

A STRONG AND HEALTHY START

Social, Emotional and Mental Health Supports During COVID-19

Issued by the Vermont Agency of Education and the Vermont Department of Mental Health

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Background and Objectives

This document provides guidance on social, emotional and mental health, and overall well-being, for both educators and students as Vermont moves to reopen schools for the 2020-21 School Year in the context of COVID-19. The guidance is intended for a wide audience—district and school-level personnel, including administrators, teachers, staff, and local school boards and municipalities; community partners and support service providers; parents; and other education stakeholders. The guidance addresses issues likely to arise during reentry to school but also speaks to sustaining social, emotional and mental health given the ongoing nature of well-being as the school year progresses during a national pandemic. This guidance also provides recommendations surrounding equity, anti-racism and related topics given national events surrounding the murder of George Floyd, as students and staff have been affected by these events simultaneously with COVID-19. One’s racial and ethnic identity are core components of the self and are linked with social, emotional and mental health. Feeling heard and being seen, acknowledging and identifying that racial injustices impact mental health, and acknowledging the profound impact of systemic racism are all important for feeling safe and connected as we return to school.

Because we continue to learn more about COVID-19 and health guidance may accordingly continue to evolve, this guidance may be periodically updated as new information becomes available. This document is one of a series of Strong and Healthy Start guidance documents that the Agency of Education (AOE) is developing in conjunction with partner agencies and stakeholders.

Primary objectives of this guidance are to:

- Ensure that educators (i.e., teachers, staff, and administrators) are operating from a stance of well-being, both for their own personal health and in order to effectively educate Vermont’s students.
- Ensure that students are socially, emotionally, and physically supported so they may effectively learn and grow in the context of COVID-19.
- Ensure that Local Education Agencies (LEAs) have the resources they need to optimize educator and student social, emotional, and mental health, as well as the systems in place to provide supports to individuals and families as needed.
- Encourage LEAs to build on the current strengths of their communities and respect the cultural differences of families and staff.
- Leverage existing investments in Education Support Teams (ESTs), Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) and Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS) to facilitate a smooth and successful return to school, as well as maintain social, emotional and mental health.

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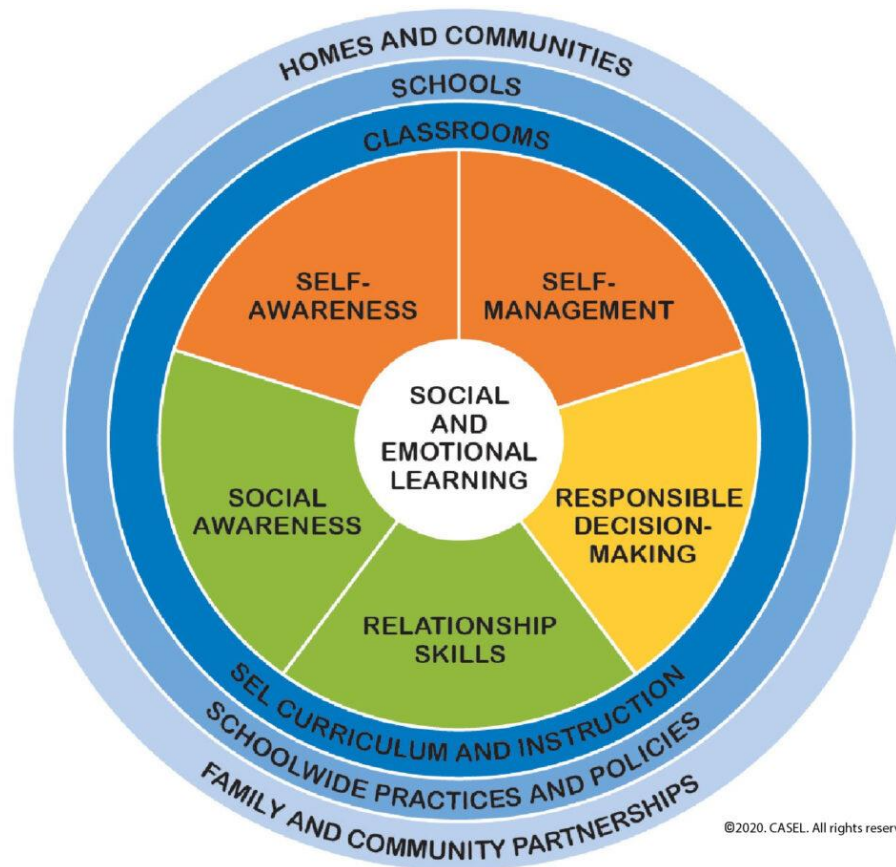
Definitions

To foster clear and consistent interpretation of guidance, this document adopts the following definition for Social and Emotional Learning (SEL):

"Social and emotional learning (SEL) is the process through which children and adults 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]; 2020).

This definition mirrors the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) recent framework for assisting state education agencies in providing technical assistance and guidance on SEL to local education agencies (LEAs) and systems (see Appendix 1 for additional resources).

CASEL breaks Social and Emotional Learning into five core competencies: Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Social Awareness, Relationship Skills and Responsible Decision-Making. They also identify three key, nested settings. Classrooms, where SEL Curriculum and Instruction are key tools. Schools, where schoolwide practices and policies are key tools, and homes and communities, where family and community partnerships are key tools. Consult [Core SEL Competencies](#) on the CASEL website for more information.



For the purposes of this document, adult mental health is defined as “a state of well-being in which every individual realizes their own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community,” World Health Organization (see [Vermont Department of Mental Health](#)). In addition, children and adolescents have unique needs when we promote their mental wellness and prevent mental illness. Children are not simply “little adults.” Efforts to promote the healthy emotional and social development of children and their family members can have tremendous benefits for children in the long-term. These benefits include school readiness, academic success, choosing healthy behaviors, positive peer/family relationships, and positive involvement in their community (see [Vermont Department of Mental Health](#)).

Guiding Principles

In preparing back-to-school (and beyond) planning activities, it is recommended that LEAs frame their work around the following principles:

Address both Physical and Psychological Safety

LEAs need to be prepared to address both physical and psychological safety at school reentry and beyond, for educators and students. In effect, local leaders must contemplate how best to ensure that the health implications and risks related to COVID-19 are addressed, using the [Safety and Health Guidance for Reopening Schools, Fall 2020](#) as a guide and how best to ensure the mental, social and emotional health of those within the education system. This document can be used as a guide to assist in the latter requirement. We encourage schools to consult with community partners and mental health experts to inform the development of plans for the reopening of schools and throughout the education transition during COVID-19. For instance, consider consulting with a school counselor, school psychologist, school social worker/clinician, or other expert in social, emotional, and mental health, or other community partners with expertise in engaging families who have experienced trauma, poverty or other related challenges. These individuals can offer unique, relevant information to help you plan and implement your local supports model during COVID-19.

LEAs may find it useful to focus on Connection, Compassion, and Community (3 C's) in their approach (see [Back to School After COVID-19: Supporting Student and Staff Mental Health](#) toolkit). LEAs should prioritize relationships and connections upon the return to school.

Employ Multi-disciplinary Teams for Reentry and Beyond

LEAs are deep in planning activities for fall school reentry, based on Health and Safety Guidelines; many have already released reentry plans. In order to effectively address social-emotional (SE) and mental health concerns, LEAs are encouraged to develop multi-disciplinary teams of professionals to plan for, track implementation of, and monitor outcomes for SEL and mental health. Such planning and decision-making can be either embedded within existing planning and tracking structures or through establishing a new team for the purpose of SEL and related topics. It is critical to establish or re-affirm roles and responsibilities, a timeline of implemented strategies and methods for tracking progress, and robust referral systems for available supports. Consistent with your staffing structure, include school counselors, school social workers, school psychologists and community partners, etc., in addition to school nurses, on multi-disciplinary teams. Consider how both SU/SD and school-level planning and decision-making will be addressed via teaming structure.

Multidisciplinary teams will help build a broad coalition to integrate SEL and academic supports into transition plans, creating and maintaining a caring, safe, and supportive environment for all students and educators. Consider how you will encourage stakeholder involvement and build on the district's current strengths, such as existing SEL programs and positive relationships between educators and students.

Prepare for Flexibility

The nature of the COVID-19 pandemic calls for systems to plan for a potential move among in-person instruction, remote learning, and hybrid learning paradigms ([AOE, July 2020](#)). Each of these scenarios will require different practical operations and preparation. Accordingly, we recommend that LEAs also consider the social, emotional, and mental health aspects of potentially having to move within these different models. Plan for and implement processes that help educators, students, and families become comfortable with change, embrace flexible approaches, and prepare for unique situations and challenges.

Reentry and Sustained Adjustment

Focus on both school reentry and sustaining psychosocial adjustment over time. The nature of social, emotional and mental health calls for plans and processes to be implemented both at school reentry and in an on-going way to continue monitoring, checking in, and recalibrating efforts. The COVID-19 pandemic, school re-opening, and race-based violent acts have increased stress levels and anxiety about the unknown. It is important to acknowledge these experiences, yet also reflect upon opportunities for healing, growth, and resilience. In addition, it is possible that the impact of COVID-19 and racial injustice on social, emotional and mental health may present in different ways as the school year progresses. Given these uncertain aspects, we recommend that local systems prepare for a focus on well-being for the foreseeable future. “One and done” types of activities are unlikely to be successful for continued well-being in our current health and societal contexts.

Educator Well-Being

When returning to school, recognize that faculty and staff may have experienced their own loss and trauma as well as on-going stress related to COVID-19 and racial injustice. Adult experiences will likely impact students. Directly addressing faculty and staff needs must be a part of the reentry plan. It is recommended that attention to self-care become part of the school culture, a practice in which all engage so it is not left up solely to the individual employee on their own time. A holistic, district- or school-wide approach for self-care can help reduce stigma about mental health, improve stress levels, and better ensure that adults are able to function effectively in their roles.

People tend to be distressed and anxious about the unknown. Frequent, clear and repeated communication can help reduce this distress. Opportunities for faculty and staff to ask questions and provide input can also offer a sense of contribution and involvement. Strategies to reduce the likelihood of feeling overwhelmed can include perceiving oneself as part of a team, knowing how others are contributing so as not to feel wholly responsible for all aspects of health and safety, and feeling recognized for one’s contributions.

- Provide specific professional development opportunities for faculty and staff to support their own and students’ social and emotional needs.
- Identify district, school, and community resources available to support faculty and staff. For instance, remind faculty and staff about the [Vermont Employee Assistance Program](#). Highlight and support the Vermont Education Health Initiative (VEHI)’s [PATH](#)

[Wellness program](#). Ensure the SU or District has a Wellness District Champion and Building Leaders to provide supports and resources promoting faculty and staff well-being.

Student and Family Well-being

When returning to school, recognize that students and families may have experienced loss and trauma as well as on-going stress related to COVID-19 and racial injustice. Directly addressing student and family needs must be a part of the reentry plan. It is recommended that attention to self-care become part of the school culture, a practice in which all engage so it is not left up to the individual student/family to navigate. A holistic, district- or school-wide approach for self-care can help reduce stigma about mental health, improve stress levels, and better ensure that students are able to learn effectively.

- Be prepared to assist families in finding supports, including mental health supports, social services and/or financial assistance, and childcare assistance. Work with families to identify who may need assistance with food, clothing and other basic needs. In addition to re-affirming existing working relationships, consider establishing new partnerships with local or regional community organizations that can assist families in your LEA.
- Consider how teaching and supporting student self-care and mindfulness can become part of the SU/district and school culture.
- In a developmentally appropriate manner, teach students how to make time each day to review their own social, emotional and mental health status and take action to take care of and protect themselves.
- Provide activities to help families feel comfortable sending their children back to school.
- Communicate clearly and often with families.

Recommended Practice

Emerging recommendations across a wide variety of professional organizations, advocacy groups, and experts indicate best practices to rely on in order to achieve and sustain social, emotional and mental health during both COVID-19 and in the context of race-based violence and injustice. See Appendix 1 for a list of specific resources to assist you in your planning and implementation.

Assessing Student Well-being

It is recommended that LEAs adopt multiple levels of checking in with students to determine their social, emotional and mental health needs. These range from informal survey or interviews prior to the beginning of the school year, daily or weekly well-being check-ins, and consideration of whether to implement formal SEL screenings. The goal is to consider and implement a plan for effectively connecting with all students to understand their social, emotional and mental health upon reentry and to identify students requiring additional support throughout the school year.

School Entry Check-in

In recognition that some families, as described above, will have experienced negative or traumatic events related to the COVID pandemic and/or being confronted with racial injustice, there are likely to be students of all ages who will require additional supports to re-enter school. Suggestions to help these students include the following:

- Consider “pre-conferencing,” having teachers contact all students’ families prior to school opening to both check in and inquire about any serious concerns students or parents may have about returning to school. If so, behavioral supports can be mobilized prior to the start of school. This can also assist in identifying any students at high risk of significant stress or trauma.
- Consider using universal school entry surveys to understand student and family needs upon entry for the school year. See Appendix 2 for examples of universal school-entry questions.
- Consider an interview process for younger children (Grade PK-3) and a survey for older youth (Grade 4- up) administered by/submitted to a teacher or trusted school adult. Staff can share responses with existing support systems within school for follow up (e.g., EST). Leveraging existing support systems wherever possible will be advantageous. For students who are new to the school, consider this a relationship building process with the student and family.
- Provide opportunities for reluctant students of all ages to come to school grounds and meet their teacher before opening day to reduce anticipatory anxiety.
- Consider additional measures that may support and motivate students to come to school on their first day (e.g., support animals, mascots at school, special decorations, etc.). Make these extra efforts known to families.
- Facilitate referrals using the referral process already in place within a school such as SST, EST, for children with more severe levels of anxiety.

Regular Well-being Check-ins

Consider periodic (e.g., weekly, daily, etc.) use of a well-being check-in to monitor students’ emotional well-being and facilitate a timely response to any concerns as they arise. This can be done with someone who has a relationship with the student (classroom teacher, nurse, school counselor). Existing tools for well-being check-ins include [Close Gap](#), [Mood Meter](#) and [Youhue](#).

High school students indicate that they would welcome regular well-being check-ins with a trusted adult.¹ They also welcome pro-active scheduled times to connect with school counselors,

¹ Hoover, S. (2020, July 21). Comprehensive School Mental Health Planning for 2020 21 School Year During COVID 19, [Learning Collaborative webinar], Adolescent and Young Adult Behavioral Health Collaborative Improvement and Innovation Network (AYA-BH CoIIN), sponsored by the Association of Maternal and Child Health Programs (AMCHP) and the National Improvement Partnership Network (NIPN). [Recording of webinar](#).

rather than waiting for the student to reach out themselves. Now more than ever might be the time to invest in such outreach and support strategies for our adolescent students.

Formal Screenings

Social emotional screenings can help to direct and guide the work of school counselors and support teams, while also fostering SEL at a district- and school-wide level.

CCSSO notes that, without proper training, some screeners can be inadvertently misused leading to bias against students of different racial or socioeconomic backgrounds. Accordingly, decisions about whether to implement a formal social emotional screening should be based on several readiness factors²:

- Identification of goals and objectives for using universal social emotional screening
- Identification of a validated tool, including soliciting input from students and families
- Implementation procedures aligned with existing school structures for MTSS, including but not limited to:
 - Who administers the tool?
 - How data are collected, stored, and used, including FERPA and HIPAA considerations
 - Informed consent process; e.g., will parents opt-in or opt-out?
 - Timing & frequency of screening
- Clear plan for review of responses
- Explicit process for referral to resources and supports, including crisis response
- Plan and resources for comprehensive staff training to implement the screening procedures

Once a screening process for identifying those students needing supports is decided upon, LEAs will also need to discern how best to match support services with student need. Here, establishing new or renewed partnerships with mental health providers, community support agencies/non-profits, etc. can assist in developing optimal strategies for assisting students and families.

- Identify and implement a referral system for students who need targeted supports and/or community services, leveraging existing work in this area.
- Consider how you will use existing structures (MTSS, EST, SST, advisories, etc.) to identify students and families that might need additional support.
- What types of behaviors or indicators will be useful to consider (e.g., declining school performance, increased truancy, change in externalizing or internalizing symptoms, etc.)?

² Romer, N., von der Embse, N., Eklund, K., Kilgus, S., Perales, K., Splett, J. W., Sudlo, S., Wheeler, D., (2020). Best Practices in Social, Emotional, and Behavioral Screening: An Implementation Guide. Version 2.0. Retrieved from smhcollaborative.org/universalscreening

Expectations and Routines

It will be critical to teach and reteach expectations and routines, avoiding punitive approaches for classroom and school management. Such practices will allay student fear and anxiety, as well as provide opportunities to practice new behaviors and processes. Specific practices to consider include previewing changes and expectations before they take effect, providing opportunities for students and staff to talk about how school feels different, and, when possible, involving student and staff voice/choice in creating new routines. For younger students, pay specific attention to beginning and end of day routines, as well as new expectations for other key transition times. For instance, teachers will likely need to bolster the welcoming process, at least early on, given that required temperature checks, masks, and the like present a new and potentially scary way in which students will navigate coming into school. It is also important to acknowledge what isn't different and how some school experiences will continue amid these other changes. For instance, consider a message such as "We still care about each other and are excited to share and learn together."

- Providing teachers and staff with explicit language can be helpful, and this can foster consistency and reassurance throughout the LEA. **Appendix 3** includes examples of language to consider.
- Consider the impact of masks on students' and teachers' ability to read emotions and facial expressions, follow speech, participate in speech-related interventions, and generally participate and focus on academics, as well as how instructional practice will need to adjust accordingly.
- Provide opportunities for parents to hear about new routines and structure, ask questions, learn the logistics of an on-line classroom or hybrid model, as well as gain ideas for supporting their child/youth through this school year and managing their own stress. It may be important to convey the message that even if parents might not agree with everything that's happening, clear and consistent messaging from them will support their children's success in navigating the changes. Parents might be encouraged to discuss their own frustrations away from their children.
- The use of humor and normalizing new ways of interacting will be important strategies to deploy at the classroom and school level.

SEL Considerations

Many schools and districts are already using some model of SEL to help create relationships, establish routines and expectations. Additional considerations for holistic integration of SEL into daily operations include:

- Offer components of a SEL curriculum intentionally embedded into core academic subjects.
- Ensure teachers have the necessary professional learning opportunities to use SEL in core academic areas.
- Consider a comprehensive district- or school-wide approach for integration of Social Emotional Learning (SEL).

- School counselors along with other school based mental health providers can work collaboratively with classroom teachers to embed SEL into core academic or advisory structures.
- Establish a clear understanding about how school counseling services will be delivered.
- Provide opportunities for movement breaks (see **Appendix 4**) and other plans to address concerns about students sitting at the same desk throughout the day.
 - Ensure movement breaks fully comply with COVID-19 health and safety guidelines.
 - Consider other movement tools (e.g., balls in place of chairs) and alternative plans for students who have difficulty sitting and focusing for extended periods of time.
 - Provide opportunities for physically distanced group work/interactions around a larger table, as possible, keeping in full compliance with COVID-19 health and safety guidelines.
 - Encourage the use of outdoor spaces for class time whenever possible, in full compliance with COVID-19 health and safety guidelines.

Resource Mapping

Consider the use of [resource mapping](#) to determine effective utilization of personnel resources. Can current role assignments be tweaked or re-crafted to ensure better coverage of SEL in your SU/SD or schools?

Employ a Trauma-Informed Lens

It is recommended that LEAs foster conversations and training about trauma-informed practice in preparation for school re-opening. Considering students' challenging behaviors through both a trauma-informed lens and as a potential symptom of deficits in regulatory skills due to the prolonged out-of-school period will be an important stance to ensure student needs are met. State-promulgated resources on Vermont's trauma-informed system of care, prevention and resilience development are included in **Appendix 1**.

Family Engagement

Family engagement is critical for a successful return to school and for the entire 2020-21 school year. To assist parents in their navigation of our new shared education landscape consider the following:

- Offer families resources about specific strategies they can use at home to support successful reentry. This should also include information on how to seek support if they have specific concerns about their child. Parenting classes and groups at night would also be helpful.
- Provide back to school/reentry activities for families and students through virtual orientation and open house events, in compliance with health guidance.

- Most SUs/SDs have adopted increased, regular communication strategies with families as a result of COVID-19 and planning activities. Continue efforts to engage and communicate with families throughout the school year. Ensure that communications are easily accessible.
- Provide communications to families about the LEA’s approach to racial injustice, anti-racist educational practice, and any relevant curricular updates.
- Develop a system for tracking how often families receive and respond to LEA communications; monitor and provide supports when families are repeatedly non-responsive or when communications fall off. This can be a sign that school and community supports should be mobilized to ensure the family is doing well and that students are safe.

Special Considerations

Disengagement and Truancy

Many of Vermont’s LEAs and local systems were experiencing challenges with detecting, tracking, and acting upon disengagement and truancy even before the COVID-19 event. In the remote learning context (Spring 2020), schools and districts often experienced difficulties in contacting hard-to-reach families. Although the fall return places us within a different context regarding the pandemic, LEAs may experience similar or new challenges in establishing family and student engagement.

Most critical in addressing this challenge will be viewing disengagement as an early alert that the student and/or family require additional supports and assistance. Now more than ever, our communities and families need wrap-around approaches that connect them with not only school personnel and support staff, but appropriate social services, financial assistance, and mental health providers that can assist them. In addition, it is possible, if not likely, that some LEAs and schools will see an increase in anxiety-based school refusal given the heightened stress and emotional demands of our national context. School systems should be well-prepared to assist in helping to mobilize such resources for families in need. This may entail forging new working relationships with community partners such as food banks, community support non-profits, and/or private counselors, in addition to robust existing collaborative partnerships, to ensure resources are sufficiently available. Consider how you will address a potential increase in family need during your district and school planning activities.

Familiarize yourself with [AOE’s guidance on hybrid learning](#) concerning how to track attendance across a variety of teaching and learning dispositions. Unless directed otherwise, current regulatory requirements regarding truancy designation still hold. However, LEAs are strongly encouraged to employ formal truancy proceedings as a final, last resort in attempting to engage and connect with students and families.

Stigma for Not Wearing Cloth Facial Covering

As of August 1, 2020, Governor Scott declared it mandatory that children and adults wear facial coverings (i.e., masks) in public places within Vermont. However, some individuals with

specific health concerns and very young children are not required to wear masks. It is recommended that LEAs attend to any possible stigma or discriminatory behavior that may arise for those few individuals in schools that cannot (and therefore, should not) wear cloth facial coverings. It may be useful to discuss this issue in reentry conversations, and/or during activities for establishing and practicing new routines. See also “Facial Coverings and Personal Protective Equipment” in [Safety and Health Guidance for Reopening Schools, Fall 2020](#).

Loss of Extracurricular Activities

For many of our students, engaging in extracurricular activities such as music, band, chorus, drama, social clubs, and school sports is a core part of their educational experience and their identity. Faced with meeting health and safety guidelines, LEAs will likely be unable to offer some of their usual extracurricular activities this coming school year. It will be important to directly acknowledge this loss for students; focusing on an empathetic, caring response. In addition, some parents and staff will almost certainly feel this loss as well. Such loss may also be compounded by any grief experienced due to the COVID-19 pandemic or instances of racial injustice and race-based violence that have occurred prior to school reentry. LEAs are recommended to offer opportunities for open discussion of this topic both to respect the depth of concern and grief such loss may engender as well as provide alternative possibilities for enrichment and hope for the future. School counselors and mental health partners can be excellent collaborators in setting up this aspect of your reentry plans.

Homelessness and Housing Instability

The economic impact of COVID-19 has hit some families very hard in many, if not most, areas of Vermont. As a result, LEAs may experience an increase in the number of students who are experiencing homelessness or unstable housing situations. To prepare, ensure that your [McKinney Vento Liaison](#) is up to speed on all identification practices, required processes, and regulations (even if no students have experienced homelessness prior to COVID-19). Consider using your multi-disciplinary teams to discuss approaches to ensure that students are not “slipping through the cracks.” Homelessness can be a source of shame, in addition to incredible anxiety and inability to focus on learning, for students and their families. Adopt an empathetic, caring response in exploring whether the fiscal impact on families has resulted in the need for housing services. In addition, leverage your referral and community partnership processes (discussed previously) to facilitate supports for families in need.

Appendix 1. Resources

COVID-19 and Reentry

- [Restart and Recovery. Considerations for Teaching and Learning Overview.](#) (CCSSO, 2020).
- [Restart and Recovery. Supporting SEL and Mental Health during COVID-19.](#) (CCSSO, 2020).
- [Reunite, Renew, and Thrive. SEL Roadmap for Reopening School](#) (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2020).
- [Back to School After COVID-19: Supporting Student and Staff Mental Health Childhood-Trauma Learning Collaborative Toolkit](#) (New England Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network, 2020).
- [School Reentry Considerations. Supporting student social and emotional learning and mental and behavioral health amidst Covid-19.](#) (ASCA & NASP, 2020).
- [Action and Allyship Guide: An Onramp Towards Equity.](#) (State of Vermont Racial Equity Advisory Panel, 2020).
- [Building Developmental Relationships During the COVID-19 Crisis Checklist](#) (Search Institute, 2020).
- [VTSCA SEL Guidelines for School Reopening.](#) (VTSCA, 2020).
- [No One is the Same: Supporting Students' Mental Health as We Return to School.](#) (We Are Teachers, 2020).
- [Expect Heightened Anxiety, Behavioral Issues in Returning Students.](#) (District Administration, 2020).
- [Trauma Informed School Strategies during COVID-19.](#) (National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2020).
- [Well-being of Parents and Children during the COVID-19 Pandemic: a National Survey.](#) (Henkhaus, Zicafoose et al., 2020).
- [Comprehensive School Mental Health Planning for 2020-21 School Year During COVID-19.](#) (Learning Collaborative, 2020).

Equity

- [Educational Equity](#) (Vermont Agency of Education)
- [Ethnic and Social Equity Standards Advisory Working Group \(Vermont Act 1\)](#)

SEL

- [Core SEL Competencies.](#) (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2020).
- [Strengths-Based Practice in Troubled Times.](#) (Center for the Study of Social Policy, 2020).
- [Coping with Stress.](#) (Vermont Department of Health)
- [AAP Policy statement on the Impact of Racism on Child and Adolescent Health.](#) (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2019).

SEL Screening

- [Best Practices in Social, Emotional, and Behavioral Screening: An Implementation Guide. Version 2.0.](#) (Romer, von der Embse, Eklund, Kilgus, Perales, Splett, Sudlo and Wheeler, 2020).

For Teachers and Staff

- [Trinka and Sam Fighting the Big Virus.](#) (National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2020).
- [Coping in Hard Times Fact Sheet for School Staff.](#) (National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2020).
- [Coping with Stress.](#) (Vermont Department of Health).
- [AAP Policy statement on the Impact of Racism on Child and Adolescent Health.](#) (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2019).

For Parents

- [Building Resilience in Troubled Times: A Guide for Parents.](#) (Center for the Study of Social Policy, 2020).
- [Trinka and Sam Fighting the Big Virus.](#) (National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2020).
- [Coping in Hard Times Fact Sheet for Parents.](#) (National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2020).
- [Coping with Stress.](#) (Vermont Department of Health)
- [AAP Policy statement on the Impact of Racism on Child and Adolescent Health.](#) (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2019).
- [Wearing Masks](#) (Werner and Marotta, 2020)

Trauma-informed Approaches

- [Trauma-informed System of Care Policy.](#) (Vermont Agency of Human Services).
- [Trauma Prevention and Resilience Development.](#) (Vermont Agency of Human Services).
- [Trinka and Sam Fighting the Big Virus.](#) (National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2020).
- [Trauma Informed School Strategies during COVID-19.](#) (National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2020).

Appendix 2. Universal School Entry Questions

Some examples of universal school entry questions to ask each student/family can include the following:

- What has changed for you since we started learning from home?
- What did you enjoy about being home?
- Who do you share your worries or problems with, at school and at home?
- Which adult/s in this building do you feel comfortable talking to?
- What does it look like and sound like when you are feeling stressed or worried?
- What do you do to help yourself feel calm?
- What do you wish was different?
- What might you or your family need?
- What are you thinking about or concerned about right now?
- What are your hopes and dreams for school this year?
- What are you proud of about yourself?
- How can you help others?
- Anything else that you think we should know.

[Source: Washington Central Unified Union School District (WCUUSD) SEL Task Force]

Appendix 3. Sample Talking Points for Educators

Acknowledge the “Difference”

- Things will continue to look different for school.
- Preview the changes and need for flexibility to help keep everyone safe and healthy as best we can with what we know.
- It is also important to acknowledge what isn't different and how some of our experiences of school can continue amid these other changes. We still care about each other and are excited to share and learn together.

Give space for feelings

- This is hard and different.
- Some people have really enjoyed being at home.
- Some people have NOT enjoyed being at home.

Address the sudden the changes last year

- For safety we had to go remote quickly.
- We didn't get a chance to say goodbye/celebrate the end of the year like we usually would.
- It was sudden, and it was a big change out of our control.

Allow room for grief and loss

- Model vulnerability and honesty that is developmentally appropriate.
- I miss being in person and seeing all of you.
- I miss the way things used to be.
- I do wish it could go back to normal.
- A lot of people have a lot of different feelings about how things are different.
- It is okay to not be okay all the time.

Provide as much clarity as you can around what IS happening

- Preview expectations and create a shared means of communication.
- This year will look different and we will be...
- For health and safety reasons we will be...
- I will be in touch with you through...
- We will figure this out together.

Hold hope and optimism for ongoing connections

- No matter if we are in person, remote or a mix of the two I am excited to start this school year with you.
- I am happy/glad to see/hear you.
- I will be in touch every (day/week) and look forward to seeing/talking with you.

Emphasis “we are in this together”

- We will navigate this together
- We will learn how to be problem solvers together
- We will make mistakes and figure this out together

Create space to express worries, hopes, uncertainty

- Normalize that everyone has many different feelings, some even at the same time
- Ask: do you have any worries about the school year?
- Ask: what do you hope to get out of this school year?
- Ask: are there things you are confused about?

You do not need to have all the answers! The important part is asking and creating a safe space to build connection

- That is a great question! Let me find out more and get back to you.
- A lot of people/students/kids are wondering about that/have shared they feel that way too.
- Would you like to work on that together?
- We are going to be working on that together all year.

You can share some of your hopes, worries, and confusion too

- Be developmentally appropriate.
- Even grownups struggle with...
- Share some strategies you use to manage feelings/anxiety and want to encourage in your learning environment: breathing, space, active movement, nature, connection with pets and friends, music, etc.

Encourage self-care and routines

- Whether in the classroom or remote create routines that support being gentle, kind, and patient with one’s self and others.
- Create your own supportive self-care plan to take care of you!

Bring it back to connection

- I am so glad to be seeing/talking to you again.
- Things are different and I am here for you.
- Things are a little harder right now and we will find our way through this.
- I am so glad to be back in connection with you and am looking forward to navigating this unprecedented/different/unusual time with you.

Thank you so much for all you do for Vermont's students and families, we are grateful for you!

[Prepared by Katina Idol, LMHC; Counselor at Lamoille Community Connections.]

Appendix 4. Sample Movement Activities

Many movement activities can be done within a student's own space and while wearing a mask. In addition to the sample list below, any outdoor time can provide a mental and physical break for students and teachers.

1. Go Noodle dance/movement videos can be done in the classroom with students in their own individual space. Or other yoga or stretching activities.
2. Progressive tensing and relaxing of different muscle groups. See: an [example of guided muscle relaxation for children \(transcript\)](#); Shorter examples ([5:25](#) and [1:37](#)) are also available.
3. Self-hugs for deep pressure
4. Breathing exercises: Example videos: 4-7-8 Breathing Exercise by [GoZen](#); Body Scan Meditation by [GoZen](#). For young children, [Sesame Street's Belly Breathe video](#) (1:58).
5. Play "Simon Says"
6. Name Moves Students stand behind their chairs. In turn, each student says his or her name accompanied by a special movement. For example, a student might say, "Kayla!" while dramatically dropping to one knee and doing Jazz Hands. After the student does his or her move, the rest of the class says the student's name in unison and imitates the move. Then it is the next student's turn.³
7. Movement Songs: Sing a song with whole-body movements, such as, "Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes," "Shake Your Sillies Out (Raffie)," etc. Older students might enjoy a simple Zumba routine, YMCA, or the Macarena. Littler ones will love Sesame Street's [A Very Simple Dance to Do](#).³
8. Cross-midline (cross-lateral) movement activities involve arms and legs crossing from one side of the body to the other. "The left side of the brain controls the right side of the body, and the right side of the brain controls the left side. Both sides are forced to communicate when arms and legs cross over. This "unsticks" the brain and energizes learning."⁴
 - a. Grab your nose with left hand, and grab your left earlobe with your right hand, and then quickly switch so that your right hand is on your nose and your left hand is grabbing your right earlobe. Switch back and forth several times.
 - b. Elbow Tap: Stand with arms at sides. Bend and touch right elbow to left knee as you raise your leg. Stand and then touch left elbow to right knee.⁴

³ <https://buildingmomentuminschools.blog/2018/09/14/movement-breaks-in-the-classroom/>

⁴ http://www.drjean.org/html/monthly_act/act_2006/03_Mar/pg04.html

- c. Windmills: Feet spread apart, and arms extended. Bend over at waist and tap right hand to left foot. Back up and then bend and tap left hand to right foot.⁴
 - d. Backwards: Bend left knee and put foot behind right leg. Reach back around with right hand and touch left foot. Reverse and put right foot behind your left leg as you touch it with your left hand.⁴
 - e. Cross crawls: March in place, then touch their opposite knee as it is at their waist. The right arm would touch the left knee and the left arm would touch the right knee as they are marching in place.⁵
9. Brief movement exercise that students can do at their desk. Text of the exercise:

This is just a very simple practice. As you're listening to me right now, one of the things I want you to do is, I want you to just sit for a second. And I want you just to stare straight ahead. Just look straight ahead. And as you're looking straight ahead, just notice what is actually landed and what is actually still in the air. All you're doing is noticing what's happening: noticing how much you dislike my voice; noticing how much you dislike, or you like, some of the things that you've heard today. Just notice those pieces. Now what I want you to do is — look over your left shoulder, and use your neck and your hips; so, turn and look over your shoulder. And then come back to center; and now look up; and look down; come back to center; and now look over your right shoulder, using your neck and your hips. And the reason why you use your neck and your hips is that I want you to engage that psoas and engage some parts of the vagal. And then, now come forward. And now just be quiet and notice what's different.

Background info: This is adapted from [Resmaa Menakem's interview with Krista Tippett](#) (On Being podcast). Resmaa Menakem is a teacher on racial trauma and author of "My Grandmother's Hands". This exercise is designed to engage the vagal nerve and the psoas muscle. Resmaa Menakem explains: "There's the vagal nerve — it's called the "wandering nerve" and I call it the soul nerve — that comes out of the brain stem, and it hits in the face, it hits in the pharynx, it hits in the chest, it hits in the gut. It wanders the whole body. And it, I believe, is one of the things why we have "gut" reactions, because most of that nerve actually ends up in the gut. And when we're stressed, that gut constricts or opens. And then there's a muscle, the psoas muscle... the psoas connects the top part of the body with the bottom part of the body. It also — if you're braced against danger — it manages whether or not you mobilize or immobilize.

⁵ <https://www.growinghandsonkids.com/crossing-midline-exercises-for-kids.html>