A young girl with a large blue backpack is walking away from the camera on a school hallway. She is wearing a white shirt, blue jeans, and a pink headband. The hallway has a brick wall on the right and white columns on the left. The image is partially covered by a blue circular graphic on the right side.

Addressing Mental Health and Social-Emotional Wellness in the Covid-19 Crisis

**A Resource Guide
for School Districts
Spring 2020**



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Addressing Mental Health and Social-Emotional Wellness in the Covid-19 Crisis

A Resource Guide for School Districts



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Contributors

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Council of the Great City Schools, May 2020

Defining Mental Health and Social-Emotional Wellness Challenges in the COVID-19 Crisis

Urban school districts will face a number of new and unprecedented challenges in the 2020-21 school year. In addition to safely reopening schools, planning for the likelihood of future rolling school closures, redesigning instructional delivery models, and effectively addressing unfinished learning and learning losses among students, schools will need to address the significant social and emotional toll that the crisis has taken on children and adults alike. After the disruption in schooling and months of isolation, fear, and uncertainty, the start of the new school year—whether it means a return to school buildings or some hybrid model of virtual and in-person learning—is likely to be met with significant anxiety and apprehension. Districts will need to create learning environments that make students and their teachers feel safe and socially and emotionally supported as they return to school.

To meet these needs, significant restructuring and reallocation of resources will be necessary, as social-emotional learning and mental health¹ have traditionally been blindspots for many school systems. In general, addressing the mental health needs of students is not universally understood or embraced as the central work of schools or districts. Efforts in this area have been relegated to siloed mental health, social-emotional learning (SEL), and student services departments, working without sufficient resources, coordination, or access. But as anyone who works with students can attest, attending to the mental health and social-emotional wellbeing of students is not an external consideration—it is a necessary condition for learning. In the context of COVID-19, it is going to become an even more pressing consideration in how we educate and support students, as districts will need to prioritize the emotional wellbeing of students as they re-engage them in academic content.

In this guide, we present a set of overarching principles and strategies to address the social-emotional and mental health needs of both students and adults at this critical juncture and beyond. We then highlight some of the key efforts being undertaken and resources being offered in a set of districts that we have identified as leaders in the field: Broward County Public Schools, the Cleveland Metropolitan School District, the Los Angeles Unified School District, and Tulsa Public Schools. Finally, we provide a list of academic and district experts in the field of social-emotional learning and behavior and mental health. Our urban communities need our support now more than ever, and we hope this guide helps to advance the planning and implementation of safe and supportive learning environments.

1 While social-emotional wellness and mental health are two distinct realms, we are working with them in an integrated manner as districts will need to marshal resources to address both the psychological impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on students and families. We define mental health and social-emotional wellbeing as reducing psychological symptoms AND improving prosocial and coping skills.

Principles and Strategies for Providing Mental Health and Social-Emotional Wellness Supports

The current crisis has presented districts with new and unprecedented challenges. It has also highlighted many of the inequities and limitations that have existed for years in the way that we, as educators, support the social and emotional health and development of our students. Dealing with the current crisis will require us to address these limitations.

In particular, building instructional environments that promote positive social and emotional skills and behavior will require districts to increase **transparency and communication** around current and ongoing mental health issues and resources, to build a sense of **shared ownership** of both the physical and emotional wellbeing of children, to provide **proactive support and interventions**, and to advance **inclusion and outreach** for our most vulnerable children and families.

Here is a deeper look at what these principles mean in practice and some strategies for districts to consider in planning for the upcoming school year—

Transparency and Communication

1

The most immediate step districts will need to take to start to address widespread anxiety and fear is to provide consistent communication that school is a physically and psychologically safe place. Students have experienced sudden and unprecedented disruption to their routines and schedules, home life, and community engagement. Many children may no longer feel physically safe in their immediate (home) or broader (community) environment. Moreover, there is a lack of consistent peer social interaction, teacher instruction, and the natural social-emotional reinforcement that is present in our schools. We can't begin to address the trauma of the past several months and resume effective teaching and learning until students feel physically *and* psychologically safe in their immediate environment. **Sharing school and district plans and processes concerning health and safety** is therefore an important first step to address this anxiety. The plans should be communicated in age-appropriate ways, such as using pictures to illustrate concepts (washing hands), and in multiple languages.

Districts can also boost this sense of security by **providing consistency in daily school routines**. While school closures or changes in schedules may be inevitable, consistent routines and procedures in the meantime help reduce stress and facilitate learning for all students. Schools can further accentuate the familiarity of the school environment by highlighting the routines and special activities that make each school a community.

2

At the same time, schools shouldn't rush to re-establish "business as usual." Schools will need to **provide both communal and private forums for students to share their thoughts and process their emotions**. For example, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning ([CASEL](#)) recommends—

- Using existing SEL programs to help provide opportunities for students to share their experiences, and to promote empathy for one another and those most impacted by the virus.

- Supporting teachers in engaging students in developmentally appropriate conversations and lessons to discuss the news around COVID-19. This can include assessing facts from misinformation, as well as opportunities for students to develop and suggest strategies for their school or community to prevent the spread of disease.
- Using developmentally appropriate conversations and lessons to discuss the impact, history, and context around biased or stigmatizing comments and behaviors related to the disease. (This guidance includes examples of how to have conversations about racism, stereotyping, and bias related to the virus.)

Many students in early elementary grades may not be familiar with or have the skills to effectively communicate their thoughts and emotions. Schools can facilitate this process by having teachers model sharing their own emotions regarding school closures. This can make it “ok” to share feelings, and at the same time demonstrates to students different ways to express emotion. For other students, **teachers must be vigilant in recognizing signs of emotional distress** and have plans in place to access individualized supports for students. Teachers are the primary facilitator of services in the classroom and must be aware of the signs that a student may need additional help. Districts can prepare their staff through professional development (e.g., Youth-Mental Health First Aid) and regularly scheduled supports. For example, districts should consider establishing regular counseling hours within the school to allow for drop-in discussions with a school mental health professional.

3

Provide teachers and families with **consistent communication** and **access to resources**, as well as **guidance and support in talking with children about the coronavirus**. In the following section, we will highlight the steps some districts are taking and provide links to the resources and materials they are making available to their parents and communities. Each of these districts provide a wealth of resources from leading medical experts in how to communicate with children about the coronavirus, and video resources schools can share with their parents. Links to these resources can be found in the individual district sections as well as in the additional resources section of this document. For students from historically marginalized communities, it will be particularly important for districts to proactively reach out to families and provide information in their native language.

It is also important for staff to provide **timely and consistent responses to student questions**. Many educators may be uncomfortable at first in communicating medical information or may have experienced substantial stress themselves. Districts should consider providing lists of commonly asked student questions about the coronavirus, as well as sample responses from staff. This will ensure consistent messaging, reduce the likelihood of confusion, and promote a sense of safety and confidence amongst students.

4

Address adult mental health needs as well as student mental health needs. In order to provide a safety net of caring adults for children, districts need to acknowledge and address the mental health and social-emotional needs of school and district staff. During a given year, upwards of 30% of teachers express clinically significant levels of stress. This stress negatively impacts instructional effectiveness and may increase rates of student distress. The current pandemic and shift in roles and responsibilities will undoubtedly lead to much greater numbers of educators with substantial stress and anxiety. Planned commitment to employee wellbeing is paramount. That is, districts must **take a proactive approach to educator wellbeing** that goes beyond the provision of *passive* resources (e.g., an online mindfulness webinar). Single professional development seminars are not effective; rather sustained employee wellbeing is achieved through skill development, ongoing coaching, and establishing regular check-ins to discuss emotional health. Districts are increasingly recognizing the need to actively promote teacher wellbeing through sustained engagement and supports. For example, Hillsborough County Public Schools (FL), has a department of employee wellbeing and targeted approaches to matching new teachers with mentors and providing targeted and ongoing supports for [promoting wellbeing](#).

During school closures, it is also vital to **address the mental health needs and wellbeing of parents**. As we highlight in the next section, districts such as Tulsa and Los Angeles have developed and shared resources for parents and caregivers on not only how to address the emotional needs of their children, but how to safeguard their own mental health and wellbeing.

Shared Ownership of the Social-Emotional Wellbeing of Students

5

One of the limiting factors in building integrated mental health programming is the idea that social-emotional needs/mental health needs are somehow outside of our responsibility as educators or not central to the work of a school or school district. To address this, districts need to **build a culture of shared ownership** over these issues. Children will not benefit from high-quality instruction if their immediate physical and psychological needs are not met. While we understand the intrinsic importance of providing school meals to students who are hungry, mental health and social and emotional needs are often treated as if they are “one more thing” or someone else’s responsibility. The message to educators, administrators, and staff throughout the district therefore needs to be: **supporting the whole child—including the social-emotional wellbeing of children—is everyone’s job**. Because building a supportive school climate and a culture of integrated social-emotional supports requires the engagement of adults at all levels—not just school counselors, social workers, school psychologists, and nurses, but district staff and leaders, administrators, principals, and the teachers that interact with students every day.

In addition to communicating this message of shared accountability, school districts should address common misconceptions about what it means to support the whole child or what constitutes “mental health” (topics that defined and discussed in greater detail in principle #10 below). With everyone having a common understanding of the “what,” schools can move towards addressing the “how.”

6

Given the critical role of teachers and administrators in addressing the social-emotional needs of students, we need to equip them with the **professional development and resources** to do the work. Research has indicated that while nearly all teachers have reported students with mental health concerns in their classrooms, most teachers indicated not having the skills to address these needs and a lack of training as the primary barrier to addressing the social-emotional needs of students.² The top three areas for needed training included (1) strategies to support externalizing behavior problems, (2) identifying and understanding mental health problems, and (3) training in classroom management. As mentioned before, traditional single session professional development has limited long term effectiveness. To meet the needs of educators, school districts, such as Wichita Public Schools, has developed “train the trainers” models to promote the use of universal screening throughout the districts and to quickly build internal staff capacity to train teachers. The School District of Philadelphia has engaged a number of partners to provide ongoing technical assistance and coaching with demonstrated success in both building and sustaining internal capacity to address student mental health concerns.

School districts may also consider building in **common planning time** for cross-functional teams of academic and mental health personnel to address social-emotional concerns *in the same way as behavior and academics*. Critically, districts should not create silos where the various types of student needs are discussed separately. Similar to the standing meetings to identify students at risk of falling behind academically, we should be just as collaborative and proactive when it comes to identifying students at risk of social and emotional challenges.

² Reinke, W. M., Stormont, M., Herman, K. C., Puri, R., & Goel, N. (2011). Supporting children’s mental health in schools: Teacher perceptions of needs, roles, and barriers. *School Psychology Quarterly*, 26(1), 1-13.

Another way to operationalize a culture of shared ownership is through the **breakdown of organizational silos**. Districts are structured very differently in terms of how they allocate the work and responsibility of providing social-emotional and mental health supports, but all too often, ownership over this domain and provision of services are relegated to student services or mental health divisions. For example, social workers and school psychologists often work in different departments such as Student Support Services or Exceptional Education and are not integrated within the larger academic functions of a school system. Even SEL and mental health units have traditionally worked in isolation from one another and are often led by individuals with differing professional training and/or philosophies. To promote efficiency and effectiveness in supporting the whole child, academic support, social-emotional learning, and mental health interventions need to be part of an integrated, comprehensive approach to support.

The use of Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) in many school systems, for example, has led to the effective integration of prevention efforts for academics (Response to Intervention) and behavior (Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports). Having an MTSS district leadership team composed of personnel from each department/domain is a necessary and efficient way to create a common language and common understanding of the integrated work across academics, behavior, social-emotional, and mental health. Being able to triangulate data on attendance, grades, and behavior provides a more complete picture than when looking at each separately. The open communication and sharing of data from across each of these areas is therefore critical to ensure students' needs are accurately identified and support provided.

To effectively break down the siloed work of social-emotional learning and mental health, districts should start by clearly **communicating a unified vision—and underlying methodologies—for supporting the whole child**. We also find that building a culture of collaboration in large urban districts requires **structured cross-functional teaming and meetings**. For example, teams of academic, SEL, and mental health staff visiting school sites together, debriefing on both the unique and shared needs across schools, and developing an integrated response would help to build a more cohesive leadership and decision-making structure similar to the efforts of aligning behavior and academics through MTSS.

Proactive Support and Intervention

As educators, and a society, we focus too much on reacting to students' social-emotional needs—oftentimes exhibited by overt or extreme behaviors—and we largely respond in a punitive manner. Schools need to focus instead on how these issues are *prevented* by becoming more proactive in the provision of social-emotional and mental health supports. To do this, districts need to create *systems* that reliably and consistently facilitate early intervention. Research has demonstrated that school mental health interventions are only effective and sustainable when delivered within a broader continuum of care (i.e., MTSS), with tools to efficiently facilitate entry into and exit from the system. In other words, preventative systems need preventative assessment tools rather than reactive methods such as discipline referrals or suspensions.

Universal screening is one such tool, whereby teachers or students complete a brief (20 items or less) survey to assess *both* social-emotional and behavioral needs, *and* areas of strength for all students. Screening should include multiple contributors (for example, input from multiple teachers, as well as the student) and take less than one minute per student to complete. Screening is not intended to be diagnostic or problem-specific (anxiety, suicide), but rather is designed to identify general pre-symptomology that can drive early intervention efforts. This data-driven approach is already used by many districts in the academic domain. However, many teachers lack the ability to consistently recognize the signs of social-emotional risk, making the use of a universal screening tool essential to an effective prevention system.

Universal screening promotes a culture shift towards (1) treating problems before they become worse and (2) identifying the skills that lead to growth and resilience. For example, in a typical middle or high school students have multiple teachers and classrooms and are often only on the school's "radar" after a disciplinary referral. Universal screening allows a school to collect and share data on that student from their homeroom teacher, subject area teacher, and from the student directly, allowing school staff to proactively identify risk before problems become severe, and to provide services and individualized support as needed. Further resources for understanding and implementing universal screening can be found in [Appendix A](#) of this report.

9

In addition, districts can also promote a more proactive approach by **building a culture of "checking in."** The simple, consistent act of checking in with students on a regular basis is an effective way of identifying early indicators of social and emotional distress, and most importantly, creating a sense of community and instilling a sense that the adults in a school building care about students. For example, in the wake of school closures Tulsa had every school establish a wellness team of 3 or more staff members, who call and check on students on a daily basis. Teachers contact students for instruction and support staff, and elective teachers reach out to students as well to check on student and family wellness.

The process of checking in also helps educators **develop a more informed/nuanced view of who is in need of support.** Because it is not always the student acting out, but the student with their head down on their desk at the back of the classroom that is in need of support and intervention. To this end, schools/teachers should be provided with the resources and training they need to identify students who need help.

10

School leaders should seize this opportunity to cultivate a more balanced view of mental health and social-emotional wellbeing. For many decades, schools have considered students to be at risk for mental health problems if they demonstrate overt symptoms of psychopathology (e.g., aggression). This is an outdated and inaccurate reflection of mental health. Rather, science has informed a modern understanding of a **dual-factor model of mental health.** That is, students may be at-risk if they display psychopathology AND if they *do not* display prosocial skills (e.g., emotional coping). For example, while one highly anxious student may display overt symptoms such as fidgeting and acting out, another highly anxious student may be withdrawn with a flat affect and unwillingness to engage peers.

As educators we therefore need to develop resources and systems for **both symptom reduction and skill building.** This is a radical change in how we understand mental health and *wellbeing*—one that requires us to move beyond greasing just the squeaky wheel to looking at the whole child. Many districts have adopted "social-emotional and behavioral" terminology to combine elements from Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) and Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS). For example, districts utilizing this approach provide behavioral supports to reduce aggression and non-compliance, combined with social-emotional skill building such as responsible decision-making and emotion recognition. Critically, districts must take an integrated and tiered approach supported through a robust data-driven decision-making process; individual and disconnected initiatives such as a Mindfulness training or social skills group will not be effective or sustainable if they are not integrated within a broader system.

Inclusion and Outreach

11 To serve our most vulnerable children and families, districts should promote a culture of inclusion. To achieve this, districts will need to **identify common needs and challenges among all students and families, as well as the specific or heightened needs of the most at-risk students.** In addition to the shared experience of isolation, fear, and anxiety, communities will likely be dealing with students who have lost a family member or are dealing with unemployment, as well as an increase in child abuse, sexual abuse, suicide, domestic violence, homelessness and more.

Addressing this increased demand for mental health support services will require considerable allocation of resources and professional development. In the Austin Independent School District, for example, a cross-functional team of professional development, mental health, counseling, and academic support staff is working together with the Karyn Purvis Institute of Child Development, out of Texas Christian University, to provide trauma-informed support training for 85 additional practitioners. The online Phase I of this training will wrap up in June, with an in-person Phase II to follow, and trained practitioners will be equipped to provide learning opportunities and coaching for staff and caregivers.

Districts can also promote support and inclusion by **connecting with community social service agencies in building wrap-around services and identifying gaps in the social service safety net.** Given the expected growth in unemployment, poverty, and illness, as well as trauma and mental health crises, coordinating with multiple providers will become even more essential to triage and direct services to the students in most need.

12 As noted above, an inclusive environment relies on coordinated outreach efforts. Districts should develop a mechanism for **reaching out to families in need and connecting them with the appropriate resources.** This includes identifying and addressing the needs of students and families who are homeless or in transitional living situations, may not have easy access to computers or internet, receive free or reduced-price meals through school, or rely on support services at their schools. For example, the next section spotlights local guides the Los Angeles Unified School District has developed in English and Spanish to connect families to neighborhood mental health clinics and family services organizations, as well as Tulsa's family assistance request process and the wellness tracking system they use to follow up on these requests.

In the case of students with disabilities, in particular, the disruption in school services could lead to acute mental health challenges. For example, students on the Autism Spectrum benefit from routine and expectations. The significant disruption to schedules and loss of specialized and individualized supports can lead to severe anxiety and disruptive behavior. Re-establishing these critical supports may take time, and districts can promote an inclusive environment by **reaching out before the start of the school year and planning for gradual re-entry into services.**

District Programming, Partnerships, and Resources

Here is a closer look at some of the strategies, resources, and programming being implemented in four Great City Schools districts to address the mental health and social-emotional needs of students, staff, and families during the COVID-19 crisis.

Broward County Public Schools

To meet mental health (and other) needs of students, families, and staff during the current crisis, Broward County Public Schools is providing the following support and resources:

- Currently, school social workers are supporting the mental health, emotional and social service needs of students via phone and email, as well as providing counseling services via telephone or virtual platforms. They are receiving referrals from teachers and other school personnel and remain in contact with pertinent staff at assigned schools to address participation (attendance) concerns with students on the District's distance learning platform. They are providing crisis intervention, case management and support services to students and families and making referrals for counseling to the District's Family Counseling Program and behavioral partners. Additional support is being provided in assisting families with technology issues, either in obtaining a device or internet connectivity. School social workers are collaborating with school support staff and school psychologists' in completing pending psychosocial reports, participating virtually in MTSS meetings and other school related meetings and conferences.
- In collaboration with the Family Counseling Program, school social workers are also contacting students who took part in the Distance Learning and Wellness Survey, requesting to speak with a mental health professional. Support counseling, linkage to school staff, and referrals for counseling are being provided based on individual needs.
- During Distance Learning, school psychologists are also continuing to participate in collaborative problem-solving teams to discuss concerns regarding students. They are also providing crisis response to schools, conducting mental health check-ins, and conducting consultations with parents, as needed.
- This April 24 [interview](#) with Dr. Laurel Thompson, Director of Student Services, shared on WIOD's Brian Mudd Show, provides a good overview of how the mental health team is continuing its work virtually. Specifically, data on student engagement—such as whether students are logging into Canvas for online instruction—is used to identify students who are disengaged or disconnected during this time. District personnel then follow up with students and families to identify the reasons for the lack of participation, whether it is a mental health issue or a device issue. In this interview, Dr. Thompson reports that over 1500 clinical hours of one-on-one student and family therapy have been provided, that school social workers have received over 4,000 referrals of students in need of services, and that they have conducted over 9,000 interventions since they have gone remote. Dr. Thompson also reported that they are focusing special attention on students who qualify for homeless services, providing meals, devices, as well as mental health supports.

- The district has launched a [mindfulness initiative](#), ensuring that students, families, and staff have access to high quality online mindfulness-based education, support, and resources on The Mindfulness in BCPS portal. Here is a link to the Superintendent introducing the district’s mindfulness initiative:

<https://becon.eduvision.tv/directplayer.aspx?q=3SfVi13wT7Tn6jR0iDs6YHfJBhsJkHGrgMCnhjMlylQ%253d>

- On the mental health services homepage, the district provides links and numbers for the following hotlines:
 - First Call for Help: 2-1-1
 - Broward County Public Schools Mental Health Hotline: 754-321-HELP (4357)
 - National Crisis Text Line: 741741
 - National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-TALK (8255)
- The district also offers the following COVID-19-specific resources on its [Student Services/Mental Health Services](#) page:
 - [COVID-19 and Your Mental Health](#) (Mayo Clinic)
 - [Taking Care of Your Behavioral Health](#) (SAMHSA, 2020): Tips for Social Distancing, Quarantine, and Isolation during an Infectious Disease Outbreak
 - [Caring for Children: Tips to keep children healthy while school’s out](#) (CDC)
 - [Mental Wellness During COVID-19](#) (United Way)
 - [Helping Children Cope With COVID-19 Stress](#) (WHO)
 - [BCPS Employee Assistance Program for COVID-19](#)
 - [SAMHSA’s Disaster Distress Helpline](#)
 - [COVID 19 Resource and Information Guide](#) (National Alliance on Mental Illness)

In addition to these COVID-19 specific steps and resources, the district has substantial infrastructure in place for addressing the mental health needs of students, given its history in addressing student trauma in the wake of the 2018 Stoneman Douglas school shooting. As part of the district’s commitment to delivering evidence-based, mental health assessment, intervention, treatment and recovery through a multi-tiered system of supports, the district has developed structures and processes including the following—

- BCPS has a comprehensive electronic database known as Behavioral and Academic Support Information System (BASIS) that provides data needed to drive decision- making and instruction in schools. The data includes student assessment results, attendance data, discipline information, and demographic information. The data is analyzed to create at-risk indicators that guide school-based teams to prioritize student needs.
- Each school has a Collaborative Problem Solving (CPS) Team that meets frequently to discuss students with academic, behavioral, or social/emotional concerns. Further data is collected through a review of records, observations, interviews, etc. This information is then used to develop intervention plans tailored to the individual student’s needs. The intervention plan may include individual or group counseling provided by school-based mental health professionals.
- The District’s Family Counseling Program provides free individual and family counseling services. The goal of the program is to promote student academic performance, responsible behavior in school, and regular attendance. School-based teams and district mental health professionals also refer students and families to community providers for additional services.

- According to the district’s [Mental Health Plan for 2019/20](#), students who are exhibiting post-traumatic stress symptoms are able to receive appropriate therapeutic intervention—85% of the district’s Family Therapists are trained in Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT).
- School psychologists deliver a continuum of services that support academic, social, and interpersonal student development. They conduct psychological and academic assessments that help to identify and meet the needs of students with disabilities and those who are gifted. This includes expedited evaluations through SEDNET for students who have been hospitalized through the Baker Act process. They are also important members of the school-based collaborative problem-solving teams, as they help to collect and interpret student and classroom data. School psychologists promote positive behavior and mental health by serving on crisis intervention teams, working to improve schoolwide practices and policies, as well as providing ongoing small group and individual counseling at their schools. They also provide direct and indirect services to support at-risk or traumatized youth. They conduct trainings related to violence prevention, suicide prevention, crisis response, and mental health. Additionally, school psychologists collaborate with parents, school professionals, and community providers to coordinate needed services, which may include mental health awareness trainings.
- School Social Workers are advocates who help students achieve academic and social-emotional success by linking the home, school, and community. Social work support services include intervention, crisis support and mental health counseling, addressing issues of non-attendance and truancy, completing behavioral assessments, and psychosocial evaluations.

Cleveland Metropolitan School District

To support and connect to families during school closures, the Cleveland Metropolitan School District is providing the following support and resources:

- The district’s Rapid Response Desk/Team has moved their crisis response operations online. The Rapid Response team is a 24/7, 365-day service that gathers resources in response to a range of crises including, but not limited to: suicide ideation/attempts, grief adjustment, and gun violence. During school closures, this team of crisis coordinators is still fielding calls from school administrators concerning students in need of immediate assistance, reaching out to families virtually and connecting them to local resources and support personnel.
- The district’s COVID-19 social-emotional wellness site also provides links to resources families can access for immediate emotional support or assistance, including a crisis text line, which connects individuals to live, trained crisis counselors, and Frontline Mobile Crisis, Cuyahoga County, which provides 24/7 mental health crisis and suicide prevention assistance, as well as referrals for other supportive services.
- CMSD is working with Dr. Laura Purnell, a wellness coach and former CMSD educator/superintendent, to develop and conduct wellness sessions to help parents/caregivers cope with their emotions so they can create a supportive home for children. Four pre-recorded sessions are currently provided on the district’s website. Week 1 featured a wellness workshop for families, Week 2 covered resilience strategies, Week 3 addressed fear, and Week 4 was devoted to a discussion of family values and “stepping into the new normal.” In addition, members of the Humanware Department (see below for description) record their own SEL videos for parents and scholars. These videos offer “Brain Breaks” and guidance for families on how to use SEL activities.
- The social-emotional wellness site provides links to resources specifically designed to address the social-emotional wellness needs of families and children, including:
 - [Building Positive Conditions for Learning at Home: Strategies and Resources for Families and Caregivers](#) (American Institutes for Research)

- CMSD is working with [The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning \(CASEL\)](#) to respond to and raise the awareness of the range of emotions students and educators are feeling as a result of the coronavirus (COVID-19). CASEL CARES connects the SEL community with experts to address how SEL can be most helpful in response to today’s circumstances. <https://casel.org/covid-resources/>
- A [bank of social-emotional wellness videos](#) for students at home. For each video, the site provides a description, intended grade levels, and run time. Examples include videos that describe breathing techniques and strategies for helping students destress and calm down, videos that deal with gratitude and relationship building, and videos that provide guidance for parents in how to have courageous conversations about coronavirus and school safety.
- [First Aid for Feelings: A Workbook to Help Kids Cope During the Coronavirus Pandemic](#). (Available in English, Spanish, and French). Denise Daniels, a leading child development expert, has teamed up with Scholastic and the Yale Child Study Center to help children, families, and educators cope during this pandemic.
- Regular [updates](#) from the CEO keep the school community informed of developments and resources. A recent update laid out the protocols/process for the district’s upcoming (in-person) graduation procession and virtual graduation ceremony.
- The district’s COVID-19 site provides academic enrichment resources, including weekly materials and assignments for all grade levels. CMSD has also partnered with CW43 WUAB and the Cleveland Teachers Union to present televised lessons for students whose schools have been closed due to the Coronavirus. A sample week of episodes can be found [here](#).
- CMSD is fielding remote learning surveys for parents/students to provide information that will be used to make decisions about how best to support scholars and their families when school resumes this year.
- Families can access information on grab-and-go meal locations and an interactive map, links to health and government resources, and information on [technology assistance and support](#), including information on how to apply for discounts or complimentary Wi-Fi service.

In addition, the district has the following infrastructure in place for addressing the social-emotional and mental health needs of students:

- **School-based Mental Health Services:** Every CMSD school is paired with one of five community agencies. These agencies provide a menu of resources including individual therapy, small group sessions, crisis intervention, general consultation, and conventional grief adjustment. All services provided are free of charge to the scholars, the families, and the school district as they deliver the required services at the school building avoiding difficult after school appointments.
- Another key component of the CMSD school-based mental health services is to make sure that all students know where to reach out to for help. The schools and students take an active role in communicating available supports through each school.
- **Humanware** is an initiative of the Cleveland Metropolitan School District supporting the commitment to providing safe and supportive schools where their scholars can succeed and thrive.
 - Humanware advocates for evidence-based social-emotional learning (SEL) practices. Humanware Partners serve as thought-partners, planners, professional learning providers, and coaches to CMSD educators to facilitate the integration of SEL core competencies into schools to engage students, family, educators, and community to create safe, supportive, and successful learning environments.
 - Humanware advocates for best practices that ensure that all human resources in a student’s school, family, and community function together so that students are learning in safe, supportive, and successful schools.

- **Districtwide Student Support Teams (SST):** The SST is a group of adults from each school districtwide that supports the most intensive needs (Tier 3) of CMSD youth at that particular building. The team meets weekly at each site to discuss referrals made from staff and parents. The SST is made up of a core team of adults, who attend all building level SST meetings, including the parent or guardian (when available), the building administrator, a teacher representative and an individual from support services (either the building psychologist, school counselor or school nurse). The plan is for the core team to determine who else needs to attend the meeting and invite them, set the meeting schedule and gather all the available information that will assist the team in determining what each situation requires. The goal of each SST is to determine appropriate intervention strategies for the referred students in order to keep them successfully functioning in their regular classroom setting.
- **Winning Against Violent Environments (WAVE):** WAVE is CMSD’s peer mediation program. Each school has a WAVE team made up of an adult coordinator and grade specific scholars who perform the mediations. All schoolwide WAVE teams are trained by the district’s WAVE Specialists who also consult with the teams and monitor the mediations. Often, scholar concerns are addressed by the WAVE mediators, which minimizes further adult involvement and discipline.

Los Angeles Unified School District

LAUSD has developed the following COVID-19 Mental Health and social-emotional wellness strategies and resources:

- LAUSD has a set of extended hour (6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.) hotlines for families and employees, and the Student Health and Human Services (SHHS) Division has added a layer of support to the main district hotline. When families call the district hotline, an operator can immediately connect the caller with the SHHS team—who can provide mental health support and consultation for students, families, and educators—as well as provide support with accessing basic resources such as food, clothing, and shelter, referrals to Los Angeles county community partners, and support for families with school enrollment during closures.
- Families may also contact SHHS personnel directly via their own hotline number, and SHHS Wellness Programs established a direct extension on the hotline to assist families with enrolling in health coverage. Given that many district families have lost their job-based health coverage or they’re experiencing a reduction in income because their hours have been cut, they can no longer pay premiums. So LAUSD staff also assists families in need of financial assistance to maintain coverage.
- Online resource [guides](#) have been developed for each local district (with the district covering over 700 square miles, it is subdivided into 6 local districts). These guides are available in English and Spanish, and connect families to neighborhood mental health clinics, family services organizations, wellness centers, and other organizations to contact for assistance with food, housing, or unemployment insurance. These guides have also been made into flyers and are being distributed to families who come to the Grab and Go (meal) centers.
- The district is also in the process of developing an online tool which families will be able to use to search for community organizations in their neighborhood that provide essential services. The organizations will be the same that Student Health and Human Services’ School Mental Health and Healthy Start staff use to refer families, so everyone will have access to the same information.
- In response to school closures, all professional development for teachers and administrators offered by the district’s Social-Emotional Learning unit has been adapted to be presented virtually. The SEL unit also has a web page with comprehensive list of virtual SEL resources for parents and teachers. This list is organized by grade span: <https://achieve.lausd.net/Page/16609>.

- The Division of Instruction has developed and provided 10 hours of professional development to assist teachers and administrators with the transition to online instruction. Social-Emotional Learning was highlighted as a part of this learning. Continuity of Learning sessions developed by the SEL unit included: Mindfulness, integrating the Middle School Second Step Digital Resources into online learning, and incorporating Self-Management and Social Awareness into virtual classroom practice.
- LAUSD has also developed a 30-hour course—Future Ready—to build and refine the skills of teachers and administrators to provide rigorous and robust online instruction. A part of this course will focus on Social-Emotional Learning.
- SHHS has a [website](#) that provides [resources for families during school closure](#), including a list of Wellness Centers and school-based clinics that remain open, news updates, links to free educational resources from PBS SoCal | KCET and KLCS-TV, instructional continuity guides in both English and Spanish for both [parents](#) and [students](#), as well as an instructional continuity guide specifically targeted to [students with disabilities](#), online technology support, an interactive map for locating the closest Grab and Go meal sites, and links to a host of other online resources such as:
 - [Ten Free Library Resources for Families & Kids to Access from Home](#): Tutor.com, Storytime Online, Tumblebooks and more (Los Angeles Public Library)
 - [La biblioteca digital te acompaña en casa](#) (Los Angeles Public Library)
 - [Coronavirus Resources: Teaching, Learning and Thinking Critically](#) (*New York Times*)
 - [Free, easy science for remote learning](#) (Mystery Science)
 - [12 World-Class Museums You Can Visit Online](#) (Mental Floss)
 - [Amazing Educational Resources](#)
 - [Khan Academy Schedule for School Closures](#)
 - [Free Zoom Videoconferencing Tool for K-12 Schools](#)
- On this site there is also a link to an excellent [document](#) outlining five resilience factors: Sense of Safety, Ability to Calm, Self-Efficacy and Community Efficacy, Connectedness, and Hope. Other districts should consider utilizing or adapting this document in their parent and community outreach efforts. In clear, straightforward language, and in both English and Spanish, this guide provides parents with concrete steps they can take to support their children during this crisis.
- A [website](#) and email address enrollduringclosures@lausd.net have been established by SHHS to support newly enrolling families with school enrollment this academic year to ensure that students who live within the district’s boundaries are enrolled and able to access the district’s distance learning programs and other academic and social services, as appropriate.
- An email has also been established, ask-shhs@lausd.net, through which families can ask questions about the coronavirus and supports offered during this time.
- SHHS has developed tools and resources to support the implementation of [Positive Behavior Supports and Interventions and restorative practices](#) in virtual learning environments including structure and routes, establishing and reinforcing behavior expectations, building community, and practicing self-care. An on-line professional community has been established to share tools and resources to support district educators with establishing safe, healthy, welcoming and affirming virtual classrooms via the district’s learning management system.
- [Virtual town halls](#) are being held in communities across the district, to keep families informed and address concerns.

- The State of California has also established a website to help Californians working in essential sectors during the coronavirus response to find safe, reliable, and accessible child-care options. A link is provided on the family resources page.
- Superintendent Austin Beutner provides [regular updates](#) to the school community available in English and Spanish closed caption and American Sign Language (ASL). This form of communication is a positive manner to connect with entire communities while social distancing.

In addition, the district has the following infrastructure and partnerships in place for addressing the social-emotional and mental health needs of students:

- The Division of Instruction has a unit dedicated to Social-Emotional Learning. This team promotes SEL by developing and providing professional developments for teachers and administrators as well as workshops for parents.
- In partnership with CORE (a consortium of nine school districts in California), LA Unified uses the Mindsets, Essential Skills, and Habits (MESH) framework to define and measure SEL. The District’s School Experience Survey, which is administered annually, contains a section that measures Growth Mindset, Self-Efficacy, Self-Management, and Social Awareness. The data from this survey are used to inform decisions around SEL programming and instruction.
- The Social-Emotional Learning Unit has developed several partnerships with organizations that provide SEL curricula. The Committee for Children is a long-term partner. Their TK-5 Second Step program is used by most elementary schools in the District. The Second Step digital platform for middle school for grades 6-8 was provided to every Title I middle school in LAUSD. Sanford Harmony is another partner that has provided free SEL curricular kits to every teacher who attends professional development to learn about their program. More recently, they have moved their materials online to reach an even wider audience.
- The Social-Emotional Learning team has also established a relationship with Inner Explorer, a program that provides developmentally appropriate mindfulness practices for classroom use. Due to the COVID -19 crisis, Inner Explorer is providing free access to their program to the entire district for three months.
- Additionally, the Social-Emotional Learning team partners with the Sandy Hook Promise Foundation and Let it Ripple. These organizations provide free resources for schools and teachers to further self – efficacy and social awareness.

Tulsa Public Schools

Tulsa Public Schools has developed the following COVID-19 social-emotional wellness and mental health strategies and resources:

- The district has established a Wellness Care Line, staffed by TPS team members, for students and families to call if they need to talk and/or ask questions regarding referrals for mental health services, community resources for basic needs and social services (food, shelter, clothing), questions about distance learning, and supports for students with special needs.
- Parents can also fill out a [Family Assistance Request Form](#) to request support online anytime for referrals for mental health services, community resources for basic needs and social services (food, shelter, clothing), and pre-qualification for free- or low-cost internet access.
- The district has implemented a wellness tracker in PowerSchool to track data on a range of areas—mental health, technology, food resources, etc.— to help them focus on supporting the whole child during this time. This tool gives teachers and school staff, as well as the district team, a place to track individual calls to students/families and flag updates or unmet needs.

- Every school must establish a wellness team of three or more staff members who call and check on students on a daily basis. Teachers contact students for instruction, and support staff and elective teachers reach out as well to check on student and family wellness.
- All students receiving Tier 2 and Tier 3 services receive calls by licensed social workers to assess their needs and ensure that TPS is helping them navigate supports.
- Leadership has also asked all TPS supervisors/principals to actively check on the wellness of their staff.
- Another resource for staff is Tulsa’s “[Employee Assistance Program](#)” (EAP) benefit. The benefit connects Team Tulsa employees to behavioral health providers at no cost to the employee. There is no charge for sessions (approximately four sessions) and no information regarding employee information is disclosed to the district.
- Community partners are working alongside TPS to drop off ‘SEL packages’—including ‘at home’ social-emotional activities and curriculum as well as things like jump ropes and water bottles— together with food and other supplies at the meal sites for students and families. TPS also provides food and personal items to TPS staff who may be struggling during this time.
- TPS also partners with [The Opportunity Project](#) to provide expanded learning opportunities—including social-emotional learning—during out of school time. This organization offers a wealth of [COVID-19 resources](#) for students, families, and educators.
- The [TPS Social-Emotional Newsletter](#) provides updates on the social-emotional resources that are being made available to schools and their community during the distance learning opportunity. The district also distributes a “Wellness Wednesday” Newsletter to school leaders and teachers every week.
- TPS is providing explicit SEL lessons in their distance learning guidebook to provide supports to teachers as they use them in their lessons with students. The Tulsa website also provides a digital bank of [SEL resources](#) for elementary schoolers, middle schoolers, high schoolers, and adults.
- Finally, on its website, Tulsa recommends that parents limit their child’s exposure to COVID-19 media coverage and provide a calming influence, reminding them that children look to adults to understand how to respond to the situations around them. They also offer numerous links to resources to help children address their fears, including the following:
 - **Centers for Disease Control:**
[CDC Coping During COVID-19](#)
 - **Child Mind Institute:**
[Talking to Kids About the Coronavirus](#)
 - **National Association of School Psychologists:**
[Talking to Children About COVID-19: A Parent Resource](#)
 - **SAMHSA:**
[Coping with Stress During an Infectious Disease Outbreak](#)
 - **Share My Lesson:**
[Coronavirus Student Guide: Explanations and News Updates](#)
 - **University of Pennsylvania:**
[How Emotional Contagion Takes A Toll](#)

In addition, the district has the following infrastructure and partnerships in place for addressing the social-emotional and mental health needs of students:

- TPS partners with Panorama Education to distribute districtwide SEL surveys twice a year. In addition, five pilot sites use SELWeb to collect SEL data.
- District leadership conduct biweekly phone calls with school leaders and biweekly meetings with senior leadership. These meetings provide climate data updates and 'pulse checks' with teams to understand their current emotional state.
- The Student and Family Support Services department currently has seven licensed therapists on staff, and three student success coordinators who support engagement in secondary schools.
- The district also partners with 38 mental health organizations which provide mental health supports for TPS students, families, and staff.
- Tulsa Public Schools is part of the Collaborative District Initiative with the [Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning \(CASEL\)](#), and has partnered with the Yale Center for Social-Emotional Learning to implement foundational social and emotional learning practices with students, educators, and district leadership.

Appendix A

Technical Assistance and Information on Universal Screening

- The mission of the **School Mental Health Collaborative (SMHC; www.smhcollaborative.org)** is to facilitate and promote access to high-quality, evidence-based, school mental and behavioral health assessments and interventions. The SMHC focuses on (1) reviewing and disseminating evidence-based school mental health interventions and assessment, (2) developing consumable evidence briefs and blueprints that will serve as effective catalysts to guide advocacy and inform school mental health policy and practice, and (3) creating school-university research partnerships that include expert technical assistance to facilitate essential implementation processes and provide program evaluation expertise.
- A primary example of SMHC technical assistance partnership involves supporting district efforts in universal screening training, use, and integration into MTSS processes. The team developed a free [Best Practice Guide for Universal Screening for Social-Emotional and Behavioral Outcomes](#) as well as a publicly available [online repository of resources to support screening initiatives](#).
- The SMHC provides a range of technical assistance and professional development situated within a Multi-Tiered System of Support and across four phases including *Readiness, Installation, Expansion, and Program Improvement*.
 - *Readiness*: A school team determines the capacity to begin installing social-emotional, behavioral, and mental health supports across Tiers I and II. Readiness typically involves building internal capacity to complete assessments in Tiers I and II along with the requisite intervention supports. Training in specific interventions at this phase will involve primarily didactic introductions to the concepts and components of the intervention, to promote **basic knowledge** of the intervention. Subsequent training will involve a much closer look at the intervention through active learning methods to permit practice of the content in a controlled setting, such as through role plays with feedback, to promote **intermediate and procedural knowledge** and **competency** of the intervention and culminate with readiness to apply it with supports.
 - *Installation*: A school team has foundational supports in place and is ready to begin data collection, data review, intervention selection, and progress monitoring. Installation phase involves more in-depth training, practice, and review of readiness interventions/assessments, as well as problem-solving common barriers to success (e.g., intervention fidelity). Training in specific interventions at this phase will involve supervision of the intervention as delivered in the actual settings, through coaching methods to ensure fidelity to intended procedures, to promote **expert knowledge and proficiency** of the intervention, and culminate with the ability to deliver it independently.
 - *Expansion*: Once the team has installed the necessary components to begin integrated Tiers I/II, expansion includes weekly coaching to improve delivery of classroom interventions, meeting with problem-solving teams to review progress towards school initiatives/goals, and expanding into areas beyond initial installation (e.g., moving from PBIS or behavioral foundation into integrated SEL or mental health supports).
 - *Program Improvement*: Schools with fully installed and expanded Tiers I/II now build a culture of continuous improvement through data reviews, ongoing coaching, and onboarding of new staff. A specific focus includes training on data literacy and using data across a variety of sources to monitor the overall effectiveness of the MTSS as well as specific components across Tiers I and II.

Appendix B

Links to Articles and Resources

- [COVID resources from the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning \(CASEL\)](#)
- [COVID-19 and Your Mental Health \(Mayo Clinic\)](#)
- [Five Resilience Factors \(LAUSD Student Health and Human Services\)](#)
- [Building Positive Conditions for Learning at Home: Strategies and Resources for Families and Caregivers \(American Institutes for Research\)](#)
- [Evidence Based Interventions for Trauma \(Treatment and Services Adaptation Center\)](#)
- [Taking Care of Your Behavioral Health \(SAMHSA\)](#)
- [Coping with Stress During Infectious Disease Outbreaks \(SAMHSA\)](#)
- [SAMHSA's Disaster Distress Helpline](#)
- [Interim Guidance for Administrators of US K-12 Schools and Child Care Programs \(CDC\)](#)
- [Caring for Children: Tips to keep children healthy while school's out \(CDC\)](#)
- [Coping during COVID-19 \(CDC\)](#)
- [Talking to Kids about the Coronavirus \(Child Mind Institute\)](#)
- [Mental Wellness During COVID-19 \(United Way\)](#)
- [Helping Children Cope With COVID-19 Stress \(WHO\)](#)
- [Mental health and psychosocial considerations during the COVID-19 outbreak \(WHO\)](#)
- [COVID 19 Resource and Information Guide \(National Alliance on Mental Illness\)](#)
- [Talking to Children About COVID-19: A Parent Resource \(NASP\)](#)
- [COVID-19 Information and Resources for Schools and School Personnel \(Ed.gov\)](#)
- [Coronavirus: How emotional contagion takes a toll \(University of Pennsylvania\)](#)
- [Coronavirus: ELL and Multilingual Resources for Schools \(Colorín Colorado\)](#)
- [School Responses to COVID-19: ELL/Immigrant Considerations \(Colorín Colorado\)](#)
- [Distance Learning for ELLs: Privacy Considerations \(Colorín Colorado\)](#)
- [COVID-19 School Closures: Supporting English Learners During the COVID-19 Pandemic \(AFT\)](#)
- [Preparing for Widespread Illness in Your School Community: A Legal Guide for School Leaders \(NSBA\)](#)
- [Addressing mental health & crisis among students during COVID \(State of Reform\)](#)
- [Coronavirus Student Guide: Explanations and News Updates \(Share My Lesson\)](#)
- [Helping Students and Staff Cope with Crisis and Loss During a Pandemic \(Children's Hospital of Los Angeles and the National Center for School Crisis and Bereavement\)](#)
- [Planning for Virtual/Distance School Counseling During an Emergency Shutdown \(ASCA\)](#)

Appendix C

District Experts and Researchers

The following district staff and researchers contributed to this report and may be contacted with questions or requests for further information.

Report Contributors:

Nathaniel von der Embse, University of South Florida

Associate Professor, School Psychology
Fellow, Educational Policy Information Center
Co-Director, School Mental Health Collaborative
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Dr. von der Embse is an associate professor of school psychology at the University of South Florida, and chair of the Government and Professional Relations committee for the National Association of School Psychologists. Dr. von der Embse serves as an associate editor for the *Journal of School Psychology*, and his research interests include universal screening for behavioral and mental health, teacher wellbeing and student test anxiety, and training educators in population-based mental health services. His research has resulted in over 75 peer-reviewed publications, professional articles, and book chapters. Dr. von der Embse's research has been featured in the New York Times, Bay News 10, WUSF, TIME magazine, cited in government policy briefs, and presented nationally and internationally (China, France, England). Dr. von der Embse has a currently funded research program of nearly \$8,500,000 from the Institute for Education Sciences, National Science Foundation, Spencer Foundation, National Institute for Justice, and the Scattergood Foundation. He received the 2018 Lightner Witmer Award for early career scholarship from Division 16 of the American Psychological Association.

Dr. von der Embse received his Ph.D. from Michigan State University in School Psychology. He is currently working with **Philadelphia Public Schools** and **Hillsborough County Public Schools**.

Judy Elliott, National Education Consultant

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Judy Elliott is the former **Chief Academic Officer of the Los Angeles Unified School District** where she was responsible for curriculum and instruction from early childhood through adult, professional development, innovation, accountability, assessment, afterschool programs, state and federal programs, health and human services, magnet programs language acquisition for both English and Standard English learners, parent outreach, and intervention programs for all students. Before that she was the Chief of Teaching and Learning in the **Portland Oregon Public Schools** and prior to that an Assistant Superintendent of Student Support Services in the **Long Beach Unified School District** in CA. Judy also worked as a Senior Researcher at the National Center on Educational Outcomes at the University of Minnesota. She started her career as a special education classroom teacher and then a school psychologist. During this time, she was an adjunct professor

at the State University College at Buffalo New York, where she taught graduate courses in curriculum and instruction and applied behavior analysis in the Department of Exceptional Education. She earned her Ph.D. in Educational Psychology from the State University of New York in Buffalo, NY.

In 2012, she was appointed by Commissioner John King as the first ever New York State “Distinguished Educator” to help support and oversee the **Buffalo City School District** Priority Schools. Judy continues to assist districts, cooperatives, schools, national organizations, state and federal departments of education in their efforts to update and realign systems and infrastructures around curriculum, instruction, assessment, data use, leadership, and accountability that includes all students and renders a return on investment.

Her research interests focus on systems change and leadership, equitable and accessible effective instruction for all students, data-based decision making, and accelerated student achievement. She has trained thousands of staff, teachers, and administrators in the U.S. and abroad in areas of integrated service delivery systems, multi-tiered system of supports, effective use of data, linking assessment to district and classroom instruction and intervention, strategies and tactics for effective instruction, curriculum adaptation, collaborative teaching and behavior management. She has published over 51 articles, book chapters, technical/research reports and books. She sits on editorial boards for professional journals and is active in many professional organizations.

Judy is nationally known for her work in Multi-Tiered System of Supports/Response to Instruction and Intervention. She has led many successful projects in this area and actively continues to support school districts and national organizations in this work.

District Contacts:

Stephanie Andrews, Tulsa Public Schools

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Stephanie Andrews has been an educator for 20 years with Tulsa Public Schools serving as a classroom teacher, Counselor, and currently the Director of Student Engagement. Stephanie will be assuming the role of Interim Executive Director of Student and Family Support Services. Stephanie holds an Ed.S. in Educational Leadership, an M.S. in Community Counseling and a B.S. in Elementary Education. Stephanie was an NBCT educator. She currently serves as the district lead for social-emotional learning in Tulsa Public Schools where she is part of the leadership team for the Wallace Foundation grant around social-emotional learning and expanded learning.

Pia Escudero, Los Angeles Unified School District

Executive Director, Division of Student Health and Human Services

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Pia V. Escudero serves as Executive Director of the Student Health and Human Services (SHHS) Division in the **Los Angeles Unified School District**, the second largest school district in the nation. She is responsible for implementing policies and direct services that promote the health and wellbeing of students, families, and staff. She oversees more than 2,500 administrators, service providers, and support staff in the following departments: Human Relations, Diversity, and Equity; Nursing Services; Pupil Services (Attendance); Positive Behavior Intervention & Supports & Restorative Justice; School Mental Health; Special Student Populations; Student Medical Services and MediCal Programs; and Wellness Programs.

Throughout her career, Ms. Escudero has been recognized as a leader in the field of school mental health, wellness, and trauma. Her expertise includes the development, implementation, and evaluation of high-quality interventions that promote resiliency, healing, and lifelong health. Ms. Escudero is a locally and nationally recognized licensed clinical social worker. She holds a bachelor's degree in Sociology and Spanish Literature from the University of Southern California and a Master's Degree in Social Work from the University of Southern California.

Antoine Hickman, Broward County Public Schools

Chief of Student Support Initiatives and Recovery

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Dr. Antoine Hickman has committed his career to the field of education as a “voice for the voiceless.” He is currently the Chief of Student Support Initiatives and Recovery for Broward County Public Schools, the sixth largest school district in the country.

In his current role as Chief of Student Support Initiatives and Recovery, his responsibilities include providing leadership in the delivery of student support services in the areas of positive behavior and climate planning, prevention and intervention support for physical and social-emotional health, equity and diversity, and personal development for all students. His various leadership roles have afforded him the opportunity to work with multiple public and private entities to provide reasoned approaches to address the behavioral and mental health needs of students. In addition to providing oversight of school and district programs in rural and urban districts, his overall success as a leader and administrator has been attributed to his positive, cooperative, committed, and consistent attitude as a servant leader.

Saemone Hollingsworth, Broward County Public Schools

Executive Director, Exceptional Student Learning Support

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Saemone Hollingsworth is the Executive Director of the Exceptional Student Learning Support Division of the School Board of Broward County. Prior to her appointment to this position in September 2019, she was a Cadre Director in the Office of School Performance & Accountability for three (3) years where she supervised fifteen (15) elementary Principals.

The majority of Ms. Hollingsworth's career has been spent in the Broward County School system. After starting her career as a self-contained Special Education Teacher with the Alachua County School Board, she continued as a Special Education teacher at both Palm Cove Elementary School and Silver Ridge Elementary School. Ms. Hollingsworth also served as the ESE Specialist at Silver Ridge Elementary School for eight (8) years. She then served as an Assistant Principal at Silver Ridge Elementary School for seven (7) years and later became the Principal at the same school. After completing the Wallace Intern Director Program, Ms. Hollingsworth became a Cadre Director in 2016.

Ms. Hollingsworth earned her undergraduate degree in Special Education from the University of Florida. She earned a Master's degree in Educational Leadership from Florida Atlantic University.

Ebony Johnson, Tulsa Public Schools

Interim Chief Learning Officer

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Dr. Ebony Johnson is a Tulsa native who takes pride in having grown up in North Tulsa and graduating from McLain High School in 1994. She began her journey in education in 1999. Dr. Johnson has been a

Language Arts middle school teacher where she was named Teacher of the Year for Monroe Middle School after teaching for only two years, an Elementary School Principal at Academy Central and a High School Principal of McLain Magnet High School for Science and Technology where she raised test scores, fostered college acceptance for many seniors and changed the culture towards high expectations for all students. Dr. Johnson served as Principal of Central Magnet Junior and Senior High School for Fine and Performing Arts, the Executive Director of Student and Family Support Services within Tulsa Public Schools and most recently named the interim Chief Learning Officer. In addition, she is the co-lead for the Wallace Foundation PSELI (Partnership for social and emotional learning initiative) multi-year grant. Ebony is also lead for Tulsa Public Schools on a partnership with the Aspen Institute on Climate work and she partners with community agencies and philanthropic supporters on mental health and ways to address student trauma.

She has served her community by sitting on a number of boards, committees and speaking to various groups and constituents about the power of education for all children.

Dr. Johnson has received many awards and accolades for her work with high-poverty, urban students as well as her commitment to collaborating with the community as a whole including the Tulsa Metropolitan Urban League Educational Excellence award in 2010 and the Williams/Shocks Women of Inspiration award. In addition, while an undergraduate college student she was inducted into the NSU Hall of Fame and was named Miss Black Oklahoma 1997 and served as the founding president of the Rho Sigma Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. In order to keep our community informed of educational information, Ebony sends the "What's Happening in Education" to radio station 105.3 –Kesha the Daytime Diva. In 2014, Ebony received the 100 Black Men of Tulsa Hall of Honor Community Service Award.

Most recently, she received the honor of a top 10 Tulsan to Watch in 2015 by the Tulsa World. She was also named Educator of the Year by the Perry Broadcasting and Company in 2015 and Principal of the Year by the Tulsa Metro Chamber of Commerce Partners in Education 2016. She also received the Status of Women Award by Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority in 2016.

She has conducted numerous trainings on Classroom Management for the Urban Child, Culturally Responsive Teaching and Progress Monitoring. She received her Bachelor of Arts in Education from NSU in 1999, her Master's in Education from NSU in 2001 and her Doctorate in Education from the University of Oklahoma in 2011. She is a board member of the YMCA of Greater Tulsa and Women of the United Way of Tulsa.

William J. Stencil, Cleveland Metropolitan School District

Educator-Executive Director

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Bill Stencil has over 44 years of experience in education as a Teacher, Coach, School Psychologist, Crisis Coordinator and District Administrator. He is presently the Executive Director for the Humanware/Social-Emotional Learning Department with the Cleveland Metropolitan School District and the former Director for the Cleveland Office of Psychological Services. Beginning in 2007, he worked closely with Cleveland CEO, Eric Gordon, and the Cleveland Teachers' Union in the creation of Humanware and has been a major influence in the development of all the initiatives found in the present department. Bill continues to stay involved with crisis response as he created the existing, Cleveland Rapid Response Team and still oversees its functioning. He also spent several years as the lead for the State Crisis Response Team representing the Ohio School Psychologists Association. In addition, Bill spent 10 years in private practice focusing on adolescents and their families. To share resources with colleagues and families, Bill takes every opportunity to present various aspects of Humanware/SEL information throughout the country in conferences, webinars, radio, and television spots.

Marco Tolj, Los Angeles Unified School District

Director, Strategic Planning and Data Management

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Marco is a Director in the Division of Special Education for the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD). He brings with him over 20 years of experience in education with a focus on data-driven instructional decisions, creating a student-centered environment through inclusion and building collaborative school cultures to support the needs of students. Previously, he was a Special Education Administrative Coordinator leading a team supporting over 120 schools in Local District Central within LAUSD, which serves over 10,000 students with disabilities. He has also served as a teacher, coach, coordinator, and high school administrator throughout his career.

Allison Yoshimoto-Towery, Los Angeles Unified School District

Chief Academic Officer

Los Angeles Unified School District


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Allison Yoshimoto-Towery is Chief Academic Officer of Los Angeles Unified, leading instructional strategies for almost 500,000 students in one of the nation’s largest and most diverse school districts. She oversees preschool to adult education, including specialized programs for English learners, Standard English learners, Gifted learners, Academic counseling, guiding post-secondary success, advanced placement programs, linked learning and career technical education are a few of the programs within the Division of Instruction. Most important to Allison is leading from an equity lens and rethinking how “business as usual” is done to meet the needs of those students and communities traditionally underserved by public education.

Allison has served Los Angeles Unified for more than 25 years as a teacher, principal, director and top administrator. She is a fierce advocate of high expectations for all students and believes it is up to educators to find a way to reach every child. As principal, her school won a California Distinguished School Award and the highly competitive Target Heart of America Library Grant in collaboration with local government. She currently is overseeing the effort to provide all students with access to high-quality instruction and a robust online curriculum as Los Angeles Unified shifts to a system of remote learning.

The great-granddaughter of Japanese-American migrant farmworkers, Allison learned the values of hard work and perseverance during her childhood in Boyle Heights and Monterey Park. Through her family’s experience, she understands the importance of ensuring all students feel proud of their heritage, and is dedicated to providing them with opportunities that celebrate biculturalism and bilingualism.

Allison has a bachelor’s degree from the University of California, Irvine; a master’s degree in education and reading specialist credential from Cal State Los Angeles; and a master’s degree in education and an administrative credential from UCLA. In 2020, Allison was awarded the Curriculum and Instruction Administrator of the Year for the Association of California Administrators, Region 16.



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