>● Joint MASC-M.A.S.S.</li> <li>● Joint MASS-CUE</li> <li>● Women’s Leadership (WELN)</li> <li>● GS-21 (Global Studies-Skills Committee)</li> <li>● PD Offerings &amp; Webinars</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● NSIP (Induction)</li> <li>● ASLS (Ass’t Supts)</li> <li>● Aspiring Supts</li> <li>● LLP (Leadership Licensure)</li> <li>● IDEAS (Initiatives for Developing Equity &amp; Achievement for Students)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● MIAA (Massachusetts Interscholastic Athletic Assoc)</li> <li>● DESE               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Influence 100</li> <li>○ USN (Urban Supt Network)*</li> </ul> </li> <li>● MASC</li> </ul>

\* (USN) Urban Superintendent Network is a structure originally established by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) and supported by M.A.S.S.

**First Steps for Track #1:**

**What and by When?**

- Engage an external provider to support an organization-wide equity audit and strategy development process - by September 2021
- Develop and administer a research-based, Association-wide survey(s) of members’ experiences and perceptions of M.A.S.S. policies, programs and practices as they relate to equity, diversity and inclusion - by November 2021

**Track #2 M.A.S.S. and District Leaders’ Reflection and Learning through Action about Racial Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion**

Personal and collective work of reflection and learning - and learning through action - is the foundational starting point for everyone. That said, one’s journey through the *Awareness Zone*, through the *Learning Zone* and deep into the *Action and Growth Zone* need not be complete before beginning the other two tracks of work. For every leader the goal is taking “informed action” as quickly as possible because our students cannot wait for us to know everything we could know: we must learn by doing.

We in M.A.S.S. will be reaching our destination when: every superintendent/assistant and M.A.S.S. leader

- Has moved deep into the “action and growth zone” of anti-racist leadership
- Knows that the work will not end: that they will continue to make mistakes and discover challenges that will, periodically, lead them back to the “awareness” and “learning” zones - with humility and resolve



We believe no progress will be made toward our goals without personal and collective reflection and learning. To become an *anti-racist leader*, each of us - and ultimately our leadership teams, schools, districts, and association - need to move through an *awareness zone* where we have a limited sense of how racism works into a *learning zone* where we actively seek out opportunities to learn the “why, what and how” of the ways racism works at unconscious, individual and systemic levels. From this zone, we push ourselves into an *action and growth zone* where action produces learning and growth, and that learning and growth, in turn, yield more effective action. We know that **the journey is not linear; it is iterative:** we and our leadership teams will learn along the way - often through our actions - that we need to return to earlier beliefs and behaviors in earlier zones to learn more. We know, too, that **each of us starts in a different place, and where we start is far less important than that we are on an on-going, continuous journey armed with determination and a sense of urgency.** It should be noted, too, that the path through the zones looks different for educators of color than it does for white educators. For descriptors of the knowledge and behaviors typical in each zone, please see [Journey to Anti-Racist Leadership](#).

**For Track #2, M.A.S.S. will provide on-going opportunities for members to reflect and learn with and from colleagues and publish resource guides on leadership strategies and professional development resources and providers.**

Recommended leadership strategies are likely to include, among other actions:

- Working closely with the leadership team, including principals, on assessing the current state, planning action, and managing pushback

- Developing and using personal and district core values as the foundation for anti-racism work
- Embedding the district’s racial equity, diversity and inclusion work in the district’s overall Strategy for Improvement and school improvement plans
- Attending to the cultural, adaptive aspects of the work

When identifying professional development resources to recommend, M.A.S.S. will prioritize those that are consistent with best practices in professional development.<sup>3</sup>

### First Steps for Track #2:

#### What and by When?

- Provide on-going opportunities for members to reflect and learn with and from colleagues - on-going
- Publish an initial resource guide to leadership strategies - by October 2021
- Publish an initial guidebook describing professional development resources and providers recommended by members and demonstrated to have had a positive impact - by October 2021

### Track #3 Guidance and Support for District Leaders to take effective action to advance Racial Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion



We in M.A.S.S. will be reaching our destination when:

1. Common Framework and Resources
  - All superintendents have access to a common framework and set of tested processes, tools and measures they can customize to their district context in order to lead their racial equity, diversity, and inclusion work
  - All superintendents have support to understand and use the common set of resources well with their leadership teams and in the context of their particular district
2. Effective District strategies for achieving racial equity, diversity and inclusion
  - All superintendents have support and guidance to develop and/or refine their strategy for leading racial equity, diversity and inclusion in their district within the context of their district’s core values and District Strategy/District Improvement Plan

<sup>3</sup> Learning Policy Institute (see also Learning Forward’s new draft standards for Professional Learning [HERE](#))

- All superintendents have support and guidance to implement their strategy and manage internal and external resistance effectively
  - All districts are implementing, assessing and revising thoughtful strategies
3. Impact on Adults and Students
- The strategies are working: there is greater racial equity, diversity and inclusion in schools<sup>4</sup>

**For track #3, a comprehensive, curated set of guidance and recommended resources will be identified and made available to every district leader in the Commonwealth; support will be provided to use them to develop and implement effective strategies and manage pushback.**

Assumptions: three assumptions will guide the development of these resources:



1. To reduce duplication of effort and competing demands on district leaders, M.A.S.S. will seek to complement and **leverage DESE frameworks and resources**, whenever appropriate
2. **Guidance and resources will be customized** for different district contexts, i.e., stage of the work, kind of district and community<sup>5</sup>
3. Once the recommended resources have been identified, M.A.S.S. will **prioritize implementation support** designed to help district leaders identify their starting point, develop their strategies for their path forward, and troubleshoot the inevitable implementation challenges that will ensue
  - Implementation support will include exploration of leadership strategies well-aligned with the district's goals
  - A major form of implementation support is likely to be **facilitated peer networks**

#### A Common Statewide Framework for Equity

We recognize the potential power of a common statewide framework to use to design, prioritize and

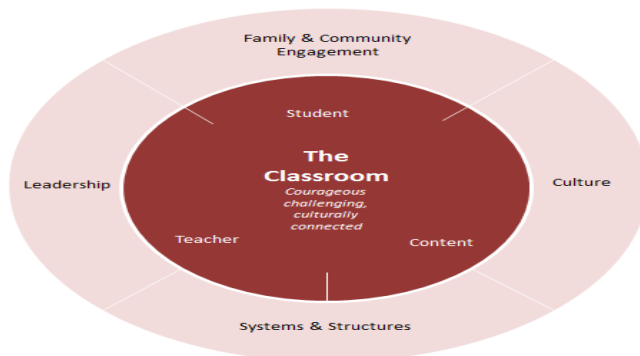
<sup>4</sup> M.A.S.S. REDI must identify and propose measures of success that both DESE and M.A.S.S. can embrace.

<sup>5</sup> Many leaders believe that different district demographics require different strategies to achieve equity. Even though M.A.S.S. research may lead to recommending many of the same resources for all districts regardless of demographics, it seems appropriate to group districts by demographics at this point in the initiative.



monitor the work on racial equity, diversity, and inclusion. We are considering a Framework developed at Harvard’s Graduate School of Education. Known as **RIDES** ([Reimagining Integration: Diverse and Equitable Schools Project](#)), it is a comprehensive, tested approach to assessing equity gaps in schools and designing actions that address them. RIDES also comes with a set of public domain, online materials and videos to support its implementation. Finally, RIDES is the framework being used in DESE’s *Influence 100* initiative designed to build a pipeline for future superintendents of color in the Commonwealth.

RIDES’ systemic approach [here](#) is centered on the classroom and the instructional core and recognizes the power of culture to shape the experiences of students and staff within and beyond the classroom:



The RIDES framework reflects four broad outcomes for all students, called the **ABCD's**:

- High **ACADEMICS** for all students
- A sense of **BELONGING** for all (so no students have to check their culture at the door)
- A **COMMITMENT** to dismantling racism
- Valuing **DIVERSITY** in thought and in people

The ABCD outcome framework is implemented with the help of several tools:

- RIDES Equity Improvement Cycle [here](#)
- RIDES/Panorama Equity and Inclusion Survey [here](#)
- RIDES Progress Assessment [here](#)

The RIDES Framework would likely need to be supplemented or augmented. For example, the “liberatory design” feature of the [Leading for Equity Framework](#) developed by the National Equity Project offers a powerful approach to thinking through the “why, what and how” of collaborating to design alternatives to current practice.

#### Differentiating Recommended Resources by Kind of District and Stage of the Work

In some cases, district leaders will need other tools to address their specific district context and stage of work. For example, districts with little racial diversity that are in the early stages of their racial equity, diversity and inclusion work will likely need to focus attention on curriculum review and revision. This may be the most urgent starting point in order to begin work around staff and student racial literacy. Therefore, a supplemental framework focusing more deeply on curriculum may be recommended. Similarly, a district already doing a lot of anti-racism and inclusion work but not yet getting much traction

may need to pose very specific questions about resource allocation. In that case, the [Dimensions of Resource Equity](#) (Alliance for Resource Equity) could be recommended to help district leaders assess the state of equity across ten key dimensions of equity and excellence<sup>6</sup>.

Below is a preliminary sketch of what will eventually become a web-based tool. It illustrates the range and scope of resources envisioned. When complete, **each box in the grid will have one or more recommended resources to match the kind of district and the stage of its work.**

M.A.S.S. RECOMMENDED RESOURCES FOR LEADING DISTRICT RACIAL EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION WORK.....A roadmap to explore together, not a recipe to follow.....

	Type of Guidance & Support	Stage of the Work		
		Doing Some of the Work	Doing a lot of the Work	Doing a lot & getting results for students
Core Framework for All		RIDES (Reimagining Integration: Diverse and Equitable Schools) <a href="#">here</a> Leading for Equity's <i>Libratory Design</i> : mindsets and modes to design for equity <a href="#">here</a>		
Core Measures of Progress		RIDES/Panorama Equity and Inclusion Survey <a href="#">here</a> RIDES Progress Assessment <a href="#">here</a>		
Core Leadership Strategies & Professional Development <sup>7</sup>		World Trust's <a href="#">Racial Equity Learning Modules</a> : <a href="#">videos</a> and <a href="#">curriculum</a> UnboundEd's <i>Disrupting Inequity: Having Brave Conversations about Bias</i> <a href="#">Toolkit</a>		
Very Racially Diverse District	Focus Areas and Supplemental Resources		<a href="#">Dimensions of Resource Equity</a>	
	Implementation Support			
Somewhat Racially Diverse District	Focus Areas and Supplemental Resources			
	Implementation Support			
Little Racial Diversity in District	Focus Areas and Supplemental Resources			
	Implementation Support			

<sup>6</sup> The Resource Equity Diagnostic is a tool introduced in the *New Superintendent Induction Program*.

<sup>7</sup> There will need to be an intentional link here between Track #2 and Track #3 work: the resources recommended for leadership strategies and professional development here in Track #3 should overlap substantially with those identified to support the learning described in Track #2.

## Implementation Support

Once the frameworks, tools, measures, leadership strategies and professional development resources have been recommended and the measures of success identified, it will be critical to have in place a system of support for effective implementation. District leaders need on-going support to make wise choices about starting points and, even more importantly, support and guidance along the way for managing the inevitable internal and external pushback and challenges they encounter. Our early thinking is that peer-led and -facilitated networks can be the foundation for such support, assuming that peer facilitators and leaders get strong, sustained support. We look forward to exploring with M.A.S.S. members and friends the feasibility of establishing such networks.

### **First Steps for Track #3:**

#### What and by When?

- Determine the recommended framework by September 2021
- Develop the process by which M.A.S.S. will identify potential customized resources - by October 2021
- Choose a limited number to recommend and support - by January 2022
- In collaboration with DESE, identify quantitative measures of success - by ?

### **A FINAL WORD**

M.A.S.S. is eager to work with its members and partners to develop and refine the action plan for the M.A.S.S. REDI Strategy. This will be an iterative process: we will learn, make mistakes, learn from them, and regularly share what we learn. We have never attempted something this challenging and ambitious - nor this important. We need your hearts and minds to make this work. We are in it for the long term. And we will have each others' backs as we embark on this collective work together.