

# Build School Communities and Support Students' Social, Emotional, and Mental Health

Public Consulting Group (PCG) is pleased to offer this guide to support school-based leaders in addressing the social, emotional, and mental health well-being of students. As students and staff return to in-person learning this fall, the US Department of Education has prioritized social emotional learning (SEL) for students as a basis for accelerating learning and mitigating learning loss.

School-based leaders can utilize this guide to develop plans for addressing the priorities outlined by Landmark 2 in the "Return to School Roadmap."

**1. Priority:** Assess social, emotional, and mental health needs of students and staff.

## Action Strategies:

- ✔ Identify existing tools approved by the district and their availability within the schoolhouse to assess social, emotional, and mental health needs of students.
  - Utilize the [CASEL District Resource Center tool](#)<sup>1</sup> to learn how other districts around the country have prioritized social emotional learning.
  - Consider utilizing free or low-cost screeners to identify students requiring more extensive evaluations quickly and efficiently and/or supports, if necessary.
- ✔ Utilize an online database to store and synthesize social emotional screener and assessment results.
  - Explore the use of [EDPlan Intervene](#) to systematically identify and program for students requiring social, emotional, or mental health support.

**2. Priority:** Invest in effective strategies to address social, emotional, and mental health needs of students.

## Action Strategies:

- ✔ Assess staff capacity to provide increased access for students to school counselors and mental health professionals.
  - Partner with fellow school-based administrators to reassess the workload of school counselors and mental health professionals with the goal of prioritizing opportunities for student-focused interventions.
  - Develop a master schedule that eliminates administrative responsibilities (e.g., bus duty, covering the cafeteria, etc.) of school counselors and mental health professionals.
  - Determine if family engagement responsibilities, typically within the scope of school counselors and mental health professionals, can be extended to Family Engagement or Title I Specialists.
  - Identify opportunities for school counselors and mental health professionals in graduate programs to provide services under the supervision of licensed professionals (contingent upon district regulations).

**3. Priority:** Ensure restorative, equitable, and inclusive approaches to school discipline.

- ✔ Evaluate your school's current social, emotional, and mental health practices.
  - Partner with district-level leadership to review existing resources and district framework for SEL practices. If resource gaps exist between framework guidance and implementation, consider the use of ARP ESSER funds to supplement those existing needs.
  - Utilize the "[Where to Start: CASEL School Guide](#)"<sup>ii</sup> to determine indicators for schoolwide SEL practices and to complete the "needs inventory."

#### Action Strategies:

- ✔ Connect with district- and state-level leadership to identify which new discipline practices will be implemented, and the subsequent training opportunities that will be implemented in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- ✔ Familiarize school-based leadership and behavior response teams to [restorative practices](#).<sup>iii</sup>
- ✔ Determine, in partnership with district-level leadership, how to implement [trauma-informed and restorative](#)<sup>iv</sup> discipline in your buildings.

**4. Priority:** Provide extracurricular opportunities to build school community and advance academic and emotional development of students.

#### Action Strategies:

- ✔ Discuss with district leadership to determine what extracurricular opportunities are being funded with ARP ESSER funds.
- ✔ Identify if additional funds are available to sponsor school-based educators and staff to host in-person (when appropriate) and virtual clubs after school.
- ✔ Partner with parent-teacher associations or other organizations to solicit donations from local companies to provide resources for students to utilize for extracurricular opportunities.

Returning full-time to in-person learning may be a stressful experience for students this fall. Moving forward, school-based leaders should continue to prioritize the social, emotional, and mental well-being of all students as the foundation for accelerating learning. Students will be most readily available for learning when their SEL needs are being met.

<sup>i</sup> "District Resource Center" -Collaborative for Social, Academic, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)  
<https://drc.casel.org/>

<sup>ii</sup> "Where to Start: CASEL School Guide", CASEL  
<https://schoolguide.casel.org/where-to-start/>

<sup>iii</sup> "Restorative Practices: Fostering Healthy Relationships & Promoting Positive Discipline in Schools. A Guide for Educators."  
<http://schottfoundation.org/sites/default/files/restorative-practices-guide.pdf>

<sup>iv</sup> "Trauma Informed Restorative Discipline: A Guide for Creating Restorative Learning in Your School." -Restorative DC & School Talk  
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/17dFYdyFdZ1HNCvuLAaaoTEZvS-H8Uxg/view>

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