COVID-19 and Whole Child Efforts

Several national organizations have offered guidance for planning for the reopening of school buildings closed due to COVID-19. This guidance emphasizes the need to support the whole child—that is, attending to their basic needs (safety, health, nutrition) and well-being. The notion of supporting the whole child is not new,[1] but the current crisis has ignited a clear call to action for schools to be ready to provide comprehensive supports to address the needs of children, youth, and their families as schools reopen.

Education decisionmakers may strengthen investments in whole child efforts aimed at improving conditions for learning including school climate, social and emotional learning, mental health, and trauma-specific services. When schools and their community partners create positive conditions for learning, they create conditions for realizing robust equity.[2] This is critically important given the persistent inequities that have been laid bare by the COVID-19 crisis.

Education and community leaders will need a shared understanding of the common whole child terms and phrases as they work to mobilize student supports. Community partnership is a cornerstone of successful whole child efforts,[3] and a shared language will help schools and districts collaborate with families and community organizations including youth development organizations and health and social services providers. The tables that follow provide definitions for key terms and a crosswalk of the whole child terminology to the reopening guidance. Please note that the purpose of the crosswalk is to illustrate the use of these terms, not to assess the quality of the guidance.

This document will be updated with new resources and guidance as they emerge over the coming months.

Table 1. Common Whole Child Terminology

Themes	Key Terms
Conditions for Learning	**Conditions for Learning:** The set of essential conditions that allow students to learn and succeed in school; schools that maintain essential conditions for learning create an environment that is experienced as safe, supportive, inclusive, challenging, and caring[4]
Mental Health	**Mental Health Promotion for All:** Activities to foster positive social, emotional, and behavioral skills and well-being of all students, regardless of whether they are at risk for mental health problems (Tier 1 within a multi-tiered system of support)[5] **Mental Health Early Intervention:** Services that support students who have been identified through a systematic, equitable process as experiencing mild distress, mildly impaired functioning or as at-risk for a given problem or concern (Tier 2 within a multi-tiered system of support)[6] **Mental Health Treatment:** Services that address mental health concerns for students who are already experiencing significant distress and impaired functioning (Tier 3 within a multi-tiered system of support)[7]
School Climate	**School Climate:** Reflects how members of the school community experience the school, including interpersonal relationships, teacher and other staff practices, and organization of the learning environment; includes factors that form the conditions for learning (physical and emotional safety, connection and support, and engagement); a positive school climate reflects attention to fostering physical, emotional, and identity safety, providing support that enables students and staff to realize high behavioral and academic standards as well as encouraging and maintaining respectful, trusting, and caring relationships throughout the school community[8]
Social and Emotional Learning	**Social and Emotional Learning (SEL):** A systemic approach to SEL intentionally cultivates a caring, participatory, and equitable learning environment and evidence-based practices that actively involve all students in their social, emotional, and academic growth. This approach infuses social and emotional learning into every part of students' daily lives—across all of their classrooms, during all times of the school day, and when they are in their homes and communities.[9]
Trauma	**Trauma:** An event, a series of events, or a set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening; that overwhelms a person's ability to cope; and that has adverse effects on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being[10] **Trauma-Specific Services:** Evidence-based and promising prevention, intervention, or treatment services that address symptoms of traumatic stress and related challenges that developed during or after trauma[11] **Trauma-Sensitive Schools:** Schools in which all aspects of the educational environment—from workforce training to engagement with students and families to procedures and policies—are grounded in an understanding of trauma and its impact and are designed to promote resilience for all[12]

Table 1. School Reopening Guidance Crosswalk: Whole Child Efforts

Organization	Guidance	Conditions for Learning	Mental Health	School Climate	Social and Emotional Learning	Trauma
American Enterprise Institute	A Blueprint for Back to School		✓		✓	✓
American Federation of Teachers	A Plan to Safely Reopen America's Schools and Communities		✓		✓	✓
Aspen Institute	Recovery and Renewal: Principles for Advancing Public Education Post-Crisis		✓	✓	✓	✓
Chiefs for Change	The Return: How Should Education Leaders Prepare for Reentry and Beyond				✓	
Council of Chief State School Officers	COVID-19 Response: Phase 2 Restart and Recovery	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
ExcelinEd	Reopening Schools After COVID-19 Closures		✓		✓	✓

Notes. Alignment with the "conditions for learning" term was determined based on whether the guidance used this specific language. Alignment with the "social and emotional learning" term was determined based on whether the guidance made reference to addressing social and emotional needs. This crosswalk features guidance documents for school reopening that are broad in nature and not focused on a particular reform area. Some organizations are offering detailed guidance for how to consider whole child reforms in the context of school reopening. For example, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning's (CASEL's) resource, An Initial Guide to Leveraging Social and Emotional Learning as You Prepare to Reopen and Renew Your School Community, provides a thoughtful set of recommendations for using social and emotional learning in reopening plans.

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