Creating Communities of Care

How Charter Schools can Develop Systems that Support Student Mental Health

October 2022

NATIONAL CHARTER SCHOOL RESOURCE CENTER

The National Charter School Resource Center (NCSRC) provides technical assistance to federal grantees and resources supporting charter sector stakeholders working across the charter school life cycle. NCSRC is funded by the U.S. Department of Education and managed by Manhattan Strategy Group in partnership with WestEd.

This report was produced by NCSRC in partnership with lead authors Andrea Browning and Adrian Larbi-Cherif, Ph.D.

Suggested citation: National Charter School Resource Center. (2022). *Creating Communities of Care: How Charter Schools can Develop Systems that Support Student Mental Health*. Manhattan Strategy Group.

This publication was produced in whole or in part with funds from the U.S. Department of Education under contract number GS10F0201T. The content does not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the U.S. Department of Education, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the federal government.

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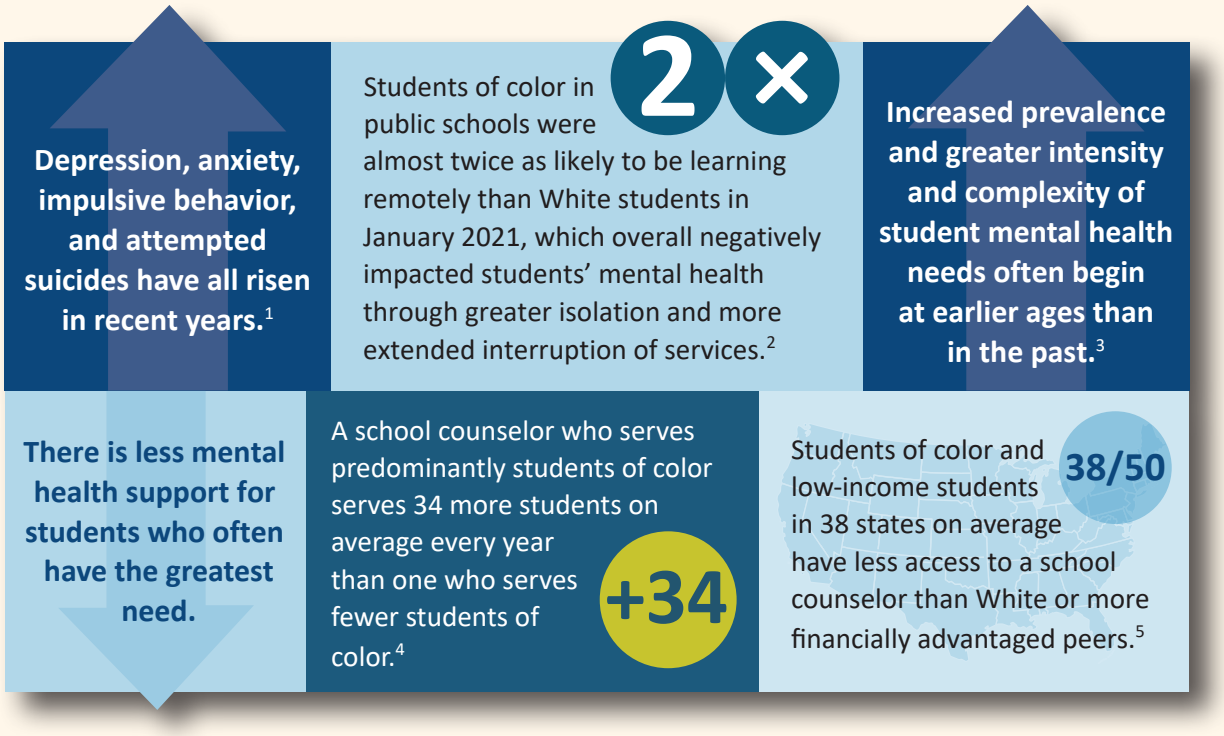
Introduction

Charter schools, as public schools, are responsible for creating learning conditions and wraparound supports that prioritize the social, emotional, and mental well-being needs of those in their school community. Supporting student well-being is a comprehensive, schoolwide endeavor, and it is vital that it is integrated into all aspects of education. Charter schools are uniquely positioned to serve the mental health and well-being of students. While they may have different access to mental and behavioral health resources than traditional public schools, they also have the ability to act nimbly and make swift changes to serve their students. Better understanding the research and validated approaches related to mental health and well-being for students can help guide charter leaders in making decisions about how to best use resources to support healthy school environments.

Why This Matters Right Now

The ongoing pandemic has underscored the importance of providing mental health supports for all students, and particularly so for those most acutely impacted by the pandemic.



[1] Office of the Surgeon General, 2021
[2] National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2021
[3] Hertz & Barrios, 2021
[4] Education Trust, 2019
[5] Education Trust, 2019

Children may now be experiencing other aspects of insecurity as they react to adults' difficulties and stress within the current uncertainties wrought by the pandemic. For many students, personal and family hardships during the past two years have had a profound effect on their ability to participate in school. Students' personal grief from losing loved ones to the pandemic has been compounded in some schools by a sense of collective grief. Communities with a higher incidence of COVID-19 have also experienced higher levels of stress, anxiety, and disconnection than communities less impacted by COVID-19.

Students in many of the nation's public schools, both traditional and charter, continue to experience increased unpredictability wrought by school closures and by additional quarantines or school absences because of community transmission. Disruptions in some schools have included staff shortages, reductions in school programming (including extracurriculars like sports and clubs), unexpected school closures, and the like. Additionally, the Center for Education Data Research found that staffing shortages (including janitors, nurses, special educators, and teachers for English learners) are markedly more pronounced in districts with higher poverty rates.[6]

Together, these added strains can impede the mental, emotional, and social factors that naturally support children's development, particularly for historically marginalized students and those in under-resourced schools. Given these stark realities in education, it is even more imperative that traditional public school and charter school leaders work to increase and maintain access to school-based services, including those that impact mental health and social and emotional learning (SEL) and well-being, for all students and families.

A Framework for Organizing Mental Health and Well-being Supports

To provide for the range of social, emotional, mental health, and well-being supports needed for healthy learning environments, charter school leaders can organize their efforts into three categories of school support:

1. Creating a **welcoming, affirming environment** that **enables a sense of safety** for every student

2. Providing **responsive mental health, well-being, and SEL supports** for all students

3. Partnering with the community to **extend mental health and well-being supports**

[6] Goldhaber & Gratz, 2021

How to Use This Resource

This resource focuses on improving student mental health and well-being to help set the foundation for school community wellness.[7] Charter leaders can use this resource to learn about the research base and strategies for comprehensive student and community well-being that is aligned with the U.S. Department of Education's Return to School Roadmap. This resource also provides guidance on addressing the social, emotional, and mental health challenges that have been induced and exacerbated by the pandemic. In this regard, it is crucial that these systems prioritize equity and attend to the needs of students and families who have been affected the most by the pandemic as well as families who have been historically marginalized.

Section 1 of this resource provides a summary of key research that links improved mental health and well-being with positive outcomes for students and schools. This section also includes attention to educator wellbeing and equity considerations for student wellbeing. Section 2 unpacks the framework by providing strategies for comprehensive and responsive support for mental health and well-being, aligned resources, reflection questions, and spotlights of three charter organizations: Valor Collegiate Academy, Rocky Mountain Prep, and Uplift Education. The spotlights illustrate exemplary ways that charter schools are supporting student mental health, well-being, and student learning. The resources, strategies, and examples focus on the needs of the most marginalized students and communities, including students of color. In Section 3, the resource includes guidance for how school leaders can apply continuous improvement to create systems that support communities of care or refine currently existing systems.

[7] CASEL, n.d.-a.; CASEL, 2021

Section 1: Summary of Key Research Linking Mental Health and Well-being to School Outcomes

To create, maintain, or improve upon evidence-based systems of care, charter leaders would benefit from having a foundational understanding of the developmental and cognitive science behind how student mental health relates to learning. Comprehensive systems of care honor that SEL is central to all learning and is most effective when integrated schoolwide. SEL refers to the "process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions."[8] Further, learning science indicates that students' individual and collective experiences and characteristics, including exposure to trauma, can affect their readiness to learn. Charter leaders also need to consider how to equitably address the SEL and mental health needs of their students when planning and implementing mental health and well-being supports.

Some key research findings about supporting student mental health and well-being follow. A more comprehensive summary of the evidence base related to the connection between mental health and learning, SEL, school climate and culture, learning and the brain, and how trauma affects learning are in Appendix I.

PRIORITIZING EDUCATOR WELL-BEING

Additionally, educator well-being is a critical component of creating communities of care in schools and an urgent priority for charter leaders. A recent study found that more than one-third of educators among the 171 educators interviewed met the threshold for a diagnosis of depression or anxiety. Further, one in five of these teachers exhibited significant symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder.[9] Teachers, like students, can experience a brain-based fear or stress reaction that elevates their heart rate and blood pressure and may spur an emotional reaction. In fact, teachers themselves may be dealing with the effects of trauma in their own lives and may also be experiencing what is known as vicarious or secondary trauma because of their regular exposure to traumatized students.[10] This personal or secondary exposure to trauma may lead to changes in teacher affect and behavior, such as being in a persistent state of arousal or reactivity, which can lead to teacher burnout or exiting the profession. Further, students and teachers may collectively face trauma that affects all members of a community, as we have seen with the ongoing hardship of dealing with COVID-19. This kind of community-level trauma can show up in educational environments in many ways, such as by creating a strained school environment in which students chronically do not feel safe in school or teachers are facing burnout. This brief video from Uplift Education (featured in a spotlight later in the paper) presents the challenges and possibilities of providing for educator well-being. Although this paper focuses almost exclusively on student well-being, it is also important to include staff well-being into plans and strategies for schoolwide approaches to well-being.[11]

[8] CASEL, n.d.-b

[9] The New Orleans Trauma-Informed Schools Learning Collaborative, 2021

[10] American Counseling Association, n.d.

[11] CASEL, 2021

Research Summary: Positive impacts from cultivating student mental health and well-being.

SEL	Positive Relationships	Healthy Learning Environments
• Students who receive social and emotional support and prevention services are more likely to achieve better academic outcomes.[12] • When compared to students who did not participate in schoolwide SEL programs, nearly 24% more students who had participated in SEL programs exhibited increased pro-social behaviors and reported decreased levels of distress.[13] • Research suggests that students' social and emotional development is inextricably linked with their cognitive development and academic learning. Effective schoolwide SEL programs can not only improve SEL skills in the short term but can also boost student achievement in the long term, with multiple meta-analyses estimating an 11-percentile-point gain in achievement on average for participating students.[14]	• Positive relationships between and among students and teachers, as well as positive emotions such as interest in learning, tend to make the mind more receptive to learning. On the contrary, negative emotions like anxiety and self-doubt can inhibit the brain's ability to process information and to learn.[15] • Emotionally supportive teachers can help students perceive that their peers are more supportive, which is in turn associated with students more likely to self-regulate and stay on task.[16] • Students who feel connected to at least one trusted adult in school have a stronger sense of well-being.[17] Trusted adults tend to engage youths in conversations that involve support role modeling, encouragement, and practical guidance that helps young people move to adulthood.	• When compared with their peers, students who have high levels of well-being feel greater connection to their school, have better academic performance, demonstrate more pro-social behaviors, and report less bullying and victimization in school.[18] • When an individual perceives a threat, an individual's limbic system (the amygdala, specifically) signals a flood of stress hormones including cortisol and adrenaline to be released.[19] This stress response may inhibit a student's ability to learn and to self-regulate their behavior. • Exposure to trauma or adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) can undermine an individual's sense of safety, emotional self-regulation, healthy social interactions, and can also affect a student's learning.[20] Students who have experienced three or more ACEs are more likely to experience chronic absenteeism, exhibit behavioral problems, and are more likely to experience academic failure.[21]

What can leaders do?

Charter leaders are critical to creating school communities that care for educators' well-being. Leaders of a school culture that includes a commitment to adult well-being might integrate personal and collective well-being practices into structures and routines for collaboration. For example, leaders can begin and end trainings and staff meetings with mindfulness activities such as taking five deep breaths together, which can quickly and effectively create an intentional moment for educators to pause and check in with themselves. Additional leadership actions to foster well-being include things like creating time and space for educators to participate in professional learning communities focused on building supportive,

[12] Greenberg et al., 2003
[13] Durlak et al., 2011
[14] Mahoney et al., 2018
[15] Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018
[16] Ruzek et al., 2016
[17] Meltzer et al., 2016
[18] Arslan & Allen, 2020
[19] Goleman, 1995
[20] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, n.d.
[21] Carlson, 2019; Kaiser Permanente, n.d.

collaborative relationships or designating "wellness days" or early dismissal days for educators on a regular basis (e.g., one day a month). In some charter schools and networks, leaders may be able to work with local agencies to provide confidential mental health services, such as short-term counseling, to educators on school campuses.[22]

Why it's Important to Center Equity in Student Well-being and Mental Health

Creating true educational equity requires that public schools think beyond a one-size-fits-all approach to student well-being. In contexts that truly provide for equity, "each child receives what they need to develop to their full academic and social potential," which involves "ensuring equally high outcomes for all participants by removing the predictability of success or failures that currently correlates with any social or cultural factor."[23]

There is growing research evidence that historically marginalized students are more likely to be labeled in ways that are damaging, which can contribute to a negative self-image and reduced help-seeking.[24] Unmet mental health needs may manifest as behaviors viewed as problematic or defiant by education systems, which may lead to exclusionary discipline, lost instructional time, and significant disproportionality in referrals of students of color for special education services .[25] Additionally, implicit biases and deficit perspectives can contribute to educators responding more often to behavioral issues from students of color with exclusionary discipline actions. Consequently, exclusionary discipline practices contribute in part to inequitable outcomes for students of color in comparison to their White peers.[26] Therefore, creating equitable learning environments requires the recognition that an educator's interpretation of a student's behavior can be affected by their unexamined implicit biases along racial, socioeconomic, cultural, and linguistic lines. This then puts the impetus on educators to be proactive in creating equitable environments in which all students feel welcomed.[27]

[22] Check out this audiocast by WestEd for evidence on how one school has provided every educator with confidential, free access to a therapist during school hours.

[23] National Equity Project, n.d.

[24] Weist et al., 2019

[25] National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2020

[26] Losen & Martinez, 2020; U.S. Department of Education, 2021a

[27] Gullo et al., 2019

Section 2: Strategies to Support Welcoming Environments, Student Responsiveness, and Community Integration

The following pages provide examples of mental health and well-being strategies that characterize high-quality, evidence-based supports for students and school communities. The strategies included below are intended to provide charter leaders with some components and characteristics of supports that can improve student mental health and well-being described earlier in this paper. Strategies are organized based on the three categories of school support framed earlier in this resource:

1. Creating a **welcoming, affirming environment** that **enables a sense of safety** for every student

2. Providing **responsive mental health, well-being, and SEL supports** for all students

3. Partnering with the community to **extend mental health and well-being supports**

Each section begins with an illustration of the importance of the key area of school support, followed by examples of strategies that can help schools meet students' needs aligned to this area of support. Each section also includes a set of questions school leaders can use to better understand their own school's practices and needs within each area. Following these questions for practice, each section concludes with a snapshot of how one charter school or charter network is delivering related supports in their own local context.

Creating a Welcoming, Affirming Environment that Enables a Sense of Safety for Every Student

To create welcoming, affirming environments for all students, charter leaders need to implement strategies that create safety in their school and correspond with school and community values. This can be done through programmatic support and commitments that can shape the school climate and culture. As mentioned previously, providing safe and supportive environments can help students feel ready to learn, can support students in developing relationships and social skills supportive of learning, and can help students with self-regulation and self-awareness that is foundational to engaging in academic content.[28]

[28] Mahoney et al., 2018

The following strategies have been identified as important components of comprehensive approaches to creating welcoming and affirming environments to improve student mental health in schools:[29]

- **Culturally responsive practices** – providing students with opportunities to engage with course materials that reflect their experiences and cultural identities. Additionally, it is important that all students get to share about their lives and backgrounds, learn about each other's backgrounds, and value different cultural and linguistic identities.
- **Predictable routines** – providing students with predictable roles, routines, and orderly transitions between activities to help students feel safer in classrooms. It is also important to provide some autonomy as well as cues on how to participate in classroom activities.
- **Positive expectations** – setting high, positive academic expectations for all students. Students are provided with specific, constructive feedback to help them improve academically, socially, emotionally, and behaviorally.
- **Explicit SEL instruction** – providing frequent opportunities to develop, practice, and reflect on social emotional skills (e.g., relationship building) in ways that promote self-awareness, are developmentally appropriate, and are culturally responsive.
- **Supportive relationships** – providing regular opportunities for students to develop positive relationships with their peers, teachers, and other adults in the building to feel more connected, seen, and supported in their school community.
- **Self-care strategies** – incorporating additional holistic practices, such as mindfulness exercises, physical exercise and movement, meditation, yoga, and calming routines to promote self-regulation .

Students are more likely to feel safe, affirmed, and welcomed when they feel that the school community allows them to bring their full humanity to school and further develop their identities. It is crucial that educators recognize the power of language and aim to develop school climates that affirm students' developing identities and sense of belonging.

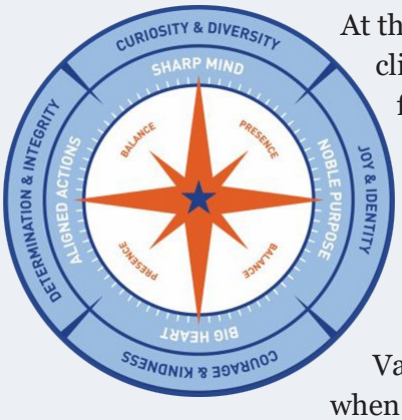
In considering how to make school more welcoming and affirming, charter leaders should ask their school community:

1. What does safety look and feel like?
2. What are the markers of a "safe" environment?
3. Whose safety is prioritized in our current school culture? Whose safety is not? How can this be resolved?
4. How do students and families see themselves reflected in the school environment?
5. Do students, families, and caregivers feel that they have a voice on school policies? Do staff? If not, how can this change?

[29] CASEL, 2021; U.S. Department of Education, 2021b; Yoder et al., 2021

Spotlight on Valor Collegiate Academy, TN

Valor Collegiate Academy, a charter school in Nashville, Tennessee, serving Grades 5 through 12, aims to develop sharp minds and big hearts for its middle and high school students. Since opening in 2014, Valor's goal is to help its students develop an appreciation for diversity, equity, and inclusion by being intentionally diverse by income and race. Additionally, Valor's discipline policies aim for restorative justice, relationship mending, and focusing on students getting realigned with their "true north," or greater purpose, rather than implementing exclusionary discipline practices.



At the center of its approach to developing a welcoming and affirming school climate and culture is Valor's Compass Model, which was developed by its founders to help students develop their "inner compass," or inner source of guidance for a purposeful life. The Compass Model consists of five interdependent domains as all members of the Valor community "aspire to consistently access and live from their True North, to balance their Sharp Mind and Big Heart, and to constantly work to Align their Actions to their Noble Purpose domains."

Valor's results have led them to be an innovator in the charter sector when it comes to academic achievement and supporting all students' mental health. Since opening in 2014, it has ranked in the top 5% of Tennessee schools in terms of growth and achievement, with Valor's students from lower socio-economic backgrounds outperforming their middle- and upper-income peers in the state of Tennessee. Furthermore, 64 schools have officially adopted the Compass Model to improve SEL and mental health in their schools in light of Valor's success.

The Compass Model leverages a holistic, project-based approach to students developing positive identities and aims to be responsive to each student's needs as they learn how to develop purpose, kindness, determination, and curiosity inside and outside of school. One central aspect of the Compass Model is the badge system. Students earn badges as they develop key disciplines, habits, and mindsets. As students progress from 5th grade to graduation, they earn badges that serve as key markers along their journey. Initially, students explore self-discovery, and by graduation they can develop skills that can result in service projects inside the school and in their communities. Ultimately, students have some autonomy to chart their own pathway through the Compass Model. This is also integrated into the academic curriculum where students get to choose which academic programs they take on, such as designing their own science project.

> "Honestly, it starts within. Safe spaces for adults create safe spaces for kids. You can't create safe spaces for kids when the adults perpetuate a system of engagement with each other of relational toxicity. It starts with beginning to notice for oneself things like where I am not taking care of myself, where I'm not living in integrity, and where I'm being called to grow. The natural consequence is being able to then start to see these things for students and begin to shepherd their own comprehensive development."
>
> *Taryn Sprayberry , Director of Strategic Partnerships*

Valor also helps create a welcoming and affirming environment by holding weekly peer groups of 15 to 20 students called

Compass Circles. These groups are facilitated by a mentor and involve opportunities for students to develop social-emotional skills around self-awareness and social awareness and develop a healthy identity through processing how they feel in relation to their core values. Compass Circles also provide students with opportunities to share with their peers what is going on in their lives and where they might need more support. Peers can resonate with what their peers share and provide positive, nurturing feedback. For example, if a student is struggling with their parents getting a divorce, their peers might share how they see perseverance in the student experiencing the challenging transition. For each of the following factors, survey data has shown that more than 80% of students report that Circles help them feel less alone, learn new ways to help their friends, and feel that what they say and do matters to others. In addition to student impact, approximately 80% of faculty report that the program has helped them change the way they think about emotions as well as learn new ways they can help their colleagues.

For additional resources on creating welcoming and affirming environments, see Appendix II.

Providing Responsive Mental Health, Well-being, and SEL Supports for all Students

A truly systematic approach to student well-being is proactive, responsive, and aligns with students' mental health, behavioral, social, and emotional strengths and needs.[30] Responsive well-being supports use data, community engagement, and student input to understand which strategies are most effective for individual students. There is no one-size-fits-all approach that is responsive to the learning needs of all students. Rather, charter school leaders must consider the needs of their particular school communities and the needs of individual students.

There are, however, some broad guidelines charter leaders can utilize to be responsive to students' needs. For example, school leaders should consider whether the supports offered to students signal that their identities are recognized, affirmed, and welcome. Additionally, schools can consider how to support students who have been adversely affected by the pandemic and may need to take on new roles at home. Responsive supports in this scenario could look like more frequent calls home to connect with families/caregivers and extended timelines for completing coursework. Schoolwide approaches to social and emotional programming can also provide students with opportunities to make decisions and resolve conflict. Additionally, it is important that schools are responsive to students' current and past experiences and make efforts to integrate restorative practices.[31] Some ways to create responsive supports include:

- **Culturally responsive practices** – implementing whole-school SEL efforts and academic supports that include the following qualities:
  - Recognize and value students' cultural identities and lived experiences as assets to be built upon;[32]
  - Build on students' prior knowledge and experiences when introducing new content;[33]
  - Value and support cultural pluralism; and

[30] U.S. Department of Education, 2021b

[31] Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Yoder et al., 2021

[32] Gay, 2013

[33] Hammond, 2014

  - Support skills linked to the development of positive identities and academic and social and emotional learning.[34]

- **Multitiered systems of support (MTSS)** – organizing multiple tiers of support that use data to identify and plan supports for whole-school needs, the needs of specific groups of students, and more intensive supports to meet the needs of individual students. Appendix III provides an example of an MTSS and strategies that can be applied at each tier.
- **Restorative circles and practices** – including healing-centered rituals and routines that often aim to resolve conflict by fostering collaborative support and centering student problem-solving. Examples of these routines include using restorative practices such as structured circles and protocols that give all parties in a conflict a voice in resolution rather than implementing exclusionary discipline policies.
- **Opportunities for student choice** – supporting students in making their own decisions within appropriate parameters to support decision-making and accountability for decisions and social interactions (e.g., students are allowed to design and execute their own academic projects).
- **Trauma-informed professional learning** – becoming a trauma-informed school through ongoing professional development and supports that enable educators to be consistent, predictable, and respectful to students. Providing teachers with opportunities to learn about the signs of trauma in students as well as specific strategies that avoid re-traumatizing students in moments of acute reaction.

Understanding Tiered Approaches to Student Well-being

MTSS are being increasingly incorporated in charter schools to respond to students' social, emotional, academic, and behavioral needs. MTSS use academic data, behavioral data, SEL data, etc., to engender a schoolwide culture that supports the whole child. School teams analyze data to identify student needs and plan and deliver services that meet individual and collective student needs. Many charter schools already utilize parts of MTSS.[35]

School leaders can use MTSS to organize academic, behavioral, and social-emotional interventions based on three "tiers" or levels of support: universal (all students), targeted (small groups of students), and intensive (individual students). MTSS models typically use universal screening processes to identify needs for individual students and groups of students.[36] Need identification then drives the problem-solving process regarding intervention based on the level of student need. Students can move in and out of tiers based on their needs and progress. Several studies have demonstrated that MTSS are an effective means of increasing student achievement as well as improving social and behavioral outcomes for young people when implemented with evidence-based programming.[37] See Appendix III for an example of an MTSS approach focused on improving student mental health and well-being.

[34] Diamond et al., 2004

[35] Check out this resource to learn more about MTSS and how to implement this approach.

[36] Batsche et al., 2007

[37] Stoiber & Gettinger, 2016

In considering the extent to which programming and supports in their school are responsive to students and families, charter leaders should ask themselves the following questions:

1. How have members of our school community played a role in selecting the supports and programming available to students?
2. What academic curriculum is in use and why? Who wrote the curriculum, and is their perspective representative of the school community?
3. What SEL programming is currently in our school? How effective is it at serving our students and families? Have we considered the SEL programming and strategies through the lens of diversity, equity, and inclusion? Has a diverse group of school and community partners been given an opportunity to understand what social and emotional supports are in place and why ? (See 4 Common Questions on Integrating SEL & Behavior in MTSS.)
4. Are there systems in place to identify and address behavioral, environmental, and individual student learner factors that might impact learning? Are educators given opportunities to reflect on their teaching practice to identify these factors?
5. Are there data management and analysis systems and routines in place (e.g., universal screening) to disaggregate data and identify which students need additional SEL and mental health support?
6. How does our school respond to students who are exhibiting distress? Are these additional supports effective? How do we know?
7. How do we support our students' families' mental health? If we aren't currently serving families, what else could we be doing?

Spotlight on Rocky Mountain Prep, CO

Rocky Mountain Preparatory (RMP), a subgrantee of Colorado's Department of Education's Charter School Program's State Entity grant, has four campuses that serve children in pre-K through 5th grades in the Denver, Colorado, area. Educators at RMP know that student well-being is connected to family well-being. The importance of supporting students' needs in the context of their families has been even more critical in this time of continued hardship during the pandemic.

The COVID-19 crisis has led RMP to redouble its family engagement efforts. To better understand what wraparound supports were most critical to students, the leadership team at RMP conducted an audit, alongside a social worker, to gauge student and family well-being needs. The data that resulted from this audit suggested a need for distributed leadership among the RMP staff, increased funding for mental health supports, clearer awareness of community resources, and timely responsiveness to better support student and family well-being.

Given that student hardship is connected to family hardship, RMP recognizes that all staff play an important role in ensuring basic needs are met so students can reach their full potential academically and in life. RMP staff and educators who hold deep relationships with families can submit a referral, and a team made up of teachers, social workers, and operations staff can identify the quickest stopgap supports and work alongside the family to connect them with long-term resources. For example, a teacher may learn from a student that a guardian has lost a job and the family is experiencing food insecurity. In this case, the teacher would be able to submit a referral to the Family Advocacy Support Team (FAST), which has access to school resources to create an "emergency stopgap" to give the family up to $300 in cash assistance to help with food, laundry support, clothing, or other needs while also supporting the family in finding employment.

> "A couple of years ago I noticed RMP passing out flyers about DACA [Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals] and I was intrigued to learn more about it. Although I'm an undocumented mother, RMP made me feel safe enough to reach out to the FAST team about the program. They shared resources with me and directed me to a Zoom session. This allowed me to connect with an immigration lawyer who said I would qualify for DACA if I obtained my GED. As for now, I'm in school working toward getting my GED. I want to show my kids that anything is possible. I'm grateful to the RMP FAST team for helping me overcome my fear and setting an example for my kids.""
>
> *RMP parent*

To make this responsiveness possible, RMP has set aside flexible funds of approximately $20,000 at each campus that school communities may leverage for emergency family health and well-being needs. The RMP leadership team has developed and shared guidance to help campuses determine how these flexible student and family-oriented funds may be used. In the 2020–2021 school year, FAST teams supported nearly 125 families with resources for basic needs around food, shelter, mental health, and more. As of December 2021, zero students who had received FAST support had unenrolled from school.

In addition to the social and emotional supports students receive in schoolwide SEL programming, relationships with parents and caregivers are a foundational building block that helps RMP respond to community needs. RMP leadership and staff recognize that the adult-to-child relationship in school communities may be one of the most critical supports for a student in creating a

responsive connection to school. In addition, a strong homeroom culture, which includes a ritual of "check in" and "check back" (following up) when student well-being needs arise, undergirds their efforts to see, acknowledge, and respond to the health, mental health, and well-being needs of individuals. Building strong connections allows for vulnerability and trust to develop such that the school is not just a place of learning but a place of community, safety, well-being, and connection to resources to help students and families thrive.

For additional resources on providing responsive mental health and well-being supports, see Appendix II.

Partnering With the Community to Extend Mental Health and Well-being Supports

Many charter schools function as an informal community center and as such are a critical touchpoint for students and families as they navigate their own mental health and well-being needs. Charter schools are better able to offer a continuum of care for students that includes wraparound well-being supports when they intentionally leverage community assets.[38] For example, charter schools may bring in services from community health and mental health providers to families at no cost or low cost. Similarly, charter schools may be able to provide well-rounded SEL programming and other supports in extended day or after-school settings through community-based organizations such as Boys and Girls Clubs.

Charter leaders can increase the availability of behavioral health services to both students and their families by making schools available as community-based sites for health care provision. As part of their MTSS, charter schools may identify students who would benefit from individualized counseling or other mental health supports. Given the recent increased need for mental health services and historically insufficient access to school-based psychologists and interventionists in public school settings, charter schools can close this gap through partnerships with local organizations and agencies. For example, behavioral health services offered through local public agencies may be difficult for families to find and access, though schools can serve as a bridge to these services by bringing mental health providers into the building for whole-school and intensive programming.

The range of partnerships appropriate for each school will vary based on both student and family needs and on the availability of programming and services in the community. Some strategies to consider include:

- **Community engagement as a path to partnerships** – engaging with parents to determine which community-based organizations they are already connected to and consider joint opportunities to work with these organizations.[39]
- **Formalize partnerships with community health organizations** – forming partnerships with additional care providers require memoranda of understanding that make clear the unique contribution of each group and articulate how school-provided and partner-provided services will be aligned in delivery.[40]

[38] CASEL, 2021

[39] National Charter School Resource Center, 2021

[40] National Association of School Psychologists, 2021

- **Focus on the core principles of collective impact theory** – recognizing that greater efficiency and impact can be achieved when partners share goals and align assets and expertise instead of continuing to work separately.
- **Routines and expectations for collaborating with partners** – developing routines and expectations for data sharing and engaging in regular progress updates between the school and external care providers so school-based supports can be informed by supports provided by partner organizations.
- **Partner with parents** – finding innovative ways to get parents and other caregivers into the school building, such as offering a range of well-being services to families through school-based activities.[41]

In considering how to offer mental health and well-being supports that are appropriate for the school community and utilize community assets, charter leaders should ask themselves:

1. What data sources can we access to determine challenges our students and families are currently facing? What are the most prevalent needs that the data reveal?
2. Are we involving parents and caregivers in mental health and wellness efforts? How so? Can we deepen this engagement?
3. What services are beyond the scope of what our current staff can provide? Are there community organizations that can provide these services?
4. Do staff members, school leaders, and parents/guardians have existing relationships with community-based organizations that have offerings aligned to our school population's needs? If not, who can we partner with?
5. What routines are in place to coordinate efforts with community partners? How do we ensure these partnerships extend the mental health and well-being supports we already provide?

What resources can we leverage to extend the capacity of partner organizations to serve our community of students and families? For example, do we have before- or after-school offerings when parents are likely to be in the building with students? Do we have consistent and reliable funding sources that can be used for counseling and other services with external providers? If not, how can we identify consistent, reliable funding?

[41] CASEL, 2021; National Charter School Resource Center, 2020

Spotlight on Uplift Education, TX

At Uplift Education, a network of 45 public charter schools serving students in pre-K through 12th grade in the Dallas-Fort Worth area in Texas, leaders utilize a combination of school and community-based assets to provide health and mental health services to students and their families. The Uplift leadership team recognizes that many of the well-being challenges facing children are rooted in family challenges. By expanding their offerings to students and families to include community health services, Uplift is creating a new health and mental health delivery model that can attend to both student and family well-being.

Dr. John Gasko joined Uplift as the Chief Wellbeing Officer shortly before the COVID-19 crisis began. Through his research and experiences in previous roles focused on community well-being, he has observed how health care, including mental health care, is typically triaged, or treated as something that needs to be referred to an external organization. According to Dr. Gasko, "Any time you create distance between a problem and a referral is a missed opportunity." Instead of relying on external referrals for mental health and well-being services, Uplift has made use of public-private partnerships that enable health and mental health services to be delivered to students and their families, essentially closing the gap between identification of a need and a referral for help by providing services in school.

Understanding that the cost of health care and mental health care makes it out of reach for many families, Uplift participates in several public-private partnerships funded by the service providers, which connect their families to services they need beyond those available in school. In this "reimagined" health care delivery model, Uplift has a Medical Director who is a physician within a local medical group. They partner with the Uplift network to broaden families' access to primary care. This medical group enables families to access health care for free, typically by leveraging Medicaid coverage or community programming through Children's Health. Because of this partnership, Uplift has been able to maintain a mobile fleet of primary care providers that will set up in communities and not charge families for services.

Uplift Education has been thoughtful about the roles needed on each campus to create a continuum of nursing and health care services. Each campus has its own nurse as well as a dedicated social and behavioral counselor. In addition, each campus has a licensed mental health professional whose work is largely driven by referrals from others in the school community. This staffing structure enables the Uplift team to provide for students' needs within a community that can follow up and maintain communication with other care providers. This structure enables school-based health and mental health professionals to actively provide well-being support to students, both individually and collectively.

Additional public-private partnerships have enabled Uplift to create responsive student, family, and staff supports by funding two family therapists who work across the school network. If the campus-based behavioral counselor at an Uplift school determines that a student's well-being requires a more family-based approach, the Uplift team can dispatch one of their family therapists in the network. Staff at Uplift are also able to benefit from the health and mental health ecosystem that the network is building. Through an Employee Assistance Program called "Lifeworks," Uplift staff have access to immediate 24-hour counseling services.

Consistent with an understanding that referrals for mental health care may not result in access to services for those who need them, Uplift has made additional offerings available directly to families. As a new offering, Uplift also intends to make available, through a third-party provider, access to up to six free counseling sessions for students, their parents, and up to three additional family members. This new family-centered support can help lessen the stigma of needing to look for mental health services that are crucial for students and their families.

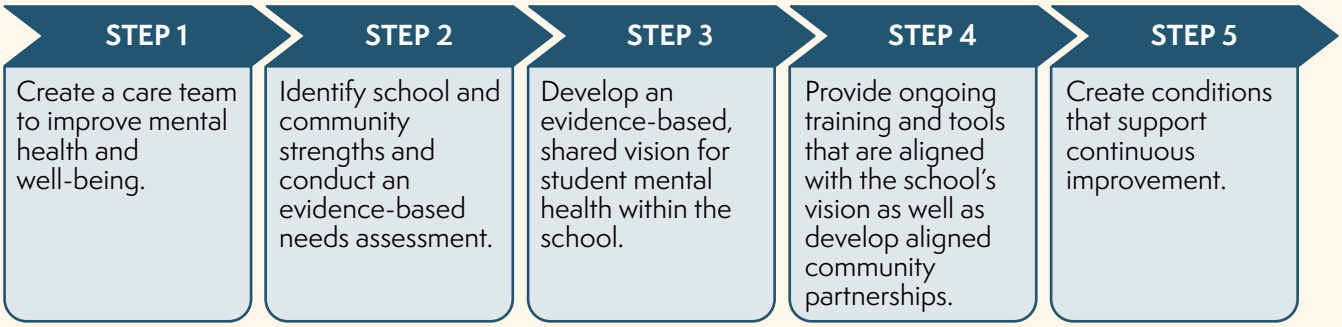
Uplift was recently awarded a prestigious federal Education Innovation and Research (EIR) grant to support this model. Their implementation of these well-being supports will be rigorously evaluated by a randomized controlled trial conducted by an external evaluator. In Years 3 and 4 of their EIR implementation, supports will be randomized across 40 classrooms and multiple schools so the team can obtain reliable impact data to inform similar efforts in schools nationwide.

For additional resources on extending mental health and well-being supports by utilizing community assets, see Appendix II.

Section 3: Applying Continuous Improvement to Support Student Mental Health and Well-being

The types of mental health and well-being strategies just described in the Framework for Organizing Mental Health and Well-being Support can be used to inform a school's ongoing efforts to improve student mental health. To implement these strategies, charter school leaders need to take steps to understand their school environment, the needs and assets of their communities, and the range of mental health and well-being needs that are already present. They will also need to leverage continuous improvement to realize these goals.

The following tool lays out a step-by-step guide charter leaders can use to either develop a vision for student mental health (left column) or refine their existing vision for student mental health (right column). Schools are encouraged to:



Whether just getting started or refining existing plans, school leaders can look across both columns to learn how to refine their strategies for improving student wellness.

Tool: Developing, Implementing, and Refining a Vision for Student Mental Health and Well-being through Continuous Improvement

Step	Getting Started	Considerations for Improving Existing Plans
Step 1: Create a care team to improve mental health and well-being	Form a care team of diverse stakeholders that help define why it's important to improve student mental health in your school: • Convene a care team of teachers, school leaders, families/caregivers, community organizations, school-based mental health professionals, and students. Questions to consider when forming your care team: – Who are the mental health experts within the building? – Which community organizations can support student mental health and well-being? – Which parents and community members often advocate for student mental health? Which parents and community members offer diverse perspectives? • Identify your school community's "why." Seek input from the care team to develop a shared understanding of the goals and scope of work. – Why does this care team exist? – What do we want our school to look and sound like? How do we want the parents, educators, staff, and students to interact with each other? – What do students need to feel safe and healthy here? How can we find out who feels safe and who does not? • Create norms, timelines, and processes to ensure each member's diverse perspectives and experiences are considered and valued throughout the process. • Assign roles and identify team members who will help lead the process, analyze and collect SEL data, and promote this initiative in your school. • Leverage the care team throughout the next steps as leaders and co-creators in developing your plan.	If you already have a care team in place, consider the following questions for reflection: • Does the current team need to be revamped to ensure that diverse perspectives are represented? • Does your team need to revisit and redefine its why? Has the purpose of this group changed over time? How does the team know? • Do norms and processes need to be reconsidered to produce more equitable and safe learning environments? • Do roles need to be reassigned to make the care team more effective? • Do norms, timelines, and processes need to be reconsidered to make your care team more effective?

Step	Getting Started	Considerations for Improving Existing Plans
Step 2: Identify school and community strengths and conduct an evidence-based needs assessment	To help define a vision for improving student mental health, it is essential to identify your school community's current strengths and needs:[42] • Identify strengths and assets of the community already present. – What community activities are already occurring that support well-being and connection? – What strengths do families, students, and educators bring into the school? • Collect data through student surveys; parent surveys; listening sessions with families and the community; and interviews with educators, students, and families about their experiences with well-being, etc., to better understand what mental health issues are prevalent in your community. – Conduct diagnostic assessments for academics and well-being to identify students with the most need. – Analyze data to identify the most pressing student mental health and well-being needs. – Apply an equity lens when collecting and analyzing data to ensure that data is analyzed by race, English learner status, disability status, and other characteristics relevant to the school context. Ensure that care is responsive to student need, that assumptions and biases are questioned, and that data are analyzed from multiple perspectives	If your team has recently inventoried the school community's strengths and needs, consider the following: • Do we need to reevaluate the school community's strengths? How do we know? What evidence can we now point to or collect to understand our school community's assets? • What data do we need to collect to reevaluate students' mental health and well-being needs? Do we already have these assessments and data analysis systems in place? What data could we collect to better understand our students' well-being and academic needs? • In terms of equity, which groups of students' needs are being met? Whose are not? How do we know? Do we need to adjust how we collect data to better understand how mental health supports can be more equitably implemented?

[42] This helpful guide from the RAND Corporation provides a framework for evaluating evidence-based social and emotional learning, and in particular those interventions that align to the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

Step	Getting Started	Considerations for Improving Existing Plans
Step 3: Develop an evidence-based, shared vision for student mental health within your school	After conducting the strengths and needs assessment, develop a shared vision for improving student mental health that will be shared throughout the school community: • Identify key goals based on a needs assessment and landscape analysis that will drive continuous improvement efforts. Ensure goals are anchored in equity and seek to support students in need of the most support. Create goals that are SMART to ensure they are meaningful and impactful. • Break down goals further into short-term, mid-term, and long-term outcomes. • Design key strategies your school can implement to realize key goals. • Communicate vision, goals, and strategies broadly to school staff, families, and community organizations. Create documents that summarize the vision and action plan and refer to it in staff meetings, professional development, parent-teacher events, meetings with community partners, etc. Make it visible throughout the school, on the website, in educator training materials, and in communications with families.	If your school already has a vision for student mental health and well-being, consider reflecting on the following: • Based on our current needs assessment and evaluation of strengths, do we need to redefine our vision for student mental health and well-being? • Do we need to redefine our goals and strategies for realizing this vision? • How can we better communicate our vision with students and families?

Step	Getting Started	Considerations for Improving Existing Plans
Step 4: Provide ongoing training and tools that are aligned with your vision and develop aligned community partnerships	After you have developed your shared vision for student mental health and well-being, meet with your care team again to establish the strategies you will use to meet your goals. Example strategies are provided below, but encourage your care team to think creatively to develop activities that support the unique needs of your stakeholders. *Personnel, Partnerships, and Expertise* • If necessary, hire mental health professionals (e.g., school counselors, social workers) who can help coordinate schoolwide programs aimed at improving student mental health. • Form relationships with community partners to bring more mental health practitioners into your school. This could include partnerships with community health organizations or partnerships with institutions of higher education that provide pre-service professionals with training/externship opportunities. • Form partnerships with organizations that can enhance the program offerings at your school (e.g., forming partnerships with organizations that can provide education in science, technology, engineering, art, and math). • Identify or build expertise on your team to ensure you will comply with HIPAA, FERPA, and other information-sharing requirements or restrictions. *Educator Training* • Provide in-depth training for supporting students' mental health in response to COVID-19 to mental health practitioners within the school (e.g., school counselors, social workers). • Provide all staff with training on SEL, trauma-informed approaches, and the inequitable impact of COVID-19 on students. • Provide teachers with support in developing their own SEL skills. *Additional Tools and Programs* • Obtain/set up assessment and data management systems that track and organize data on academics, behavioral data, attendance data, students' mental health, and SEL data. • Obtain tools and curricula for explicitly teaching SEL and mental health. • If your school already has programs, curricula, and tools in place, do they align with the student mental health and well-being vision? Are there aspects that should be kept?	After reevaluating your school's vision for student mental health and well-being, consider if your school has the right strategies, partnerships, and resources in place to realize its goals. • Do we need to hire new personnel or redesign the roles of current personnel? • Are there partnerships that could strategically advance our vision? How can we form these partnerships? • What training does our staff currently need to realize our goals for student mental health and well-being? • Do we have effective data management and analysis systems in place to assess students' needs? If not, where are we falling short? How can we set up better data management and analysis systems? • Do we have the right tools, curricula, and programs in place? What is needed to close any gaps?

Step	Getting Started	Considerations for Improving Existing Plans
Step 5: Create conditions that support continuous improvement	Continuous improvement can help make the vision for student mental health a reality for your school community by using data to understand if goals are met and how to pivot efforts to adapt to your school's needs. • Collect data on student mental health and well-being continuously. • Establish data management and analysis systems to provide responsive supports to students, such as MTSS (i.e., identify interventions for specific groups and intensive support as needed for individual students). • Ensure the care team routinely evaluates data to see if the school is on track to meet its goals that are aligned with the vision for student mental health and well-being. • Create routines to continually identify how community organizations can support the vision for student mental health and well-being. • Use continuous improvement to periodically reevaluate (e.g., quarterly) and refine the vision for student mental health and well-being, its goals, and its strategies. – Solicit input from parents, students, and community organizations to be responsive to stakeholders' current needs. – Evaluate data in the aggregate and the disaggregate to determine who the current plan is working for, who it is not, and how to redesign the vision for student mental health and well-being with equity in mind.	To evaluate and refine your current continuous improvement efforts, consider the following: • Is your school collecting the right data? If not, what needs to change? • Are you effectively managing and analyzing the data to provide responsive supports based on students' needs? If not, what needs to change in terms of structures, tools, routines, etc.? • Are you effectively managing and analyzing data to understand if your goals for student mental health are being realized? If not, what needs to change in terms of structures, tools, routines, etc.? • Is the care team able to effectively reevaluate progress toward goals and the vision for student mental health? If not, what needs to change? • Do parents, students, community members, teachers, and other stakeholders outside of the care team have a voice in the continuous improvement process?

Choosing the Right Strategies and Programming

Charter leaders, in determining the right programming for their school community, can make use of existing resources that can help determine the effectiveness of programming with similar populations. After a needs assessment has been completed and a vision for student mental health and well-being has been defined, school leaders need to identify high-quality, evidence-based strategies, particularly if funding streams within ESSA are used to purchase such programs.[43] When comparing evidence-based interventions, charter school leaders and teams can use resources such as the CASEL Program Guide to enact processes that help identify and select evidence-based SEL programming that meets the needs of their school communities.

Closing

There are many entry points for charter schools to make meaningful contributions to students' well-being and mental health. Charter leaders can focus their efforts on evidence-based strategies that provide for the range of social, emotional, mental health, and well-being supports needed for healthy learning environments. To do so, leaders can organize their commitments into efforts that create a welcoming, affirming environment that enables a sense of safety for every student; provide mental health, well-being, and SEL supports that are responsive to student needs; and extend mental health and well-being supports by utilizing community assets. By listening to and working alongside students, families, educators, and community partners, charter schools can become communities of care in which young people can thrive.

[43] As stated in this guide by RAND (p. 1), "many of the ESSA funding streams require education leaders at the state and local levels to demonstrate that selected interventions meet the evidence standards of the associated funding stream and are aligned to local needs as identified through a needs assessment."

Appendix I – Understanding the Research

To create, maintain, or improve upon evidence-based systems of care, charter leaders would benefit from having a foundational understanding of the developmental and cognitive science behind how student mental health relates to learning. Comprehensive systems of care honor that social and emotional learning is central to all learning, as is attending to school climate and culture. Further, learning science indicates that students' individual and collective experiences and characteristics, including exposure to trauma, can affect their readiness to learn. Charter leaders also need to consider how to equitably attend to the SEL and mental health needs of their students when planning and implementing mental health and well-being supports.

How Mental Health and Well-being Relate to Learning

When compared with their peers, students who have high levels of well-being feel greater connection to their school, have better academic performance, demonstrate more pro-social behaviors, and report less bullying and victimization in school.[44] In fact, engagement in learning itself can be protective for students' mental health. Students who feel welcomed in their school environment, socially connected, and engaged in learning experience mental health benefits.[45] There is also a wealth of research evidence linking social, emotional, and mental health with academic learning and ones' readiness to learn.[46] For example, students who receive social and emotional support and prevention services are more likely to achieve better academic outcomes.[47]

What SEL is and What it Means for Learning

SEL refers to the "process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions."[48] Though definitions for SEL and the related competencies vary, core to social and emotional learning are a student's ability to self-regulate, self-reflect, cultivate healthy relationships, and communicate and collaborate with others. These competencies collectively equip students with a set of personal and interpersonal skills that together can help protect them from mental health risks and provide them with healthy strategies for engaging with academic learning.

Research suggests that students' social and emotional development is inextricably linked with their cognitive development and academic learning.[49] Recent research evidence has found that effective schoolwide SEL programs can not only improve SEL skills in the short term, but they can also boost

[44] Arslan & Allen, 2020
[45] Rowe et al., 2007
[46] Mahoney & Weissberg, 2018
[47] Greenberg et al., 2003
[48] CASEL, n.d.-a
[49] Jones & Kahn, 2018

student achievement in the long run.[50] That is, a student's learning is linked with their own cognitive, social, and emotional experiences. How that individual student experiences their emotions, social cues, and a sense of safety, for example, relates to how receptive they are to academic learning. Given that cognition and emotion work in tandem, developing key SEL skills like self-control can even give students a boost in cognitive function.

Comprehensive, schoolwide approaches to SEL focus on being responsive to students' needs by developing a school culture that integrates SEL into the learning processes of every subject area, as well as into nonacademic supports. Systematic, schoolwide approaches to SEL are effective because they enable students to reinforce their social and emotional competencies across classrooms.[51] Thus, comprehensive approaches to SEL are better able than discrete programs to develop safe, healthy learning environments that help all students learn the self-awareness and self-care strategies essential for academic learning. Since schoolwide approaches to SEL are integrated into everyday routines in classrooms and into the overall school culture, they can be a critical component of multitiered systems of mental health support that reach all students. Hence, focusing on schoolwide SEL programs can foster a more positive school climate and culture and boost student learning and achievement.

How School Climate and Culture Matter Impact Well-being

Student mental health and well-being can improve when schools develop a climate and culture that provide a sense of safety, belonging, and community. This requires schools to create learning conditions within each classroom that are responsive to students' needs and nurture student mental health and well-being. Learning environments can be either responsive to or reactive to individual student behaviors, challenges, and differences.[52] In environments that are responsive, experiences that surface conflict or reflect hardship become an opportunity for educators to inquire and learn more about the specific causes of that behavior.

Additionally, schools that develop positive climates and cultures do so through building trusting relationships among students, staff, and families/caregivers. Trusting relationships can help students feel welcomed and affirmed. Decades of research in learning science has demonstrated that positive relationships between students and teachers and among students, as well as positive emotions such as interest in learning, tend to make the mind more receptive to learning. On the contrary, negative emotions like anxiety and self-doubt can inhibit the brain's ability to process information and to learn.[53] For example, students who have strong, supportive relationships with teachers are more likely to self-regulate and stay on task.[54] Further, there is strong research evidence that students who feel connected to at least one trusted adult in school have a stronger sense of well-being.[55] This research underscores the importance of creating school environments that foster trust and healthy relationships between students and educators to improve mental health and academic learning.

[50] Mahoney et al., 2018
[51] CASEL, 2021
[52] Rudduck, 2007
[53] Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018
[54] Ruzek et al., 2016
[55] Meltzer et al., 2016

How a Ready-to-learn Brain Supports Learning

Not all students arrive in learning environments ready to learn, nor do all students experience learning environments in the same way. In fact, there is a great deal of variation in individual students' brains and how they perceive and react to the demands of learning in a social setting. It is crucial students first feel safe if they are to be ready to learn and engage in the work of understanding, applying, and extending new and complex information. In responsive schools, educators understand that student experiences are affected by many factors and create conditions for basic safety that are informed by neuroscience and the science of learning. Key to doing so is recognizing the role that an individual's limbic system plays in readiness to learn.

The limbic system is a set of complex structures in the brain that are critical to a student's emotional and behavioral regulation. Within the limbic system, the amygdala is responsible for defining and regulating emotions, as well as preserving and activating memories in connection to specific emotions.[56] The amygdalae (plural for amygdala; there is one on each side of the brain) activate the body's fight-flight response when an individual perceives a threat, and the body then initiates a stress response. What happens because of this is often referred to as an "amygdala hijack" in which a flood of stress hormones including cortisol and adrenaline are released in response to the perceived threat.[57] This stress reaction overrides the frontal lobes of the brain — the regions of the brain responsible for rational, reasoned cognition — so that the stress response becomes dominant. In learning environments, young people whose "smoke detector" (a term coined by Bessel Van Der Kolk, M.D.)[58] is going off because of this response may have a stress reaction that interferes with their ability to learn and to self-regulate their behavior.

How Trauma Affects Learning

Exposure to trauma or adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) can also affect students' learning. The American Psychological Association describes trauma as "an emotional response to a terrible event."[59] According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, ACEs are potentially traumatic events that occur in childhood that can undermine an individual's sense of safety, stability, and social interactions.[60] ACEs can result from experiencing violence, abuse, neglect, or loss and can have an enduring negative impact on child development, mental health, and education. ACEs are prevalent among school-aged children; data from the 2016 National Survey of Children's Health showed that 46% of children in America had experienced at least one ACE, and one in five U.S. children had two or more ACEs.[61] Students who have experienced or are experiencing ACEs or trauma can express symptoms ranging from social withdrawal to sudden changes in behavior, violent outbursts, addiction, engaging in risky behavior, and challenges with memory, paying attention, and forming social relationships.

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[56] Healthline, 2021

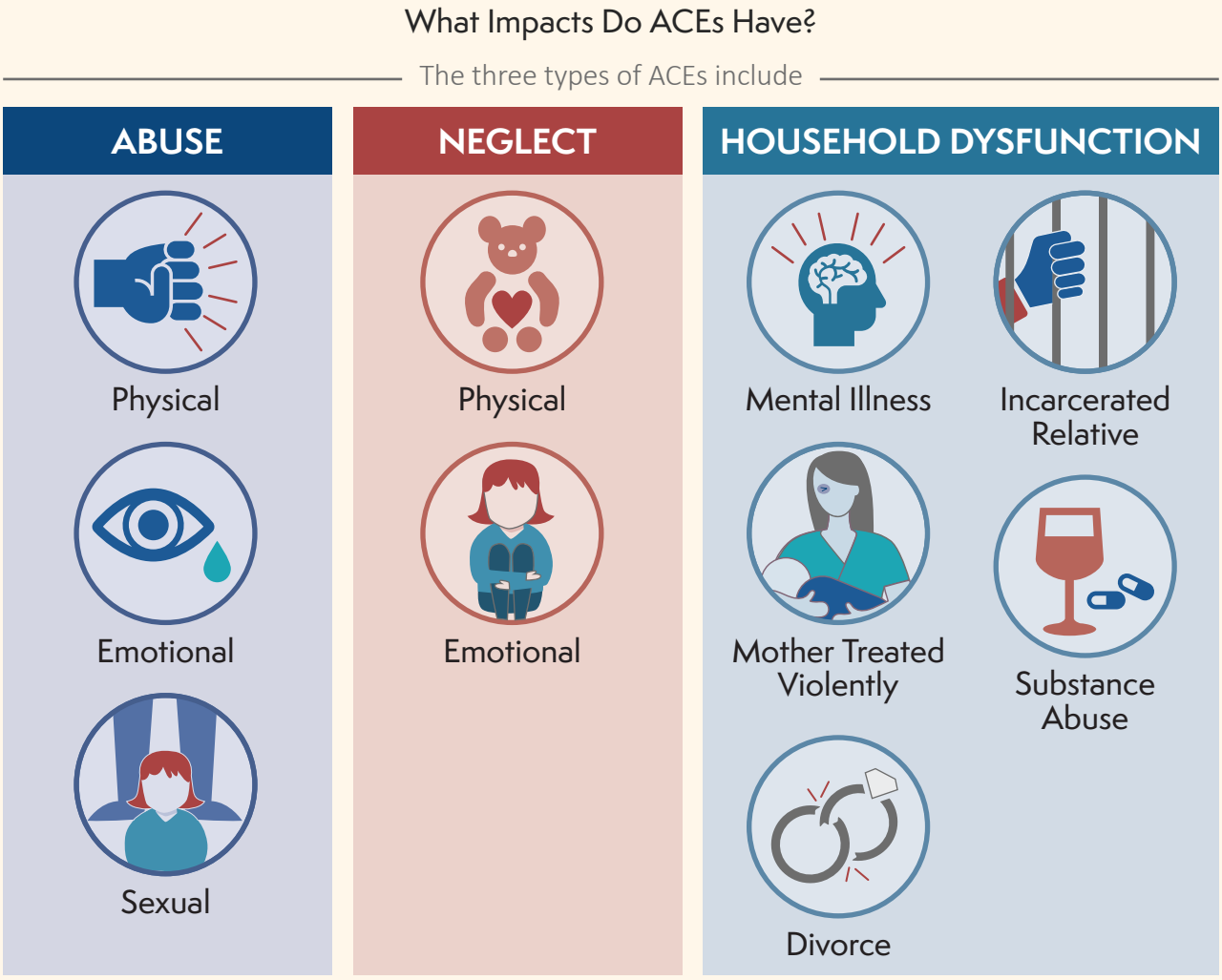
[57] Goleman, 1995

[58] Van der Kolk, 2015

[59] American Psychological Association, 2021

[60] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, n.d.

[61] For more statistics on children experiencing ACEs as reported in the 2016–2017 National Survey of Children's Health, check out the Data Resource Center for Child & Adolescent Health.



Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Credit: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

Students who are dealing with acute or chronic stressors in their lives may struggle with emotional self-regulation, which is a necessary condition for the ready-to-learn brain.[62] Even when teachers understand that reactive student behaviors may be linked to ACEs, stress reactions, and exposure to trauma, a teacher's response to student behavior can be either harmful or restorative. When student behaviors are perceived as "problematic" and schools lack a trauma-informed understanding of the individual's brain-based reaction to a stress signal, interactions in learning environments can be detrimental to the well-being and safety of both students and educators.[63]

[62] Harvard University Center on the Developing Child, n.d.
[63] National Education Association, n.d.

Appendix II – Additional Resources to Support the Development of Communities of Care

Additional Resources for Creating Welcoming and Affirming Environments

- In the context of COVID-19, explore ways to redesign schools for stronger relationships: https://restart-reinvent.learningpolicyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/product-files/Restart_Reinvent_Schools_COVID_Priority5_Relationships.pdf
- Guidance for how to implement schoolwide approaches to SEL: https://schoolguide.casel.org/uploads/sites/2/2019/09/2021.6.15_School-Guide-Essentials.pdf
- An equity toolkit for inclusive schools on centering youth voice in school change: https://greatlakesequity.org/sites/default/files/20171209382_equity_tool.pdf
- Ways to integrate SEL throughout the school day: https://www.weareteachers.com/21-simple-ways-to-integrate-social-emotional-learning-throughout-the-day/
- Example of a student experience survey that is used by many charter schools: https://www.panoramaed.com/panorama-student-survey
- Strategies to help students with self-regulation: https://udlguidelines.cast.org/engagement/self-regulation
- School climate essentials for creating conditions for students to thrive: https://www.wested.org/resources/school-climate-essentials-brief/
- Activities that prime the brain for learning: https://www.edutopia.org/article/activities-prime-brain-learning

Additional Resources for Providing Responsive Mental Health, Well-being, and SEL Supports

- Ways to integrate SEL into tiered supports for mental health: https://intensiveintervention.org/sites/default/files/NCII-SEL-Brief-508.pdf
- Building Equitable Learning Environments (BELE) Framework
- Ways to cultivate and apply race-equity mindsets: https://www.wested.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Cultivating-and-Applying-Race-Equity-Mindsets-1.pdf

- Connections between SEL and culturally responsive and sustaining education: https://www.wested.org/resources/sel-culturally-responsive-and-sustaining-education-and-critical-race-theory-brief/
- How to select the right program or approach: https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/pages/navigating-social-and-emotional-learning-from-the-inside-out.aspx
- Reflect on your team's equity efforts and capacity for antiracist strategies: https://ggie.berkeley.edu/school-challenges/anti-racist-resources-for-educators/?_ga=2.122339915.1147096418.1591808542-1938306602.1591808542#tab__2
- Quick, often referenced teaching strategies for trauma-informed instruction: https://www.ascd.org/el/articles/trauma-informed-teaching-strategies
- Brief outlining ways to integrate trauma-sensitive schools and SEL: https://www.prevention.psu.edu/uploads/files/TSS-SEL-Brief-Final-June2021R.pdf
- Characteristics of trauma-informed learning environments: https://georgiavoices.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Trauma-Report-FINAL.pdf

Additional Resources for Partnering with the Community to Extend Mental Health and Well-being Supports

- Tools for designing for whole-school well-being: https://turnaroundusa.org/toolbox/wcdesign/
- Designing trauma-informed education systems that promote healing (WestEd): Part I and Part II
- Learning for Justice K–12 resources that provide ways for educators to integrate activities focused on identity and equity: https://www.learningforjustice.org/search?query=identity
- A compendium of resources on integrating SEL throughout the school system: https://selcenter.wested.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2020/09/SELCenter_CompendiumofResources.pdf
- Guidance for how charter schools can engage families throughout the charter school life cycle: https://charterschoolcenter.ed.gov/sites/default/files/files/field_publication_attachment/Family%20Engagement%20Toolkit.pdf
- Guidance for how charter schools can leverage community assets through partnerships: https://charterschoolcenter.ed.gov/sites/default/files/files/field_publication_attachment/How%20Charter%20Schools%20Can%20Leverage%20Community%20Assets%20through%20Partnerships.pdf
- Key lessons of Collective Impact: https://www.communitiesinschools.org/our-data/publications/publication/five-key-lessons-our-collective-impact
- Collective Impact and Communty-Based Organizations: https://www.strivetogether.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/CollectiveImpact_StrongerResultswithCBOs_2014.pdf

Appendix III – Example of MTSS Strategies at Each Tier for SEL and Behavior Support

Drawing on the research base cited throughout this tool,[64] the following table synthesizes strategies that can be applied as part of a multitiered system of support (MTSS). Here, it is important to modify the suggested strategies to best fit the needs of your students and their communities.

Tier	Strategies/Goals
Tier 1: Universal support	• Provide opportunities for all students to assess their strengths and areas of need. • Set up structures so each student is well known by at least one adult (e.g., advisory periods). • Provide students with instruction on SEL skills, such as learning how to regulate their emotions and pausing when needed, resolving conflicts, respectfully disagreeing with peers, etc. • Use predictable routines, schedules, and structures to support students in feeling safe and managing their behaviors and emotions in the classroom and throughout school. • Provide students with opportunities to reflect on their decisions and the consequences of their decisions. • Provide students with opportunities to create classroom norms. • Develop structures (e.g., roles) and provide instruction to support group work. • Provide students with opportunities to share about their home cultures to engage in discussions about different cultures.
Tier 2: Targeted supports for groups of students	• Provide additional SEL instruction for individual students or groups of students experiencing greater stress or difficulty in managing emotions and behaviors, such as opportunities for daily reflection, identifying what situations trigger strong reactions, and graphing out their behavior or emotions. • Provide students who need additional supports with tools to help with decision-making, such as reflection tools or choice menus. • Establish peer mentoring structures to help students who have difficulty forming relationships. • Use role-play to help students better understand other perspectives and experiences. • Provide students with discussion prompts to help with interactions with peers.
Tier 3: Intensive intervention for individual students	• Providing targeted, one-on-one mental health support for students with the most need. Targeted support should be responsive to what is going on in the student's life (e.g., how the pandemic is inducing additional stress). • Engage with families and caretakers to better understand the needs of children experiencing intense stress. • Partner with families to help align behavior expectations between school and home. • Develop partnerships with community-based organizations that can provide intensive, one-on-one support for students. These strategies could include referring students to community-based mental health professionals, partnering with community health organizations, or partnering with universities or colleges to provide opportunities for pre-service mental health practitioners to satisfy their field-work requirements.

[64] CASEL, 2021; U.S. Department of Education, 2021b; Yoder et al., 2021

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