



Guidance for Leading Inclusive Special Education Programs: Student Well-Being



APRIL 2022

Guidance for Leading Inclusive Special Education Programs

All students deserve equitable access to high quality instruction. Yet, school systems often face unique and complex challenges in improving outcomes for students with disabilities. Addressing these challenges is multifaceted and requires strong leaders who can effectively coordinate programming within and across departments and schools to increase equitable access to inclusive learning opportunities for students with disabilities.

To support the increased effectiveness of special education programming through effective and inclusive system-wide planning, the department will release seven guidance documents to school systems in 2022. The guidance will cover the highest impact areas of special education programming to most effectively improve outcomes for students with disabilities. Each guidance document will be accompanied by an hour long webinar to support implementation.

In partnership with and alongside school and school system leaders, special education leaders are encouraged to review the guidance documents and attend webinars. Please note: release dates and topics are subject to change.

TOPICS FOR 2021-2022 GUIDANCE FOR LEADING INCLUSIVE SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS	
Month	Topic
January	<u>Leveraging Data to Align Budgets and Spending to Priorities</u>
February	Creating Compliant Systems for Student Success <u>Webinar: February 22 at 1 pm</u>
March	Educator and Staff Well-Being <u>Webinar: April 8</u>
April	Student Well-Being and Trauma Informed Supports
May	Positive Behavior Intervention and Functional Behavior Assessment <u>Webinar: May 3 at 1pm</u>
June	Cultivating a Student-Centered Vision of Teaching and Learning Aligned to Louisiana's Vision for Student Success
June	Identifying, Engaging, and Managing Key Stakeholders



Student Well-Being and Trauma-Informed Supports

“The problem with trauma is we can’t always see it. It’s not like a broken leg where ... they’re wearing a cast and you can act accordingly, knowing they are not yet healed.”

[Source: [How Teachers Can Support Traumatized Students \(and Why They Should\)](#)]

Purpose

As we move into our third year of living through a pandemic, students are still experiencing the same needs that existed prior to the pandemic as well as new challenges that continue to emerge and evolve. Now more than ever, educators must commit to addressing the needs of the [whole child](#), including academic, social, behavioral, and physical needs. Our students with disabilities, especially, rely on high-quality instruction and consistency in order to address their learning barriers, feel safe at school, and continue to make progress in all areas.

Tackling these increased challenges requires school leaders to reimagine the way we approach education. It’s time to break out of our traditionally siloed ways of doing things and instead come together to reimagine how we manage staffing, provide professional learning opportunities, and understand student challenges beyond academics.



Body

There is not an easy answer when it comes to addressing these challenges. However, the [LDOE Well-Being Pillars](#) serve as a starting point for school leaders to guide their efforts in supporting student and staff well-being. Pillar #3 specifically calls out providing individualized supports to meet the entire spectrum of student needs:

Pillar #3: Attend to Individual Students’ Needs by Responding with Appropriate Supports - Provide individualized support, such as health services and structures addressing counseling, nutrition to meet the social (how we relate to others), emotional (how we feel), behavioral (how we act), physical and mental well-being needs of students in order to create a healthier community.

It’s clear that school systems must become increasingly intentional in the ways they support student well-being. A critical first step in doing this is to assess current practices and beliefs related to student well-being.

1. **Examine policies and priorities.** [Louisiana continues to believe](#) that students thrive when adults carefully plan and faithfully uphold a culture of achievement and support. By focusing on **early and accurate identification** of students with



disabilities and sustaining a **robust implementation of MTSS/RTI**, districts can continue to meet the needs of students in a way that also addresses the increased challenges brought on by the pandemic.

2. **Examine the roots of student behavior more deeply:** Understanding the function of student behavior, as well as the potential trauma that could be contributing to behavior, is critical in addressing student well-being. (A recently passed state law, [Section 17:437.2](#), requires “in-service training in recognizing the signs and symptoms of adverse childhood experiences and the utilization of trauma-informed educational practices to address student needs resulting from these experiences.” The next issue of *Guidance for Leading Inclusive Special Education Programs* will examine issues related to student behavior, specifically positive behavior supports and functional behavior assessments.)
3. **Identify additional needs and explore vendors.**
 - [School Mental Health Quality Guide: Needs Assessment & Resource Mapping \(NCSMH\)](#)
 - [Louisiana Partnerships for Success Guide](#)

Questions to consider when choosing a vendor to address student well-being:

- What funding is available to pursue this program or service? (See p. 15 in the [2022–2023 School System Planning Guide](#))
- What must be included so that the program or service is able to meet the needs of the student population?
- What kind of program or approach (e.g., lesson-based, academic integration, teacher practices, organizational) makes sense based on the needs of teachers in the school system? (Consider training and support needs, goals for students, school day structure, etc.)
- What school system goals should be kept in mind while selecting a program or service? (Does the school system have specific goals around increasing academic performance? Addressing disproportionality in discipline? Providing opportunities for student leadership?)

Adapted from CASEL’s [Identify Your Goals](#).

Spotlight: Evangeline Parish School District

“Teachers are glad the issue is being addressed and are learning alongside students.”

– Kelli Lafleur, Special Education Director for Evangeline Parish School District

Evangeline Parish School District is approaching the critical topic of well-being by implementing specific student programs this year and planning to expand the focus to staff next year. The district has utilized funding from the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) fund to build a dedicated team to address issues of social and emotional well-being among its students and staff. The team has developed a structured curriculum for teaching topics related to well-being for both K-6 and 7-12 students, and the team supports the implementation of this curriculum in schools as well. The district has also partnered with outside vendors to pilot a mental health program for students. The program includes 170 slots for virtual mental health services and a handful of robots/kiosks that will join four Evangeline high schools. Evangeline’s well-being team has also begun



supporting principals and assistant principals with Trauma-Informed Decision Making tools to make better decisions and next steps for students and staff members.

Next Steps

Self-Assessment

Consider the following questions to examine school system's efforts to support student well-being:

- What is the school system's current status of student well-being?
- Is an annual climate and culture survey administered?
- What issues related to student well-being are of primary concern currently?
- Is student well-being a visible priority in the school system?
- Is there a strategic plan in place for implementing student well-being efforts?
- How has the school system engaged families in addressing issues related to student well-being?
- Is a [well-being advisory council](#) in place?



Additional Resources

[School Health Advisory Council Guidebook](#) - Recognizing that integrating school health into academics can be overwhelming and schools in general are overloaded, this guide is intended to provide simple yet necessary steps and resources to reduce the challenge of creating a healthier school culture.

[7 Ways Teachers & School Leaders Can Support Students in a \(Post\) Pandemic Year](#) - A PBS Education article that walks through considerations for structuring the upcoming school year to support students in a post-pandemic world.

[Supporting Students' Mental Health During COVID - Child Mind Institute](#) - An article from Child Mind Institute that provides specific suggestions for supporting students' mental health needs at school.

Feedback: In order to continually improve the effectiveness of these guidance documents, please complete the Student Well-Being guidance document [feedback form](#).

Implementation Webinar: A webinar that expands on the topic of Student Well-Being will take place on [May 3 at 1 p.m.](#)