

New Jersey School Climate Improvement (NJ SCI) Strategy Resource

Created by



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The School Climate Transformation Project (SCTP) is a partnership between the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) and the Rutgers University Graduate School of Applied and Professional Psychology that provides supports to K-12 schools in New Jersey using a multi-year, systems-level School Climate Change Process (SCCP) for developing inclusive and positive school climates. Through the provision of open-access resources, professional development opportunities, and consultation, the SCTP supports district leaders and school leadership teams in using data to develop a comprehensive plan for addressing school climate needs. This abbreviated resource previews a selection of research-based strategies commonly incorporated in comprehensive school climate improvement plans and includes a brief overview of the strategy, supporting evidence for its effectiveness in schools, some sample components for effective implementation, and links to free online resources. It is recommended that districts and schools use data to determine local school climate needs and strengths before deciding which strategies to adopt. A school climate assessment for students in grades 3-12, staff, and parents/caregivers, as well as a complete strategy library of resources, which will include a list of core implementation components for each strategy, will soon be available through the New Jersey School Climate Improvement (NJ SCI) Platform, an online application developed by the SCTP. To learn more about using these resources in your district, visit the [NJ SCI Platform homepage](#).

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The publications and resources cited or listed in this resource do not necessarily represent the opinions, findings, or recommendations of the New Jersey Department of Education or Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. The research cited in this resource represents the most recent and generally accepted research related to each strategy area at the time of publication. This resource will be reviewed and updated as new research becomes available. The user is solely responsible for determining if the linked materials are appropriate for use in any given school community and should adhere to local policies and district approval processes prior to implementing school climate strategies. Neither the NJDOE nor Rutgers University take any responsibility for the use of any of the materials in this resource.



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**This list represents a selection of school climate improvement strategies previewed in this resource. A complete library of strategies with additional information, resources, and guidelines for effective implementation will soon be available on the NJ SCI Platform.*

Introduction

The *NJ School Climate Improvement (SCI) Strategy Resource* supports district- and school-level leaders and teams in identifying research-based strategies to address school climate priorities. This document previews a selection of resources available through the New Jersey School Climate Improvement (NJ SCI) Platform - a dynamic online application, developed by the SCTP, to support all public New Jersey school districts in using the School Climate Change Process (SCCP), which is a transformative, data-driven process to address school climate needs. The SCCP begins by collecting and analyzing school climate data using the NJ SCI Survey, a comprehensive school climate assessment available on the NJ SCI Platform, to identify needs and inform the design and delivery of strategic school climate improvement plans. School climate strategies adopted to address needs should be research-based, fit with the culture and context of the school and district, and should be coordinated and aligned with existing strategies and implemented with fidelity.

This resource provides a general understanding of the design and supporting evidence for common school climate strategies to support high quality implementation. The complete library of *NJ SCI Strategy Resources* and their research-based core components for effective implementation will soon be available to registered users on the NJ SCI Platform. The NJ SCI Platform is a no-cost resource that is accessible to all public New Jersey districts and schools, with approval from Superintendents/Chief School Administrators (CSAs). To learn more, visit our [NJ SCI Platform homepage](#) or contact njscisupport@rutgers.edu.

Defining School Climate

School climate encompasses the dynamic and diverse feelings, perceptions, and experiences of school community members. In other words, it relates to the quality or experience of how it feels to be a part of the school community from each person's unique identity and perspective. Major dimensions of school life associated with school climate include safety, relationships, academic environment, as well as organizational structures and supports, all of which interact to varying levels in the school environment. School culture reflects the more engrained values, norms, practices, and traditions within the community, while school climate can shift over time through sustained strategic efforts.

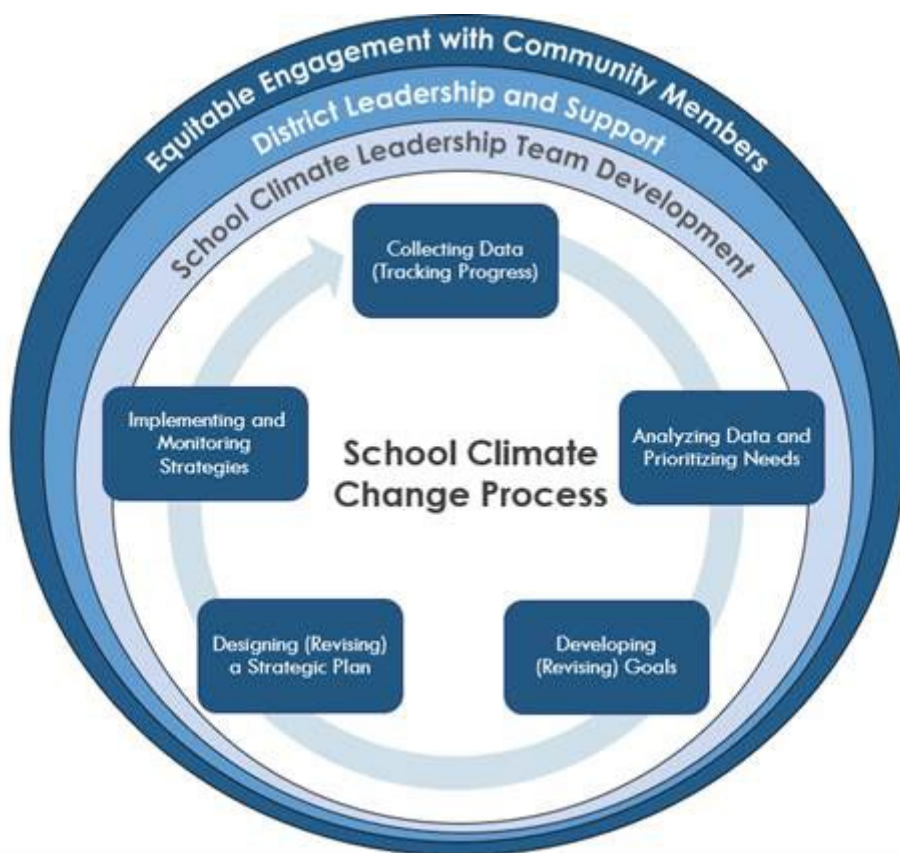
Individuals' experiences of school climate are influenced by various contextual and environmental factors. At the broadest level, national and societal events and conditions can influence policies and procedures at state and local levels, which can shape teaching and learning conditions in schools. Smaller group contexts within schools, like classrooms, can also have their own climates (referred to as "microclimates") in response to various environmental influences. Approaching school climate with this understanding attends to the ways race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality and other social and economic factors operate within and across contexts to shape school environments and individuals' experiences. This lens best positions schools and districts to understand diversity, equity, and inclusion as critical characteristics of school climate and culture, which are central to the design and delivery of effective efforts to address school climate priorities. As such, attention to cultural competence and inclusion is highlighted in the description of all school climate strategies in this resource.

Research consistently shows the importance of promoting a positive school climate for all students, staff, and parents/caregivers. Positive school climates promote higher levels of student academic achievement and foster the physical, psychological, and social and emotional well-being of both students and staff. Promoting the overall well-being of all staff and students creates conditions for effective teaching and learning that lead to more positive student academic and developmental outcomes.

For school staff, positive school climates support educator commitment, motivation, and workplace morale, while promoting a more collegial environment where all staff can thrive. For parents and families, positive school climates help cultivate greater levels of engagement, more positive and productive staff-parent relationships, as well as greater levels of satisfaction with the school environment. Overall, school climate is essential in building and sustaining safer, more engaging and inclusive learning environments for students, staff, and parents and families.

School Climate Change Process

Given the many benefits of building and sustaining a positive school climate, it is critical that schools have a framework and research-based approach for understanding and addressing priority needs. Research on school climate suggests that meaningful school change takes time and, as such, requires sustained efforts over a period of several years (typically, *at least* three to five years). The School Climate Transformation Project at Rutgers University uses a problem-solving process called the School Climate Change Process (SCCP), which is adapted from behavioral and prevention literature on systems-level change.



Schools begin this process by forming a School Climate Leadership Team (SCLT) comprised of diverse school community members. The SCLT drives and monitors effective practices related to school climate improvement efforts. In each school, this team collects and analyzes school climate data from all school groups (students, staff, and parents/caregivers) using the [NJ SCI Survey](#), which is typically administered once per school year. Teams use the NJ SCI Survey and other supplemental data sources to drive goal development and alignment of strategies,

resulting in a comprehensive and coordinated strategic plan. Once schools begin to implement their plans, they evaluate progress and make any necessary modifications based on new data collected. Schools continuously cycle through this process, collecting and analyzing data and evaluating progress of both school outcomes and plan implementation over the course of several years.

District leadership represents an essential layer of support in this process by helping align a district's vision and values to school climate goals and priorities while engaging various key community members throughout the SCCP. District- and school-level leaders focus on equity in each step of the SCCP by engaging community members through accessible data collection methods; varied communication and feedback channels; opportunities for collaborative decision-making; and culturally responsive planning, design, and implementation of research-based practices. The change process is a collaborative, problem-solving approach that brings communities together to help achieve desired outcomes and foster effective and lasting change. The NJ SCI Platform makes this work possible by providing a centralized online application where data can be collected and analyzed, both at the school and district level, and where data are stored and monitored over time as part of goal indicators set by the SCLT.

NJ School Climate Improvement (NJ SCI) Survey Domains

Assessing school climate is an important step in the School Climate Change Process. The NJ SCI Survey is a comprehensive instrument designed to help schools identify school climate strengths and needs/priorities by measuring conceptual domains, or broad topic areas, which together represent a school's overall environment. There are four versions of the NJ SCI Survey: one for students in grades 3-5, one for students in grades 6-12, one for all school staff, and one for parents and caregivers of a child or children in any grade level in the school. The NJ SCI Survey is used to gather and analyze perceptions and impressions about the school environment and the quality of relationships at the district- and school-wide levels. Once collected, the data are used by district and school leadership teams to develop strategic plans.

The following is a brief overview of the NJ SCI Survey domains:

- **Academic Culture and Classroom Practices** – Perceptions of school-wide academic expectations, student motivation, equity and access, and students' experiences in classrooms as indicated by the proportion of teachers who engage in practices to foster engagement
- **Supportive Staff-Student Relationships** – Perceptions of quality relationships between staff and students which feature inclusion, respect, care, and support; and perceptions regarding adults' support and respect for students from diverse social and cultural backgrounds
- **Supports for Student Social and Emotional Learning** – Perceptions of school-wide and instructional practices that promote the development of students' social and emotional skills as well as availability of resources and supports to help parents/caregivers talk to their children about emotions
- **Behavioral Expectations** – Perceptions of school-wide behavioral expectations as being clearly established and reinforced; perceived by members of the community as fair, culturally responsive, and inclusive of diverse perspectives
- **Negative Student Interpersonal Behaviors** – Perceptions of the occurrence of various types of negative interpersonal behaviors among students and perceived victimization based on students' identities and backgrounds
- **Prosocial Student Interpersonal Behaviors** – Perceptions of the occurrence of prosocial and inclusive behaviors, including empathy, perspective-taking, helpful behaviors, and conflict resolution, as well as getting along well with students from diverse backgrounds and inclusion of students with disabilities

- **Student Voice and Involvement** – Perceptions of conditions in school that support student voice, including listening to and valuing students’ ideas and opinions, student leadership opportunities, and student interest and involvement in school activities and events
- **Sense of Physical Safety** – Perceptions of physical safety and the organizational procedures across school contexts and conditions that support a sense of safety and preparedness among the school community
- **Student Sense of Belonging (Students only)** – Students’ perceptions that they are valued for who they are and feel connected to the school community
- **Leadership Support (Staff only)** – Perceptions of practices by administrators and other leaders that promote positive relationships, cohesion, and trust at work
- **Organizational Resources and Supports (Staff only)** – Perceptions of school- and district-level structures (e.g., policy, procedures, time) and supports (e.g., resources and professional development) that promote growth, collaboration, productivity, and successful performance at work
- **Collegial Support (Staff only)** – Perceptions of professional relationships that promote trust, respect, and support among colleagues for facilitating workplace satisfaction
- **Family Support and Engagement (Staff & Parents/Caregivers only)** – Perceptions of support and engagement of parents/caregivers, as well as the perceived quality of relationships between staff and parents/caregivers

**Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion-focused items are integrated within domains given their importance across all aspects of school life.*

The NJ SCI Platform supports school/district leadership teams in the effective use of NJ SCI Survey data to drive strategic planning decisions. It uses responsive technology to help school teams find and align research-based strategies to identified needs, as defined by the above conceptual domains, and as part of a comprehensive data analysis process. This resource provides a starting point for understanding this alignment between NJ SCI Survey domains and school climate strategies. For each strategy in this resource, related NJ SCI Survey domains are listed to emphasize connections between school climate domains and strategies that can help schools improve specific areas or aspects of their school environments.

School Climate Improvement Strategy Examples

This resource supports schools in exploring research-based strategies that are commonly used to improve school climate after identifying priority needs through a comprehensive data collection and analysis process. Strategies include any activity, approach, or intervention grounded in research that suggests it may lead to positive school climate outcomes when implemented with fidelity and careful consideration of a district’s/school’s context. At times, schools may implement strategies that do not have evidence of past success because of limited knowledge, capacity, or resources - or they implement strategies in ways that do not include the essential steps or components for making them most effective. In these cases, schools may not observe the anticipated positive effects of strategy intervention. Each strategy previewed in this resource includes an *overview* describing its purpose and supporting evidence for effectiveness, *sample components for effective strategy implementation*, a list of web-based *resources* from reputable partners and organizations, and *references* for further learning. Embedded in each strategy description are evidence-based implementation practices that are common across all strategies called *universal components*. Each universal component listed below is essential for developing a comprehensive strategic plan. Two additional universal components for effective school climate improvement involve the *use of data* to a) support decision-making regarding priorities as well as appropriate interventions and b) to monitor progress during implementation. These are not listed below as they are built into the design of the

NJ SCI Platform tools and features are available to all users in the system. Consider the remaining *universal components* as you review each strategy in this resource:

- **Leadership Support** – Dedicated school/district leaders and teams are in place to effectively represent the community served and be responsive to feedback (e.g., School Climate Leadership Team members are provided adequate time to meet regularly to develop and monitor school climate improvement plans).
- **Learning and Training** – Training and professional development opportunities are provided to support strategy implementation (e.g., SEL training is conducted for staff to prepare them to deliver modules to students and integrate concepts and skills into instructional strategies).
- **Community Engagement** – Family and community members are informed of initiatives, involved in meaningful ways as participants, and are given opportunities to provide feedback on implementation of a strategy (e.g., Parents receive communication and onsite training to inform them of student attendance policies and are invited to a school event to discuss and provide feedback on strategies and supports for preventing chronic absenteeism).
- **Integration** – Core components are embedded in everyday school practices, structures, and systems; aligned with other strategies; and embraced as part of the school’s culture (e.g., Peer Leadership lessons are aligned with monthly SEL topics and delivered as part of the regularly scheduled advisory meetings).
- **Resource Allocation** – The necessary resources (e.g., human, financial, structural, technological) are in place to implement a strategy over time in a sustainable way (e.g., Administration allocates space and time for students and staff to gather in proactive community-building groups/circles that promote skills, practices, and routines related to a restorative approach).
- **Equity, Inclusion, and Cultural Fit** – Core components are designed and implemented in culturally responsive and sustaining ways that reflect and represent the diverse identities, strengths, and needs of all members of the school community (e.g., School leaders review disciplinary data and policies to consider the impact of current practices on various groups, and to inform the adoption of restorative or positive disciplinary approaches to replace one-size-fits-all and exclusionary measures).

The complete strategy library on the NJ SCI Platform will include a list of strategy-specific, research-based *core components*, or practical aspects of a strategy that most likely account for a strategy’s positive outcomes, which may appear as steps to follow and/or key features to include in the design of an approach. These strategy-specific core components are only available on the NJ SCI Platform because they are linked to the data-driven decision-making tools and features associated with the NJ SCI Survey.

Some strategies use [multi-tiered systems of support](#) to provide preventative or early intervention support to all students at the universal level and increasingly intensive support to specific groups of students based on identified needs. It is also common to integrate different strategies in a multi-dimensional approach designed to strengthen and sustain desired outcomes (e.g., [SWPBIS](#), [SEL](#), and [Trauma-informed and Healing-centered Practices](#)). When reviewing the strategies in this resource, consider the following:

- ◆ the current practices in place to improve conditions for learning in your building;
- ◆ the levels of support being provided to different groups and members of the community;
- ◆ the data being used to identify needs and plan responsive action;
- ◆ the level of coordination across strategies to enhance outcomes; and
- ◆ the organizational readiness and supports for sustaining efforts over time.

All schools can [click here](#) to learn more about how to maximize the use of federal funds to support the implementation of strategies in this resource. Review the NJ SCI Strategies on the following pages and visit the [NJ](#)



[SCI Platform homepage](#) to learn more about how to integrate these strategies into a comprehensive School Climate Change Process (SCCP).

Anti-bullying Interventions

NJ SCI Survey Domains Related to this Strategy

- Behavioral Expectations
- Negative Student Interpersonal Behaviors
- Prosocial Student Interpersonal Behaviors
- Sense of Physical Safety
- Supports for Student Social and Emotional Learning
- Student Sense of Belonging

Strategy Overview

Traditionally, bullying is when a person is “exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other students” (Olweus, 1994, p. 1173). It often includes an imbalance of power, the intention of harming others, and can include direct (i.e., physical, verbal) and indirect (i.e., cyberbullying) methods of aggression. Students who are bullied are at a greater risk of developing mental (e.g., depression, anxiety, low self-esteem), behavioral (e.g., violence, substance abuse), physical (e.g., sleep difficulties, headaches, stomachaches), and academic (e.g., dropping out of school) problems (Centers for Disease Control, 2019). New Jersey’s 2011 *Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act (ABR)* was enacted to hold schools accountable for a) preventing, reporting, investigating, and responding to harassment, intimidation, and bullying (HIB) and b) training teachers and other school members in anti-bullying interventions. The law (*N.J.S.A.18A:17-46*) was updated in 2022 with modifications to reporting procedures and potential consequences (see forthcoming updated resources from [NJDOE](https://www.nj.gov/education/office-of-the-comptroller-of-revenue/) or contact hib@doe.nj.gov with immediate questions). Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, reported bullying rates in schools were increasing (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2019). While initial studies indicate a decrease in bullying during periods of remote instruction (Bacher-Hicks et al., 2021), schools should continue to collect and carefully assess data related to victimization in their schools to better understand post-pandemic patterns.

A meta-analysis showed that anti-bullying interventions are effective in increasing student reporting and help-seeking behaviors (Valle et al., 2020) as well as reducing bullying and improving the mental health of students who are bullied (Fraguas et al., 2021). However, interventions are incomplete without addressing how environmental factors and local norms of behavior may foster specific types of bullying, including bias-based bullying, which may carry worse outcomes for students who experience it (Xu et al., 2020). The current political climate and uptick in hate crimes toward groups, like Asian American and Pacific Islanders (Han et al., 2022), are examples of an increase in bias-based bullying observed in schools (Huang & Cornell, 2019). LGBTQ students (Jackman et al., 2020), students with disabilities (Rose & Gage, 2017), and students from underrepresented/marginalized racial and ethnic backgrounds (Galán et al., 2021) are also at a higher risk of being bullied. The specific types of bullying behaviors and common targets vary according to community composition and can be uncovered through various forms of data collection (e.g., surveys, observations, interviews) to identify specific local needs (Raia-Hawrylak, 2022) and design culturally-responsive supports (Xu et al., 2020). Systems-level anti-bullying efforts should also be integrated with other interventions designed to promote safe, affirming, and inclusive schools, including [social and emotional learning \(SEL\)](#) and [positive behavioral interventions and supports \(PBIS\)](#) in schools.

Sample Components of Effective Strategy Implementation

(Chen et al., 2021; Gaffney et al., 2021; Gage et al., 2014; Raia-Hawrylak, 2022; van Verseveld et al., 2019; Xu et al., 2020)

- **Establishment of a district-wide and/or school-wide approach to anti-bullying** that includes crafting and implementing policies and rules for anti-bullying, establishing clear behavioral expectations and supports, and ensuring resources and supports are available for students involved in bullying incidents
- **Programs for staff to reinforce adults' attitudes about anti-bullying interventions**, increase teachers' self-efficacy in intervening in bullying situations, and help teachers and other staff build knowledge and skills towards reducing bullying in the school community
- **Parenting/caregiver programs that address child- and parent-related factors** such as parenting style, children's empathy, and parent-child interaction in relation to attitudes about bullying
- **Promotion of prosocial skills and creation of a school-wide culture of kindness, respect for diversity**, and appreciation of differences between students through social and emotional competency building opportunities (see [SEL](#) and/or [PBIS](#))
- **Examination of local patterns and norms, and risk factors** which may promote specific types and targets of bullying in order to best intervene to reduce negative interactions and promote positive and inclusive student behaviors
- **Consider students' identities and cultures when delivering interventions**, such as utilizing positive and cohesive family networks for additional support and increasing students' self-esteem to combat bias-based victimization

Resources

[Harassment, Intimidation, and Bullying \(HIB\) Resources | NJDOE](#)

This page from the New Jersey Department of Education features information and resources related to the Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act.

[PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center](#)

This site features toolkits of discussion questions, pledges, activities, and curricula for elementary, middle, and high school students. It also includes a section for parents, and sections on preventing bullying for students with disabilities.

[Educator Resources | Cyberbullying Research Center](#)

This page includes curricula, PDF fact sheets, and guidance related to preventing cyberbullying and building a positive school climate.

[Lesson Plans to Prevent Bias-Based Bullying | Welcoming Schools](#)

These lesson plans are designed to reduce bullying based on biases, stereotypes, and prejudices in students of all ages.

[Stopbullying.gov](#)

This site includes resources to support a public health approach for prevention efforts including training, policy development, tips for teachers, and methods to engage students and families, as well as training modules on implementing a community-wide event to address bullying prevention efforts (see Community Action Toolkit).

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Classroom Management and Proactive Routines

NJ SCI Survey Domains Related to this Strategy

- Academic Culture and Classroom Practices
- Behavioral Expectations
- Supportive Staff-Student Relationships
- Organizational Resources and Supports
- Prosocial Student Interpersonal Behaviors
- Negative Student Interpersonal Behaviors

Strategy Overview

Classroom management refers to all actions teachers and support staff use to create a learning environment that encourages positive social interactions, active engagement in learning, and self-motivation (Burden, 2020). This includes carefully planning lessons, management and organization systems for materials, the development of proactive routines and procedures to streamline administrative tasks, and setting classroom-specific behavioral expectations that are aligned with schoolwide procedures and policies. These practices and procedures provide a sense of predictability for students, and ensure they are occupied productively and that there is sufficient time for student learning. Classroom management promotes positive behaviors through collaboration rather than “control” when teachers: work with students to co-create priorities, behavioral expectations, and classroom goals; guide student behaviors consistently through effective modeling and direction; and respond promptly and effectively to incidents (Graham, 2018; Milner IV et al., 2018).

When students feel respected, supported, and cared for in the classroom, it increases their motivation to follow directions, adhere to rules, and participate in classroom activities (Burden, 2020). Effective classroom management and consistent routines enable all students to engage fully in learning by increasing class participation, preventing potential problem behaviors, increasing student achievement (Bozkuş, 2021), and increasing prosocial behavior and positive peer relationships among students (Gaias et al., 2019). Having equity- and inclusion-focused classroom and behavior management plans is especially important for helping to reduce the disproportionate rates of disciplinary referrals or exclusionary discipline for students of color and those with disabilities and/or persistent challenging behaviors (Gaias et al., 2019; Mitchell et al., 2017). During periods of significant disruption, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, having routines that encourage daily meaningful interactions among students and staff are also important, as is the regular use of formative assessment to monitor student progress (Schwartz, 2020).

Sample Components of Effective Strategy Implementation

(Burden, 2020; Gage et al., 2018; Gaias et al., 2019; Milner IV et al., 2018; Morin, 2020)

- **Teachers introduce and establish clear expectations about classroom procedures and routines** through a process of modeling, allowing for reactions and discussion, providing practice opportunities with student exemplars, and providing grace for students to demonstrate mastery
- **Co-creation of classroom expectations, routines, and procedures** with students to foster an environment that is safe, affirming, learning-centered, innovative, intellectually challenging, and engaging
- **Development of evidence-based, culturally responsive and inclusive behavior management plans** that increase all students’ opportunities to learn
- **Responding with empathy and providing supports to students who have difficulties** adhering to expectations or routines, by being aware of learning differences or other factors (e.g., anxiety, trauma) that may influence students’ responses to new routines

- **Design of lesson plans to ensure an appropriate balance of instructional time**, guided practice, and independent practice, while building-in flexibility
- **Ongoing communication, reinforcement, and redirection related to positive behavioral expectations, routines, and procedures** with students, parents, and families to support students in staying on task

Resources

[Culturally Responsive Classroom Management | Wisconsin Rtl Center](#)

This resource provides a revised and updated series of modules to support teachers in improving and refining their classroom management skills.

[Planning Guides | Responsive Classroom](#)

This resource provides free and downloadable planning guides to help educators at the K-8 level establish classroom routines for management.

[Classroom Management: Resource Roundup | Edutopia](#)

A collection of resources for building positive learning communities, teaching class rules and routines, facilitating student focus and attention, and addressing disruptive behaviors.

[How to Build a Classroom Management Plan | The Institute for Arts Integration and STEAM](#)

A collection of strategies, tools, and supports that master educators have shared in order to establish common language, routines, and expectations in classrooms.

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Diversity and Cultural Awareness – Organizational Supports

NJ SCI Survey Domains Related to this Strategy*

Strategies designed to promote cultural awareness and diversity have the potential to positively influence all NJ SCI Survey domains. Attention to culturally-responsive and -sustaining approaches are critical to the success of any school climate strategy. In addition, there are distinct strategies and approaches to promote diversity and cultural awareness at a systemic level, which are described below.

Strategy Overview

Approaches to promoting cultural awareness and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) focus on creating safe, respectful, and inclusive learning environments for all members of the school community. Diversity involves recognizing and affirming all groups and identities, including gender/gender identity, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, age, native language, ability/disability, religion/spirituality, and family income. Equity ensures that all members of the community have fair and just access to opportunities to thrive, and inclusion promotes each individual's ability to participate and feel a sense of belonging to the community. Efforts to promote diversity and cultural awareness must be integrated and ongoing in order to improve attitudes regarding diversity, rather than hosting sporadic, one-time cultural awareness events or activities (e.g., assemblies or learning activities) (Pahnos, 1992). They should also simultaneously identify and remove barriers for students, staff, and parents/families. Organizational supports for diversity and cultural awareness including having a vision for diversity, equity, and inclusion; modeling respectful and affirming relationships with school community members (Clayton et al., 2020); addressing staff cultural competency through ongoing training (e.g., self-reflection and biases); and hiring and retaining diverse staff. These supports also enable responsive educational practices such as representation of diverse topics and voices in curricula, (self)reflection on internal biases, access to resources, and collaboration through effective communication/outreach with students, families, and community members (e.g., providing input from their cultural backgrounds) (Ruggs & Hebl, 2012).

Creating more diverse and inclusive learning environments is associated with increased student learning, improved social interactions, better and more sensitive perspective-taking, and greater cultural understanding (Gurin et al., 2002). Further, students who engage with and learn about new cultures and communities are better able to reflect on their own identities (Sarraj et al., 2015); develop greater social awareness ([SEL competency](#)), which is critical for college, career, and life success (Jagers et al., 2019); and foster a stronger sense of personal efficacy, empowerment, and agency (Gay, 2013). In addition, hiring and retaining teachers and staff from diverse cultures and identities can lead to a range of positive outcomes for all students and staff, especially students and staff of color, including (but not limited to), more equitable, unbiased views of high student expectations, closing racial academic and disciplinary gaps, and increased social and emotional development (Goldhaber et al., 2015; Carver-Thomas, 2017). Collectively, these outcomes may help prevent teacher turnover (Antonelli & Sembiante, 2022; Carver-Thomas, 2017).

Sample Components of Effective Strategy Implementation

(Clayton et al., 2020; Sarraj et al., 2015; Toms et al., 2009)

- **Leadership that focuses on building relationships**, affirming and valuing diversity, and enacting policies that protect and promote diversity, equity, and inclusion
- **Hiring and retention of diverse staff** to reflect the diverse cultural backgrounds of the school community
- **Ongoing, responsive professional development opportunities**, including trainings, workshops, and other approaches that support self-reflection and competency development in diversity-related areas

- **Inclusion of topics and perspectives from different cultural backgrounds** in curricular materials, activities, and classroom discussions across content areas
- **Thoughtful co-creation of activities and events with students and families** to promote awareness and celebrate diversity in the school community

Resources

[Culturally Responsive Practices | NJDOE](#)

This resource from the New Jersey Department of Education includes guidance on how to effectively implement culturally responsive practices in different content areas.

[Turnaround for Children Toolbox for Whole Child Design – Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Practices](#)

This toolbox provides educators with curricula, materials, and assessments to incorporate culturally responsive and sustaining practices in the school.

[Learning for Justice Classroom Resources](#)

This site provides free resources such as lesson plans, film kits, posters, and student texts designed to help educators incorporate social justice in their classrooms.

[Best Practices for Increasing Staff Diversity](#)

This comprehensive report includes best practices in recruiting diverse staff, engaging the community in the recruitment process, and facilitating dialogue between district leaders and community members.

[LGBTQ-Inclusive Lessons & Resources | Garden State Equality](#)

This resource from Garden State Equality includes information and resources on diversity and inclusion in pedagogy, language use, and teaching materials.

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Equity-driven Transformational Leadership

NJ SCI Survey Domains Related to this Strategy

- Leadership Support
- Collegial Supports
- Organizational Resources and Supports
- Academic Culture and Classroom Practices
- Supports for Student Social and Emotional Learning
- Supportive Staff-Student Relationships

Strategy Overview

Transformational leadership theory in education defines a supportive and transformational leadership style as one where leaders intrinsically motivate colleagues and peers to work together to promote team building and a shared vision (Bass, 1985). Kouzes and Posner (2007) establish five main components of transformational leadership: modeling the way, inspiring a shared vision, challenging the process, enabling others to act, and encouraging the heart. These components can be observed across a variety of behaviors including: providing and committing to a mission and vision (idealized influence); establishing high performance expectations while remaining encouraging and enthusiastic (inspirational motivation); meeting individual needs by coaching, mentoring, and providing feedback (individualized consideration); and challenging norms, soliciting new ideas, and embracing new ways of thinking (intellectual stimulation) (Avolio & Bass, 2004). One study found that principals in high-performing schools use these components more routinely and effectively than principals in low-performing schools (Quin et al., 2015).

In a literature review of transformational leadership in education, students in schools with transformational leaders are more likely to be motivated, work toward common goals, and have better performance in reading; staff also benefit from improved commitment, performance, and job satisfaction (Anderson, 2017). Because educational leaders are in a unique position to influence change and transform school systems, it is imperative that leaders are resilient and adaptable to changing contexts (Tipping & Dennis, 2022) as well as equity-driven (Clayton et al., 2020; Ross & Berger, 2009). Equity-driven transformational leaders build the foundation of change through relationships of humility and respect, continuous professional development regarding meeting student needs with an equity mindset, and establishing a common definition of equity; these leaders also put plans into action by breaking down barriers to equitable access and sustaining structures that critically examine and promote change (Clayton et al., 2020).

Sample Components of Effective Strategy Implementation

(Avolio & Bass, 2004; Ross & Berger, 2009)

- **Shared mission and vision that incorporates staff and school community input** and aligns with the development of district/school policies and procedures
- **High expectations for performance and behavior for all students**, while supporting a process that allows students and staff to learn and grow from their mistakes
- **Structured and sustained coaching, mentoring, feedback, and resources for staff members** with consideration for individualized needs and goals
- **Development of trusting relationships with staff** that support a safe, affirming school environment where different ideas are shared, dissenting views can be voiced without fear, and experimentation with new, exciting tools and practices is encouraged
- **Ongoing dialogue with staff around diversity, values, and social justice** that leads to equity-driven decisions and actions

- **Partnerships between leaders and parents/families and school community members to support student learning and behavioral outcomes** in ways that recognize and value their input and expertise

Resources

[Building Trusting Relationships for School Improvement | Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory](#)

This booklet examines the use of trust within the context of school improvement, with strategies to implement to improve teacher-teacher and teacher-principal relationships.

[Establishing Supportive Relationships between Teachers, Staff, and Students | National Center on Safe and Supportive Learning Environments](#)

This presentation focuses on developing supportive relationships between teachers, staff, and students.

[Equity Toolkit for Administrators | Colorado DOE](#)

This toolkit provides administrators with frameworks, assessments, and resources for building equity in schools and districts.

[Alliance for Resource Equity Toolkit](#)

This toolkit includes free, downloadable guidebooks to identify strengths and weaknesses of equity and excellence within the school system and how to fix them.

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Family Support and Engagement Strategies

NJ SCI Survey Domains Related to this Strategy

- Family Support and Engagement
- Academic Culture and Classroom Practices
- Student Sense of Belonging

Strategy Overview

Parents and families play a vital role in advancing student learning as well as shaping other positive outcomes for students and school staff (Barger et al., 2019; Reschly & Christenson, 2018). Family support and engagement strategies involve effective communication (i.e., diverse modes that are consistent with cultural and contextual needs of families) and strong partnerships based on shared responsibility for students' learning and development among school, family, and community members (Epstein et al., 2018), which are built on trust, equality, and respect (Reschly & Christenson, 2018). This partner-driven approach is a shift from "traditional" modes of parental/family involvement (shaped largely by one-way, disciplinary-focused communication outreach and attendance at school-sanctioned events) to one where positive relationships and shared decision-making with families and local community organizations are central (Leo et al., 2019). School and district leaders play a critical role in guiding and enabling family engagement (Smith et al., 2021) by seeking to understand and address barriers to engagement, particularly for families from historically underrepresented/marginalized groups (e.g., immigration status, income, ability level, etc.) (Leo et al., 2019). Well-organized partnerships with school community members require educators to adjust and adapt to meet the needs of families (Leo et al., 2019), and benefit everyone through a consolidation of resources that supports all students in achieving academic success (Epstein et al., 2018).

Regardless of family demographics (i.e., parents' formal education, language spoken at home, family structure), research suggests that family engagement improves students' achievement, attendance, rates of advancement to the next grade, and high school graduation (Epstein & Sheldon, 2019), as well as attitudes and attributes that support achievement (e.g., motivation, efficacy, etc.) (Reschly & Christenson, 2018). When schools implement well-planned programs and practices with the leaders' support, families can be more productively engaged in their children's education at all grade levels (Epstein & Sheldon, 2019). For all students, especially those struggling academically, socially, and/or emotionally, it is important that schools and families work together at a systems-level through Response to Intervention (RTI) and/or Multi-tiered System of Supports (MTSS) within and across school years to support students' academic and developmental progress (Reschly & Christenson, 2018).

Sample Components of Effective Strategy Implementation

(Epstein et al., 2018; Leo et al., 2019; Reschly & Christenson, 2018)

- **Effective communication with parents and families to promote student success**, which includes varied use of technology and feedback channels to inform about school programs and children's progress
- **Integration of resources and services from the community to provide families with needed supports**, address barriers to participation (e.g., providing childcare and/or meals at school events), and create opportunities for students to serve the larger community
- **Recruitment and organization of parent/family help** at school, home, and other locations, including audiences for student activities
- **Information and ideas for parents/families** related to helping their children with homework and other curriculum-related materials, as well as supporting their children socially, emotionally, and academically
- **Parent/family representation and leadership** on school committees where they are empowered to act as advocates for their children and other students on district- and school-level decisions

Resources

[Families Portal | NJDOE](#)

The Families Portal from the NJ Department of Education provides support and information related to parent and family engagement in student learning and development.

[Family and Community Engagement | USDOE](#)

This website from the U.S. Department of Education provides resources supporting the framework for building greater support and capacity in schools, homes, and communities.

[Strategies for Equitable Family Engagement](#)

This resource from the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education provides an overview of evidence-based strategies that schools and districts can use to promote equitable family engagement practices.

[Teacher-Parent Communication Strategies to Start the Year Off Right](#)

This resource from Edutopia includes educators' best practices for building strong bonds with families, from the first day of school to the last.

[Promising Partnership Practices 2021](#)

In this eBook from the National Network of Partnership Schools, district and organization leaders share ways to support and improve their schools' partnership programs and practices.

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Mindfulness-based Interventions (MBI)

NJ SCI Survey Domains Related to this Strategy

- Supports for Student Social and Emotional Learning
- Academic Culture and Classroom Practices
- Supportive Staff-Student Relationships
- Student Voice and Involvement

Strategy Overview

Mindfulness has roots in eastern philosophies and is defined as “the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment by moment” (Kabat-Zinn, 2003, p. 145). Practices of mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) can either be formal (e.g., guided meditation) or informal (e.g., in routine activities like eating and walking) and focus on internal experiences (e.g., deep breathing) and/or external sensations (e.g., sound) to draw one’s attention away from distractions and to their present state and feelings (Baer et al., 2019; Bishop et al., 2006). Schools use MBIs to proactively improve psychological wellbeing of school community members and help with problematic student behaviors (Maynard et al., 2017). Such interventions can be implemented on their own or as part of an existing [SEL](#) framework, given strong connections between mindfulness and the competencies of self-awareness and self-management (Browning, 2020; Feuerborn & Gueldner, 2019).

MBIs can increase students’ attention span, problem-solving and cognitive flexibility, and empathy for others, and decrease behavioral problems, anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation, and emotional reactivity (Maynard et al., 2017). Students who learn mindfulness-based conflict resolution are also more likely to use these strategies outside of school (Ager et al., 2015). Among educators, mindfulness can improve psychological well-being (job satisfaction, self-efficacy), physical health (better sleep quality), and classroom climate and instructional practices, and reduce negative teacher-student interactions and feelings of burnout, anxiety, and depression (Klingbeil & Renshaw, 2018). MBIs also help staff recognize stress triggers to build better coping strategies (Skinner & Beers, 2016). MBIs are especially helpful for students from low-income backgrounds (given greater exposure to environmental stressors and less access to mental health services) (Segal et al., 2021). MBIs should be applied in culturally sensitive, trauma-informed and inclusive ways (e.g., featuring voices of people from various cultures and backgrounds in guided meditations) that honor students’ feelings and input in activities (e.g., providing choice in how one participates in practices/certain behaviors) and that create spaces for healing through trusting relationships with adults (Duane et al., 2021).

Sample Components of Effective Strategy Implementation

(Duane et al., 2021; Irizarry, 2022; Zhang et al., 2021)

- **Integration of mindfulness in the curriculum** to create designated time and space within the school day for students to learn about and practice mindfulness techniques
- **Inclusion of diverse mindfulness practices** that reflect the cultural backgrounds, needs, and values of students from various communities
- **Continual professional development for teachers implementing mindfulness** to ensure proper training and delivery of practices
- **Emphasis on trust and transparency between students and adults** so that students can comfortably opt in and out of mindfulness activities
- **Consideration for student choice and feedback** when developing and implementing mindfulness across different contexts (i.e., in classroom curricula)

Resources

[COVID-19 Mindfulness | NJ Department of Children and Families](#)

This resource provides videos and reading materials to practice mindfulness and reduce stress amidst the pandemic and other health crises.

[Mindfulness Resources | Calm Schools](#)

This site includes free, downloadable guides for mindfulness activities to use in the classroom and self-care practices for teachers.

[Free Resources | Mindfulness in Schools Project](#)

This site presents research briefs, mindfulness practices, lesson plans, posters, and videos to help educators implement mindfulness in schools.

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Mindset and Motivation Strategies

NJ SCI Survey Domains Related to this Strategy

- Academic Culture and Classroom Practices
- Supports for Student Social and Emotional Learning
- Supportive Staff-Student Relationships
- Behavioral Expectations
- Leadership Support

Strategy Overview

Student mindset and motivation strategies involve reframing instructional practices in ways that match students' ability levels to help foster academic growth and improve students' attitudes toward learning. Growth mindset perspectives propose that one's knowledge and abilities are malleable, or can change over time through work and practice, whereas a fixed mindset suggests these are not easily changeable (Brougham & Kashubeck-West, 2017; Sarrasin et al., 2018). A student's view of their personality, knowledge, and capabilities as fixed versus malleable plays a critical role in learning. For instance, students who have a growth mindset are more likely to be interested in knowledge mastery while students who have a fixed mindset may not believe they can grow and change with time and effort (Brougham & Kashubeck-West, 2017; Ng, 2018). Adults play an important role in cultivating a growth versus fixed mindset through their approach to learning, assignments, and grading (e.g., praising effort over intelligence, allowing revision or error correction).

Students who have a growth mindset and a high degree of self-efficacy tend to exhibit more positive academic behaviors, challenge themselves appropriately, put forth greater effort in activities, exhibit more self-regulatory strategies, and have higher levels of academic achievement (Cannata et al., 2017; Ng, 2018). Mindset and motivation interventions are most effective in promoting student motivation and engagement (Degol et al., 2018; Rhew et al., 2018) in supportive learning environments with positive teacher and peer norms that support challenge-seeking behaviors (Yeager et al., 2019; Yeager et al., 2022). For instance, teachers who believe students can complete rigorous and high-quality work often set high expectations in demonstration of that belief. Additionally, teachers who have a growth mindset report a smaller racial achievement gap amongst their students (Canning et al., 2019; Sarrasin et al., 2018). Mindset interventions are particularly beneficial for students in families with a lower socioeconomic status as well as those who are academically at-risk (Sisk et al., 2018; Zhu et al., 2019), with specific outcomes related to higher grades for students with lower academic achievement levels, increased enrollment in advanced math courses (Yeager et al., 2019), and higher achievement in math as well as improved overall GPA, especially for girls (Degol et al., 2018; Zhu et al., 2019).

Sample Components of Effective Strategy Implementation

(Brougham & Kashubeck-West, 2017; Cannata et al., 2017; Dweck, 2014; Yeager et al., 2019)

- **Established culture of high expectations and a common language around growth mindset** that are communicated at the school-wide level and enacted through classroom-level practices
- **Recognition and encouragement of student effort (as opposed to intelligence)** to promote resilience and the belief that persevering when the work is difficult and correcting mistakes lead to growth
- **Reinforcement of a school-wide shift in the language** used to describe daily objectives, assignments, and assessment techniques that focus on “the power of yet” (as in, “I don’t know how to do that yet”)
- **Encouragement of student curiosity and passion** to instill intrinsic motivation for learning
- **Opportunities to promote positive peer norms** among students to support high academic expectations and motivate students to engage in schoolwork
- **Supportive classroom environments** where teachers can effectively model a growth mindset

Resources

[Playbooks | Character Lab](#)

This website provides research-based guides on a host of competencies, including growth mindset and grit.

[Resources for Teaching Growth Mindset | Edutopia](#)

Edutopia provides a list of resources about growth mindset, how learning mindsets can affect student performance, and strategies that support student confidence.

[Mindset Kit | Resources for growth and learning mindsets](#)

The Mindset Kit is a free set of online lessons and practices designed to help educators and administrators foster adaptive beliefs about learning.

[Growth Mindset | LearnStorm | Khan Academy](#)

Growth Mindset Activities from Khan Academy is designed to help teachers and students of all ages build growth mindsets and develop learning strategies to start the school year strong.

[Growth Mindset Free Resources | MindsetWorks](#)

This free resource provides instruction to help educators and parents teach and employ a growth mindset to children at home and through distance learning.

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Peer-to-Peer Support (Leadership/Mentorship) Programs

NJ SCI Survey Domains Related to this Strategy

- Student Voice and Involvement
- Student Sense of Belonging
- Supportive Staff-Student Relationships
- Supports for Student Social and Emotional Learning
- Prosocial Student Interpersonal Behaviors
- Negative Student Interpersonal Behaviors

Strategy Overview

Peer-to-Peer Support encompasses a variety of program types (e.g., peer leadership, peer mentoring, peer education) that involve students reaching out to and connecting with other students (often cross-age/grade) in a leader, mentor, educator, or helper role. Peer support programs can take place in one-to-one and/or group settings for the purpose of providing academic help, support during transitions to new schools, outreach on prevention education topics (e.g., substance use prevention education), and other peer helping activities that promote positive youth development (American School Counselor Association, 2021). Peer support programs are grounded in a positive youth development framework with a focus on relationship building that involves intensive leader/mentor training, monitoring, and evaluation of peer-to-peer activities (Curran & Wexler, 2017).

Research suggests peers have a powerful influence on each other's behavior that can be leveraged to create a sense of school connectedness and support amongst students (Lui et al., 2017). The social norms, interactions, and perceived characteristics of peer networks can positively influence young people's development and decrease adverse youth outcomes, including truancy and drug use (Curran & Wexler, 2017). The benefits for both student leaders/mentors and participants/mentees include increased sense of school connectedness, increased self-esteem and self-efficacy, improved academic performance, increased prosocial behaviors, increased communication skills, and better relationships with peers and adults (Karcher, 2009; Logsdon et al., 2018; Lopresti et al., 2021); there are additional benefits for peer leaders related to personal growth and an increased sense of responsibility as role models to other students (Curran & Wexler, 2017). When schools intentionally support the creation of peer networks through mentoring, it can promote student access to valuable information and resources (i.e., social capital) that may not have otherwise been available to students from low-income households, and increase students' sense of belonging (Williams et al., 2019). Research also suggests that students with disabilities can benefit academically through peer tutoring, as well as socially and behaviorally through other forms of peer-mediated supports, including peer networks and partnerships (Carter et al., 2015; Moeyaert et al., 2021).

Sample Components of Effective Strategy Implementation

(Karcher, 2014; Logsdon et al., 2018; Paluck & Shepard, 2012; Pickering et al., 2018; Tindall et al., 2018; Williams et al., 2019)

- **Comprehensive approach to peer leader/mentor selection** that considers students' connections with others as influential members in the school to lead and model positive behaviors
- **Structured and sustained learning and training** for staff facilitators/adult advisors and selected peer leaders/mentors on topics related to leadership and group development
- **Clarity on boundaries associated with student leader roles** including navigating relational dynamics and balancing academic and peer responsibilities effectively
- **Consideration of individual characteristics or potential group dynamics for making meaningful matches** between mentor/leader and/or mentee/participant that align with the objectives of the program

- **Development of peer networks that cut across social and cultural boundaries** to promote student connections and access to valuable information and resources (i.e., social capital) and create a greater sense of belonging and connectedness among peers
- **Sustained leadership support for staff facilitators/adult advisors** in effectively coordinating aspects of a peer support program (e.g., schedule regular meetings with peer leaders to support their ongoing training and development, provide consistent outreach at the proper duration and intensity)

Resources

[Building Effective Peer Mentoring Programs in Schools](#)

This guide from the Mentoring Resource Center provides examples and resources for developing a peer mentoring program, as well as roles and responsibilities of all participants.

[NAPPP Programmatic Standards Checklist, Programmatic Standards, Ethics, and Rubric](#)

This resource provides working documents in designing, implementing, evaluating, and improving peer programs.

[Resources for Mentoring: Guides, Handbooks, & Tools](#)

The website from the National Mentoring Resource Center provides a collection of mentoring handbooks, curricula, manuals, and other resources that practitioners can use to implement and further develop program practices.

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Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)

NJ SCI Survey Domains Related to this Strategy

- Academic Culture and Classroom Practices
- Collegial Support
- Leadership Support
- Organizational Resources and Supports

Strategy Overview

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are groups “with the capacity to promote and sustain the learning of all professionals in the school community with the collective purpose of enhancing student learning” (Bolam et al., 2005, p. 145). This method of collaborative inquiry differs from traditional forms of educator professional development that are less collaborative (e.g., one-way transfer of knowledge and information) and insufficient for advancing equitable curriculum and pedagogy (Leonard & Woodland, 2022). PLCs are characterized by five primary components: shared leadership and decision-making among teachers and administrators to determine best practices; collaborative inquiry and problem-solving using data to inform teaching and learning; shared utilization of new methods to increase student achievement; accountability for outcomes of the process; and evolving relationships characterized by trust and respect with colleagues (Carpenter, 2018). PLC activities typically include developing lesson plans, monitoring student progress, assessing instruction by visiting classrooms and examining data, and identifying needs of the educators and students to advance teaching and learning (Blitz & Shulman, 2016).

When implemented effectively, PLCs can increase student learning and achievement, improve teacher instruction and teachers’ feelings of self-efficacy, reduce teacher isolation, and enhance an organization’s overall capacity (Pirtle & Tobia, 2014; Talbert, 2010; Vescio et al., 2008). Effective PLCs are also customized to the context of the school, use data-driven and research-based practices, and consider multiple perspectives (Vangrieken et al., 2017; Vescio et al., 2008). Leonard and Woodland (2022) found that teachers who engaged in PLCs with the purpose of advancing equity and culturally-relevant teaching changed their language use and the choice of texts used in their classrooms, and were more reflective, inclusive, and identity-affirming in their teaching practices. Additionally, there are benefits to having virtual PLCs as they allow a broader network of collaborators to share practices and develop new ones, encourage flexible engagement among participants (Goodyear et al., 2019), and provide teachers with similar experiences they would have had in face-to-face meetings (Carpenter & Munshower, 2020).

Sample Components of Effective Strategy Implementation

(Carpenter, 2018; Leonard & Woodland, 2022; Park et al., 2019; Slack, 2019; Tipping & Dennis, 2022; Zhang & Liu, 2019)

- **Establishment of clear PLC goals, scope, and norms that include Carpenter’s (2018) five main components**, such as the use of data and research to guide discussions and collaborative inquiry
- **Engagement in reflective dialogue centered around equitable teaching and learning** to support the needs of all students and educators
- **Development of teachers’ self-efficacy and sense of autonomy** by including learning tasks that are relevant to teachers and that meet their professional and instructional needs
- **Training for school leaders to build trust and common language as they support staff** participating in PLCs and engaging in self-assessment and reflection on practice
- **Consultation with subject matter experts** in their respective fields to gain insight or to help resolve problem areas within the classroom

Resources

[The Collaborative Teams Toolkit | NJDOE](#)

This toolkit is intended to help schools establish productive, collaborative teams of teachers and administrators who work and learn together using student data to drive evidence-based dialogue.

[CAR – The Connected Action Roadmap | NJPSA](#)

This website provides information and resources related to the Connected Action Roadmap (CAR) framework, which supports PLCs in fostering increased student learning.

[All Things PLC](#)

This collaborative site features tools and resources to implement PLCs, expert insight and examples of effective PLCs, and opportunities to collaborate with other PLC practitioners.

[Professional Learning Toolkit | K-12 Blueprint](#)

This toolkit presents briefs, lesson plans, and assessments for educators to use when implementing effective PLCs.

[The Affirming Racial Equity Tool](#)

This toolkit is for members of a PLC to reflect on the content, pedagogy, and classroom culture of their teaching practices through an equity-oriented lens.

[Collaborative Inquiry | London Region Professional Network](#)

This website includes a facilitator's guide and accompanying video instruction of a four-stage model of collaborative inquiry.

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Restorative Practices

NJ SCI Survey Domains Related to this Strategy

- Negative Student Interpersonal Behaviors
- Prosocial Student Interpersonal Behaviors
- Behavioral Expectations
- Supportive Staff-Student Relationships
- Student Voice and Involvement
- Supports for Student Social and Emotional Learning
- Student Sense of Belonging

Strategy Overview

Rooted in indigenous traditions, restorative practices represent a non-punitive, community-driven process that proactively nurtures strong relationships and a sense of communal accountability while repairing relationships in response to harm or conflict. When implemented effectively, these practices help prevent harm and offer opportunities for those who caused harm to restore their status with others (Fronius et al., 2019). Implementing a restorative framework in schools requires a cultural shift away from punitive, zero-tolerance policies to more holistic, communal forms of understanding and assigning consequences. Common practices include restorative inquiry (allowing those harmed to express their feelings and needs); routine and proactive (e.g., circle time, morning meeting) and restorative circles; restorative conferencing (a structured meeting to solve a more serious problem or to change a behavior); and responsive circles (entire class discusses an incident). These practices meet key developmental needs for adolescents related to autonomy and decision-making, while promoting a sense of fairness (Gregory et al., 2015). Given that restorative practices are a multi-tiered intervention and require significant training and systems-level changes (e.g., changes to mission, vision, and values, and district/school policies, etc.), full implementation of restorative practices may need to be scaled over several years. Restorative practices can also be applied as a supplement to existing discipline approaches or in combination with other programs, such as [social and emotional learning \(SEL\)](#) or [school-wide positive behavioral interventions and supports \(SWPBIS\)](#) (Fronius et al., 2019).

Restorative practices promote increased feelings of safety, an increased sense of school community, as well as a reduction in negative student experiences such as school suspensions/expulsions (Velez et al., 2020). Schools with restorative programs also report a narrowing of discipline gaps due to race and disability (Hashim et al., 2018; González, 2012), as opposed to zero tolerance policies, under which students with disabilities, low-income students, and students of color are more likely to be suspended, expelled, and even referred to law enforcement (Anyon et al., 2014; Gregory et al., 2010). Schools should reflect on the identities of students receiving restorative interventions, as students from underrepresented/marginalized groups face both differential selection and differential processing when receiving discipline (Gregory et al., 2010) and are less likely to be participants of restorative justice programs (Lustick, 2017). When implemented in an equity-focused way, restorative practices can support schools in shifting from the use of exclusionary discipline to a mindset that supports the development of social and emotional skills, which can reduce disparities in discipline and promote more equitable outcomes (Gregory et al., 2021).

Sample Components of Effective Strategy Implementation

(Evans & Lester, 2013; González, 2011; Gregory et al., 2021; Morrison, 2007)

- **Comprehensive strategic planning**, including a multi-tiered systems approach of intervention, a timeline that accounts for community member buy-in and changes in pedagogy, and resources and supports for effective integration into the school community
- **A multi-tiered intervention (potentially mapped to existing MTSS frameworks)** that includes a primary (universal) level introducing the value of reaffirming relationships, a secondary level involving repairing relationships through dialogue and support, and a third level with intensive practices such as the facilitation of intensive dialogue and inclusion of a broad social network
- **School community buy-in to support the cultural shift** and development of common language necessary to implement culturally sustaining practices and policies aimed to keep students in classrooms
- **Equity-informed implementation by trained practitioners** to facilitate difficult dialogues among those involved, avoid stigmatization of students engaged in the restorative process, and lead individuals in reflecting on their identities and how they are carried out in the school environment

Resources

[International Institute for Restorative Practices](#)

This website provides up-to-date resources and information on the growing field of restorative practices.

[Restorative Practices: A Guide for Educators | Schott Foundation for Public Education](#)

This guide and toolkit aim to help educators better understand what restorative practices are and how to foster safe learning environments through community building and constructive conflict resolution.

[Restorative Practices \(RP\) Guide for Schools | Colorado School Safety Resource Center](#)

This resource guide includes lists and links to restorative practices programs being implemented in Colorado.

[12 Indicators of Restorative Practices Implementation: Checklist for Administrators](#)

This resource provides administrators and educators with various checklists to monitor and effectively implement multi-tiered restorative practices in schools.

[Restorative Practices Guide and Toolkit | Chicago Public Schools](#)

This toolkit provides step-by-step implementation guidance and an appendix of resources to aid schools in adopting restorative practices.

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School-wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS)

NJ SCI Survey Domains Related to this Strategy

- Behavioral Expectations
- Prosocial Student Interpersonal Behaviors
- Negative Student Interpersonal Behaviors
- Academic Culture and Classroom Practices
- Supportive Staff-Student Relationships
- Supports for Student Social and Emotional Learning

Strategy Overview

School-wide positive behavior intervention and supports (SWPBIS) “is a systems approach to establishing the social culture and behavioral supports needed for all children in a school to achieve both social and academic success” (Horner et al., 2015, p.1) and reflects a universal-level approach to implementation of the strategy. It is not a program but a process that uses evidence-based practices for classroom management and the development of non-punitive discipline systems (Sugai & Horner, 2009, as cited in Solomen et al., 2012), with the goal of preventing problematic student behaviors (Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavior Interventions & Supports, 2018). Multi-tiered approaches to implementation of positive intervention and supports include Tier 1 serving all students, Tier 2 serving at-risk groups, and Tier 3 serving the individual needs of select students.

SWPBIS is associated with numerous benefits. Research indicates that schools using SWPBIS have lower incidences of office referrals and suspension rates (Notlemeyer et al., 2019) with schools implementing tier 1 effectively having lower suspension rates compared to the national average (McIntosh & Bastable, 2018). Although SWPBIS alone is not enough to reduce racial inequalities present in schools’ disciplinary policies (Carter et al., 2017), the racial disparity of discipline between Black, multiracial, and white students – as well as the number of nonwhite students suspended – may significantly decrease with effective SWPBIS implementation, which leads to increased student achievement and attendance (Baule, 2020). Additionally, SWPBIS has been associated with students’ improved perceptions of safety of the school environment (Horner et al., 2009), student prosocial behavior (Bradshaw et al., 2012), organizational effectiveness of schools (Bradshaw et al., 2009), positive relationships among staff (Bradshaw et al., 2008), improved academic outcomes (Freeman et al., 2016). Research also shows the promising effects of SWPBIS in reducing negative student behaviors across multiple tiers of intervention, demographic settings, and school contexts (classrooms and unstructured settings) (Solomen et al., 2012). SWPBIS can be expanded to a multi-tiered intervention, which requires significant leadership, training, and systems-level supports over the course of several years.

Sample Components of Effective Strategy Implementation

(Baule, 2020; Estrapala et al., 2021; George et al., 2018; Horner et al., 2010; Netzel & Eber, 2003)

- **Administration buy-in and ongoing communication with staff, students, and parents/families** to ensure understanding of the purpose, process, and procedures for providing input
- **Effective leadership teams and dedicated coordinators** as points of contact for SWPBIS planning, implementation, and communication with staff
- **Development of systems and processes to track behavioral and other forms of data** (e.g., suspension rates, disciplinary referrals, etc.)
- **Consistent use of prevention practices** (e.g., pre-correction, high frequency [4-1 ratio] positive messaging, behavior-specific feedback etc.) by teachers and staff in their daily routines and interactions with students starting with development and delivery of high-quality, contextually-relevant lessons
- **Inclusion and participation of students, staff, and parents/caregivers** in meaningful opportunities to provide input to PBIS team as well as collaboration with other schools

Resources

[New Jersey Positive Behavior Support in Schools](#)

This resource, a collaboration between the New Jersey Department of Education Offices of Special Education and the Boggs Center of Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School, provides comprehensive professional development support to train school personnel to implement tiered interventions of PBIS.

[Center on PBIS | USDOE](#)

The Technical Assistance Center on PBIS supports schools, districts, and states to build systems capacity for implementing a multi-tiered approach to social, emotional, and behavior support.

[PBIS World](#)

This website provides tiered positive behavior interventions and supports for a compendium of negative student behaviors.

[Implementation School-Wide PBIS Framework](#)

This guide provides step-by-step instructions, as well as examples and rubrics from Portland Public Schools, for implementing school-wide positive behavioral interventions and supports.

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Social and Emotional Learning and Competency Development - Adults

NJ SCI Survey Domains Related to This Strategy

- Supports for Student Social and Emotional Learning
- Supportive Staff-Student Relationships
- Collegial Support
- Organizational Resources and Supports
- Leadership Support
- Academic Culture and Classroom Practices

Strategy Overview

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL], 2022). SEL skills are critical to the establishment of trusting and collaborative relationships among the overall school community, including parents/guardians to staff, staff to staff, staff to administration, and staff to students. This can look like collegiality among staff members, teachers explicitly teaching social and emotional lessons, staff members modeling prosocial behaviors, and supportive school and classroom environments. Developing shared understanding and common language among all staff can support school-wide SEL implementation in all contexts (e.g., classrooms, cafeteria, after school), and as part of integrating SEL with existing student supports or frameworks (e.g., Multi-tiered Systems of Support) ([CASEL](#)).

Research suggests that teachers with high social and emotional competencies can cope better with the demands of their job, maintain a positive classroom climate, build supportive relationships with their students, and establish consistent classroom interactions that promote student learning (Jennings et al., 2017). A long-term study found that teachers trained to deliver SEL programs reported reduced anxiety and depression, improved teacher engagement, and greater perceived job control and efficacy (Jennings et al., 2019). Given students can sense and react to the effects of teacher stress, supporting adult SEL has the potential to benefit all children, but especially those who may have experienced trauma and adversity; these students thrive academically with the early and continuous influence of a caring and competent adult. Moreover, teachers' impact on students' social and emotional skills is ten times more predictive of students' long-term success in high school than student test scores (National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development [NCSEAD], 2018).

Sample Components for Effective Strategy Implementation

(CASEL, 2019; NCSEAD, 2018; Schonert-Reichl et al., 2017)

- **Support from district and school leadership in promoting the importance and practice of adult SEL**, including establishing a set of common expectations and language
- **Pre-service teacher education and training programs** as an initial source for SEL development for adults in schools, especially when aligned with state-level teacher certification requirements
- **Integration of SEL into various aspects of classroom teaching and learning** including academic lessons/subjects and the classroom environment (e.g., collaborative room arrangements)
- **Ongoing, scaffolded learning and training** that is embedded in professional development programs in order to sustain and enhance staff SEL skills
- **Practices that promote adult reflection on their own competencies, identities, and biases** in order to implement equity-oriented SEL while affirming all cultures and values and building stronger relationships with others

Resources

[Social and Emotional Learning | NJDOE](#)

This resource from the NJ Department of Education provides modules with PowerPoints, facilitation guides, and handouts for teaching SEL.

[Strengthening Adult SEL & Cultural Competence](#)

This resource includes the purpose and process of developing Adult SEC districtwide.

[Search All SEL Resources | CASEL District Resource Center](#)

Resources from CASEL for Focus Area 2: Strengthen Adult SEL Competencies and Capacity.

[SEL for Educators Toolkit | Transforming Education](#)

Explanatory resources and videos that can be used in Professional Learning Communities, staff meetings, professional development, training sessions, or for individual learning, reflection, and practice.

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Social and Emotional Learning and Competency Development - *Students*

NJ SCI Survey Domains Related to this Strategy

- Supports for Student Social and Emotional Learning
- Prosocial Student Interpersonal Behaviors
- Supportive Staff-Student Relationships
- Academic Culture and Classroom Practices

Strategy Overview

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL], 2022b). SEL is most effective when implemented as a coordinated, systems-level framework integrated throughout all aspects of school life, including classroom instruction (CASEL, 2022a). SEL programs and initiatives begin with providing definitions and examples of social skills, along with related opportunities for social skill and character development through modeling and reinforcement. CASEL outlines five social and emotional competencies: Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Social Awareness, Responsible Decision-Making, and Relationship Skills.

Students who participate in SEL programs in school experience long-lasting benefits such as increased academic achievement, improved student conduct and prosocial behavior, and reduced emotional distress (Durlak et al., 2011). Studies conducted internationally demonstrate that students with a better understanding and development of social and emotional competencies are more likely to be ready for college, succeed in their careers, have positive peer and teacher-student relationships, and experience better mental health outcomes (Wang et al., 2019). These students are better able to manage their emotions when facing difficult situations, more likely to seek and offer help when needed, and negotiate conflict constructively. These skills promote positive student academic behaviors, including staying focused in class regardless of intrinsic motivation, persevering through complex academic problems, and building and maintaining strong interpersonal relationships (Wang et al., 2019).

A well-designed universal SEL program with an intentional equity-oriented design can foster more equitable learning environments and is especially helpful in schools with greater levels of exposure to risk factors like bullying, interpersonal violence, and substance use (CASEL, 2022a; Greenberg et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2019). When combined with other interventions and practices ([Restorative Practices](#), [SWPBIS](#), [Anti-bullying Interventions](#)), SEL helps schools to examine biases, address the impact of racism, affirm diverse cultures and backgrounds, build cross-cultural relationships, and cultivate adult and student relationships that close opportunity gaps and create a more inclusive school community (CASEL, 2022a; Jagers et al., 2018). This type of transformative SEL program is grounded in the long-term outcomes of student voice, authentic leadership, and justice-oriented civic engagement (Williams & Jagers, 2020).

Sample Components of Effective Strategy Implementation

(CASEL, 2022a; Greenberg et al., 2017; Jagers et al., 2018; Williams & Jagers, 2020)

- **Systemic implementation of SEL that maximizes impact of initiatives** and ensures that all members of the school community have opportunities to thrive
- **Leadership support and long-term planning** in order to scale and sustain systemic SEL efforts
- **Equity-oriented design and implementation** centered on the desired outcome of promoting educational equity, and should value and promote understanding of diversity and inclusion

- **Comprehensive SEL development for adults** in schools to ensure effective teaching of SEL concepts to students across content areas (see [Social and Emotional Competency Development - Adults](#))
- **Coordination with other systemic approaches and interventions to foster inclusive and supportive environments** where students are supported in developing skills
- **Authentic school, family, and community partnerships** that seek the input and participation of underrepresented/marginalized groups

Resources

[Social and Emotional Learning Resources | NJDOE](#)

This resource features the NJDOE SEL Competencies and Sub-Competencies and SEL Modules for Educators: Competencies for School, Work, and Life. Each module comes with a PowerPoint slide deck, a module facilitation guide, and associated handouts.

[Social and Emotional Competencies Checklist](#)

This resource from the National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments provides definitions of the five sets of competencies of SEL and checklists to evaluate SEL practices.

[Advancing Social and Emotional Learning | CASEL](#)

CASEL is a great resource for research information and practical steps to identify and implement SEL programs, with more information of Transformative SEL, and resources for State-, District-, and School-wide SEL.

[The Social and Emotional Learning Alliance for New Jersey \(SEL4NJ\)](#)

SEL4NJ provides a framework for a partnership between schools, health and mental health organizations, professional associations, higher education, corporate/business organizations, and the local community to form one strong voice advocating for SEL. They provide events, resources, and toolkits on SEL implementation.

[Curated SEL Resources | Edutopia](#)

Edutopia features blog posts on innovations and best practices in teaching. This link features a list of recent and recommended blog posts on specific topics, practices, and grade-level appropriate SEL strategies.

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Student Voice and Empowerment Strategies

NJ SCI Survey Domains Related to this Strategy

- Student Voice and Involvement
- Student Sense of Belonging
- Supportive Staff-Student Relationships
- Academic Culture and Classroom Practices
- Supports for Student Social and Emotional Learning
- Prosocial Student Interpersonal Behaviors

Strategy Overview

Schools focusing on elevating student voices collaborate with students to give them opportunities to actively participate in the process of making positive changes to school contexts (e.g., student leadership opportunities such as student councils and advisory committees) (Lyons & Brasof, 2020; Mitra, 2004). Student voice-related activities should exist in a “pyramid of student voice” starting with listening, followed by collaboration, and building to leadership (Mitra, 2005; 2018). Implementation of these levels can range from schools gathering information from students through focus groups and surveys to students working alongside teachers to develop and implement strategies for school improvement (Mitra, 2004; 2018). Service learning and youth participatory action research (YPAR) – two key strategies for supporting student voice and leadership – when implemented effectively, can promote a sense of empowerment and voice; academic engagement; positive relationships with adults; interdependence among students; respect for diversity; and a greater sense of community for all students (Celio et al., 2011; Voight & Velez, 2018).

When teachers value student voice and collaborate with students to improve curriculum and instruction, it improves students’ understanding and articulation of how they learn which helps teachers do a better job of meeting students’ needs, leading to improved academic outcomes (Mitra, 2004; Mitra, 2018; Mitra & Gross, 2009). School environments with higher levels of adult-student collaboration and student leadership provide students, especially students from underrepresented/marginalized groups, with a greater degree of agency, which has important, positive implications for student learning and youth development (Cook-Sather, 2020; Mitra, 2018), civic engagement (Cook-Sather, 2020), and relationships between students and teachers (Lyons & Brasof, 2020). Students – particularly those struggling academically or socially, or from underrepresented or marginalized groups – can elevate specific issues or concerns to the attention of the school community that may not otherwise be addressed (Lyons & Brasof, 2020; Mitra, 2018; Mitra & Gross, 2009). Increasing student voice in schools also (re)engages all students by providing them with a stronger sense of ownership in their schooling, while building student awareness so that they can make changes in their schools (Mitra, 2004; Mitra, 2018; Mitra & Gross, 2009).

Sample Components of Effective Strategy Implementation

(Celio et al., 2011; Cook-Sather, 2020; Lyons & Brasof, 2020; Mitra, 2004; Mitra, 2018; Mitra & Gross, 2009; Voight & Velez, 2018)

- **Willingness to listen and act upon students’ ideas, opinions, and critiques** regarding school environments, including systemic issues as well as classroom, school, and district-level policies and procedures
- **Sustained, inclusive opportunities for students to meaningfully collaborate and consult with adults** in decisions regarding the school environment (e.g., collaborate with teachers on classroom rules/expectations, invite students to participate in school climate team meetings, etc.)
- **Formal and informal structures to support student leadership** (e.g., student advisory committees, YPAR, student presentations at Board of Education meetings)
- **Trusting relationships between student and teacher** that emphasize two-way communication and collaboration throughout the learning process
- **Creation of developmentally appropriate opportunities to participate** in research-based participatory and/or experiential learning opportunities in the community

Resources

[Strategies and Lesson Plans Virtual School Climate Committee | Making Caring Common Project](#)

This resource includes ideas, examples, and tips for forming a student committee focused on school climate change for students in grades 6-12.

[Student Voices Resources | Stuvoice.org](#)

This website includes several articles, guides, and lesson plans to support student voice and empowerment.

[YPAR Hub](#)

This website includes information about the Youth-led Participatory Action Research (YPAR) process and provides resources and lesson plans for implementing it in schools.

[Elevating Student Voice in Education | Center for American Progress](#)

This report outlines strategies and provides examples to increase authentic student voice in education at the school, district, and state levels.

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Trauma-Informed and Healing-Centered Practices

NJ SCI Survey Domains Related to this Strategy

- Supportive Staff-Student Relationships
- Supports for Student Social and Emotional Learning
- Sense of Physical Safety
- Academic Culture and Classroom Practices
- Negative Student Interpersonal Behaviors

Strategy Overview

More than two-thirds of school-aged children face traumatic circumstances inside (e.g., overly punitive and exclusionary discipline) (Ginwright, 2018) and outside the school environment that can significantly impact learning and development (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [SAMSHA], 2022). Trauma-informed or trauma-sensitive practices can help to mitigate the effects of [Adverse Childhood Experiences](#) (ACEs), which are stressful or traumatic events that happen before the age of 18 that cause the child to feel physically and/or emotionally harmed (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021). Higher instances of ACEs can lead to increased mental health diagnoses, lower levels of school engagement and graduation rates (CDC, 2021), higher placement and subsequent retention in special education services (Porche et al., 2016), and higher risk for becoming involved in the criminal justice system as well as developing chronic health conditions as adults (Merrick et al., 2019). Trauma and stress from various sources, including historical or multigenerational, negatively impact student's ability to learn and educators' abilities to lead and teach (Cooke et al., 2020; Harper & Neubauer, 2021). Students who have experienced trauma are more likely to have disciplinary issues, to be suspended, and to be absent from school (Perfect et al., 2016); in turn, these consequences put significant pressure on school systems and staff to respond to challenging behaviors and situations (Chafouleas et al., 2019).

Trauma-informed practices include provider- and client-focused interventions that should be enacted in culturally-responsive ways. Provider-focused practices include client-advocacy and addressing barriers to service and care. Client-focused practices include teaching safety and re-traumatization prevention skills, reinforcing emotional regulation and behavior management skills, and establishing and maintaining dynamic routines (for a full list, see [National Traumatic Child Stress Network](#)). According to SAMSHA (2014), there are six key principles associated with trauma-informed approaches: safety, trustworthiness and transparency; peer support; collaboration and mutuality; empowerment, voice, and choice; and an awareness and attention to cultural, historical, and gender issues. These principles are supported by several implementation factors, including: a safe physical environment; policy changes; shared leadership and collaboration; resources and training; screening and assessment; and evaluation and progress monitoring (SAMSHA, 2014). Organizations may use or enact such principles and practices to guide systems-level trauma-informed approaches to create more safe and supportive environments.

Considering trauma as a collective experience and focusing on healing-centered engagement can emphasize the positive qualities every person possesses regardless of their experiences and which they can build on to thrive (Ginwright, 2018). Trauma-informed approaches support the well-being of students, staff, and community members (Harper & Neubauer, 2021), especially when implemented with an understanding of the sociohistorical factors that shape experiences of trauma and sensitivity to the ways that schools may (re)traumatize students through existing school structures, policies, and practices (Petroni & Stanton, 2021). Early evidence from studies on trauma-informed practices in schools indicates they may help address a range of student mental and emotional health outcomes, can help to significantly reduce suspensions and office referrals, and have a positive influence on academic engagement and achievement (Chafouleas et al., 2019; Perfect et al., 2016).

Sample Components of Effective Strategy Implementation

(Brunzell et al., 2016; Chafouleas et al., 2019; Ginwright, 2018; Harper & Neubauer, 2021)

- **Creation of a shared definition and understanding of healing-centered and/or trauma-informed education and implementation** of related, holistic practices and supports to foster a safe, supportive, and collaborative space for students and staff
- **Establishment of systems-level leadership and supportive policies and resources**, along with training for adults to recognize and appropriately react to signs of trauma
- **Availability of targeted interventions for individuals facing significant traumatic events** who need support or treatment, while focusing on the individual's assets rather than deficits
- **Examination of community-level and institutional factors** that may contribute to or cause trauma to community members so that they may be addressed collectively
- **Building resilience strategies, empathy, and strong relationships between staff and students** to support collective and holistic healing in which an individual who experienced trauma can restore their well-being, as well as sense of self and possibility
- **Input on planning and delivery from parents/families, community members, and mental health professionals** to promote healing centered and/or trauma-informed approaches that are inclusive and culturally responsive

Resources

[Trauma-informed/Healing-Centered Engagement Resources | NJDOE](#)

This website includes articles, resources, and screening/assessment tools related to trauma-informed and healing-centered engagement approaches, as well as information and resources for educators and parents/caregivers regarding grief and loss.

[Helping Traumatized Children Learn | Trauma Learning and Policy Initiative](#)

This resource includes a range of research and writing, policy information, and strategies to help schools with trauma-informed approaches.

[Traumatic Loss Coalitions for Youth Resource List](#)

This resource list from Rutgers University Behavioral Health Care and the New Jersey Department of Children and Families provides state-wide and county-specific resources for traumatic loss coalitions.

[Guidance for Trauma-Informed Approaches | SAMHSA](#)

This resource includes an overview of the concept of trauma and guidance for implementing trauma-informed approaches.

[Traumatic Experiences | Sesame Street in Communities](#)

This website includes articles, activities, and tools for working with younger children who have experienced trauma.

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