

SUPPORTIVE AND SAFE SCHOOLS

WHY STUDENT SUPPORTS AND SCHOOL CLIMATE ARE IMPORTANT

Students learn most effectively when their school feels safe, inclusive, supportive, and respectful.¹ Creating positive school climates and providing student supports can mitigate the impact of trauma,² mental health needs,³ and other non-academic factors that affect a student's ability to engage in learning.⁴ It is instrumental in closing opportunity and achievement gaps in our system and improving student outcomes.

The creation of safe and supportive schools includes strategies such as Social-Emotional Learning (SEL), tiered systems of support, partnerships with families, partnerships with community-based organizations, and providing access to mental health services, among others. Between 50-80% of students in need of mental health services do not have access,⁵ and schools are likely the first point of access for many students that do seek services.^{6,7} School climate reform strategies have been shown to decrease school violence and bullying, increase academic achievement, and improve the school experience for students, staff, and families.⁸ The implementation of universal SEL programs have also been shown to result in significant academic gains^{9,10} as well as a robust return on investment of \$11 for every \$1 spent.¹¹

CREATING SAFE AND SUPPORTIVE SCHOOLS

To create positive school climates and ensure the effective identification and resourcing of student supports, many states, districts, and schools utilize a tiered model, such as multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS). These models identify school-wide, universal strategies (Tier 1), targeted strategies (Tier 2), and intensive strategies (Tier 3) to meet both the academic and non-academic needs of students. Particularly for student mental health, MTSS helps increase coordination of supports across academic and behavioral needs of students, encourages collaborative approaches to supporting students across school teams, and increases collaboration with community partners and families.¹²

States and districts that have taken up efforts to



implement MTSS and improve school climates have established some common factors necessary for success. These include: leadership that is strategic and collaborative; staff capacity, including training and mindset; partnering with families and community to provide supports; data collection and responsiveness to data; and culturally responsive implementation.^{13,14,15}

WHAT'S ALREADY IN PLACE IN WASHINGTON

Washington state has embarked upon some critical work to create positive school climates. The Educational Opportunity Gap Oversight and Accountability Committee (EOGOAC) spearheaded a number of reforms, most recently with the passage of House Bill 1541 that continued student discipline reform and created the Washington Integrated Student Supports Protocol (WISSP).¹⁶ The WISSP approach includes needs assessments; partnership with community and community based organizations; leadership and integration among school staff, district staff, families, and partners; and data-driven decision making. Washington has also developed Social-Emotional Learning benchmarks¹⁷ for district use. The state convened a workgroup on children's mental health as well, which provided recommendations on how to increase access to mental health services across our state systems, including in schools. We can enhance these and other efforts to deliver services to students and enable districts and schools to create welcoming and supportive environments for every student.

LOOKING AHEAD

In the 2019 legislative session, we are proposing two strategies to help schools and districts continue progress in creating safe and supportive school climates.

1. Encouraging and enabling districts to create positive, supportive school climates by implementing a multi-tiered system of support framework to identify and meet student needs.

We propose building upon the good work already underway in our state by increasing capacity in schools and districts to successfully implement strategies like the WISSP and SEL benchmarks through the buildout of multi-tiered systems of supports. Providing tools such as an MTSS practice profile to assist districts in implementing positive school climate strategies will help support districts in providing coordinated services and create additional leadership buy-in.

2. Providing reliable and consistent access to mental health services for students through either staff or partner providers in every school building.

We propose increasing student access to mental health services, through additional staff within the school building or through a community partner, such as an educational service district, county health department, or community-based organization. Ensuring that students have access within their school environment to mental health services and necessary referrals is a key support to improving school climate and improving outcomes for students with mental health needs.

¹ US Department of Education, “Guiding Principles: A Resource Guide for Improving School Climate and Discipline” <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/school-discipline/guiding-principles.pdf>

² Trauma and Learning Policy Institute <https://traumasensitiveschools.org/trauma-and-learning/the-problem-impact/>

³ University of Maryland, Center for School Mental Health Analysis and Action. “Education and Systems of Care Approaches: Solutions for Educators and School Mental Health Professionals.” (2007) <http://csmh.umaryland.edu/media/SOM/Microsites/CSMH/docs/Resources/Briefs/SystemOfCareBrief.pdf>

⁴ ChildTrends, “Making the Grade: A Progress Report and Next Steps for Integrated Student Supports.” (2017) https://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/ISS-FULL-Report_FINAL-FINAL-12_5_v3.pdf

⁵ Stein, B, et al. Interventions to Improve Student Mental Health A Literature Review to Guide Evaluation of California’s Mental Health Prevention and Early Intervention Initiative.

Interventions to Improve Student Mental Health, RAND Corporation. (2012).

⁶ Stein, B. 2012 (see above).

⁷ Rossen, E. and Cowan, K. “Improving Mental Health in Schools,” The Phi Delta Kappan, Vol. 96, No. 4 (December 2014/January 2015), pp. 8-13. Phi Delta Kappa International.

⁸ Thapa, A., et al. “A Review of School Climate Research,” Review of Educational Research, Vol. 83, No. 3 (September 2013), pp. 357-385, American Educational Research Association.

⁹ Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P., Dymnicki, A. B., Taylor, R. D. & Schellinger, K. B. (2011). The impact of enhancing students’ social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions. Child Development, 82(1): 405–432.

¹⁰ Belfield, C., et al. The Economic Value of Social and Emotional Learning. (2015) Center for Benefit-Cost Studies in Education, Teachers College, Columbia University.

¹¹ Belfield, C. et al. (2015) see above.

¹² Rossen, E. and Cowan, K. (2014/2015) see above.

¹³ Sebring, P. et al. The Essential Supports for School Improvement (2006). Consortium on Chicago School Research, University of Chicago.

¹⁴ Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. “Wisconsin School Mental Health Framework.” (2015)

¹⁵ Michigan Department of Education. “Michigan Department of Education (MDE) Practice Profile for Multi-Tiered System of Supports Version 4.5” (2018)

¹⁶ Center for Improving Student Learning, OSPI. “Washington Integrated Student Supports Protocol,” <http://www.k12.wa.us/CISL/ISS/pubdocs/WISSP.pdf>

¹⁷ Washington Social Emotional Learning Benchmark Workgroup Report <http://www.k12.wa.us/Workgroups/SELB-Meetings/SELBWorkgroup2016Report.pdf>