



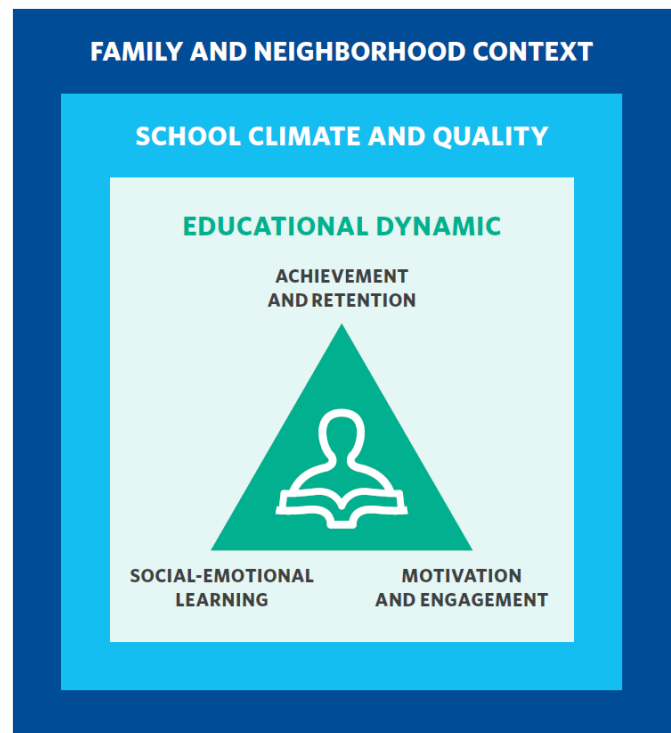
Comprehensive Mental Health Services in Schools

Comprehensive mental and behavioral health systems in schools reduce the frequency and severity of mental health disorders among students by providing a full complement of supports and services that promote positive school climates, social and emotional learning practices, and overall mental health and well-being. They are built on collaborations between students, families, community health partners, school districts, and school professionals—such as administrators, educators, and specialized instructional support personnel, including school psychologists.

Furthermore, comprehensive school-based mental and behavioral health services are critical to effective teaching and learning. Integrating evidence-based and culturally competent social and emotional learning programs and trauma-informed approaches to teaching and student well-being, throughout all aspects of the school ecosystem, help foster positive school climates and develop skills such as motivation and engagement, problem-solving, emotional intelligence, resilience, agency, and relationship building. An interactive approach to academic achievement, instruction, and social and emotional learning will help to ensure that all children, including some of the most vulnerable, receive a more equitable and higher quality public education.

Such universal programs also help address student behavioral challenges by implementing positive, non-punitive, restorative measures rather than retributive and exclusionary practices. In the aftermath of a crisis, it is not abnormal to see students exhibiting what would typically be considered behavioral concerns. The pandemic created an unprecedented set of circumstances, which forced students into social isolation, exposed them to varying degrees of trauma, and necessitated an adjustment to new sets of norms and social cues. As schools begin to fully reopen, and work to address pandemic-related learning loss,¹ having a comprehensive system of mental and behavioral health services will facilitate a return to normalcy and can help to identify and address students with increased and/or ongoing needs.

Data show that increased school-based mental services, along with evidence-based training and ongoing professional development for educators on social and emotional learning practices and positive discipline methods, improves educational outcomes and reduces the risk of suspension and expulsion.² Throughout the pandemic, teachers voiced their concerns about both the social and emotional well-being of their students as well as their desire to receive training



on how to address these concerns in their classrooms, both in-person and virtual.³ Moving forward, there will be a greater need for educators and other school staff who understand how to work with students who experienced a traumatic event. Without training, educators may inadvertently exacerbate students' trauma by disciplining them, rather than providing appropriate supports.

References

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2. Reyes, C., & Gilliam, W. (2021). Addressing challenging behaviors in challenging environments: Findings from Ohio's early childhood mental health consultation system. *Development and Psychopathology*, 33(2), 634-646. doi:10.1017/S0954579420001790.
3. Educators for Excellence. (2020). Voices from the (Virtual) Classroom. Retrieved from: https://e4e.org/sites/default/files/voices_from_the_virtual_classroom_2020.pdf.