

## NJDOE Guidelines Planning Assistance

*TeacherCoach is pleased to present school districts with a simple but comprehensive plan to address guidelines recommend by the Governor and NJDOE for our September reopening. We hope to ease the burden on school districts already burdened with the physical and financial requirements. This plan is not done in conjunction with the department, but as a separate resource for your district. TeacherCoach suggestions and indicated in [blue](#).*

### Social Emotional Learning (SEL) and School Culture and Climate

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The NJDOE understands the important role of climate and culture, more specifically, social and emotional learning (SEL) and how critical it is in re-engaging students, supporting adults, rebuilding relationships, and creating a foundation for academic learning. This section, which was developed with input from representatives ranging from experts in SEL, various organizations, educators and school leaders, includes strategies for developing positive school climates, educator well-being, and recommendations on how to prepare for and integrate SEL when in-person schooling resumes.

There is an important distinction between climate and culture. Climate represents one of three dimensions of culture (adaptation, climate, and infrastructure) related to relationships, job satisfaction, and more). It is also important to note that ‘positive’ school climate is a misnomer in that climates aren’t binary. Aspects of school climate exist on continuums similar to personality traits of human beings. SEL and educator well-being, can be understood as the strategies to meet psychological and physiological health needs. TeacherCoach has a model that outlines the simple way to meet emotional and physical health.

### Educator Well-Being

It is important that leaders thoughtfully plan for how to best support the well-being of educators. As educators’ social-emotional state improves, they will better be able to support the social-emotional well-being and learning needs of their students. Districts must account for the well-being of their educators and staff as they develop their reopening plans. While there are no anticipated required minimum standards for educator well-being, districts and schools should contemplate the considerations outlined below as they develop plans for reopening.

This is an important paragraph because it reinforces the paradigm that SEL is best delivered through a top down approach. When SEL is integrated with educator well-being, they are more engaged with their students and more likely to model and support the personal growth of their students. TeacherCoach has an in-depth psychosocial emotional learning program for educators, which they can use for their own development and the support of their students.

### *Considerations*

- Provide time and space for individuals to process traumatic events, re-establish connections with each other, and receive support that promotes their healing.
- Prioritize educator self-care and wellness through the summer and at the start of the 2020-2021 school year.
- Support educators' access to mental and behavioral resources and encourage them to utilize these services.
- Create opportunities for staff to regularly practice and reflect on their social and emotional competencies.

Self-care and mental health have been historically limited for educators. Teachers tend to rate the quality and quantity of supports low, making it critical to introduce well-received resources. The support also needs to have an element of privacy as educators may want to maintain some separation between their personal and professional lives. Mental health resources are equivalent to visiting a psychologist for a year's worth of sessions. The TeacherCoach platform of personal growth and professional development virtual and real time learning, allows for all four considerations to be met. <https://www.teachercoach.com/white-papers/>

### **Trauma-Informed Social and Emotional Learning**

Districts must organize and prepare for the next school year acknowledging the potential trauma that staff and students have faced during the COVID-19 school closures. The full impact of the pandemic and the collateral consequences from isolation, fear, and economic hardship have yet to be fully realized. In addition, students and staff returning for the 2020-2021 school year will be faced with new and intimidating routines and circumstances. We must address these challenges head-on to ensure that social and emotional learning are infused into everyday school life.

The relationship between SEL and Trauma is important to consider. People typically employ protective mechanisms to guard against real and perceived threats. In doing so they limit their ability to get their needs met, rendering SEL less effective. Acute and chronic trauma is the radical shift into survival mode, where protective mechanisms become overwhelmed and the person's resiliency begins to diminish. SEL alone is insufficient to address this in some instances. Appreciating how to differentiate between those who can be helped by SEL and those who require more in-depth assistance is critical.

Educators need to learn how to identify their own trauma and near trauma stress while also being able to differentiate those students whose interventions could adversely impact. TeacherCoach

offers specific virtual engagements on Coping with the Covid-19 Crisis and Trauma.  
<https://www.teachercoach.com/menu/>

According to Teaching Tolerance, now more than ever we must focus on:

- Establishing routines and maintaining clear communication
- Prioritizing relationships and well-being over assignment and behavioral compliance, and
- Supporting students and staff in feeling safe, connected, and hopeful.

Both expressive and receptive communication are enhanced by a various skills and knowledge: What are roadblocks to effective communication; 2. What is my style of communication? How do I differentiate between debate, discussion, and dialogue with clear parameters to balance authenticity and emotional safety? How do support adults and students with special needs impacting effective communication. TeacherCoach provides virtual and real-time training in all of these area. <https://www.teachercoach.com/menu/>

The NJDOE strongly believes that the return to school will benefit from a data-informed and coordinated implementation of quality SEL programming described in CASEL’s Initial Guide to Leveraging the Power of Social and Emotional Learning as You Prepare to Reopen and Renew Your School Community. While there are no anticipated minimum standards to which districts must adhere in developing reopening plans, the considerations below outline actions districts seek to incorporate into their plans.

While CASEL provides the standards in our field for the delivery of SEL, there are several limitations to their approach we want to consider. Contact Dr. Scherz at [coach@teachercoach.com](mailto:coach@teachercoach.com) for an excerpt from his new book set, Whole School Health and Psychosocial Emotional Learning to appreciate the 15 keys to implementing SEL.

#### **Actions to consider first:**

- Make deliberate efforts to communicate the importance of SEL and how it relates to student success in your school or district to students and families.
- Consider staffing needs that would be most appropriate in addressing the trauma and social and emotional well-being of your students as they return to school. Schools are encouraged to examine the flexibility of their available funds to hire qualified individuals that can support these needs.
- Facilitate opportunities for connection and reflection among students, families, and staff (i.e., virtual town-halls, small group online meetings, surveys, etc.). It is critical that districts make time for these conversations and ensure that students’ voices are heard. These meetings may shed light on opportunities to highlight SEL strategies that were effective in supporting and engaging students in your school or district during the COVID-19 pandemic as well as areas where your school and district commits to improving.

For educators to appreciate the importance of SEL, they need to view this work as valuable to their own well-being and not simply a set of tools and strategies they are expected to implement. Many novice and veteran teachers may feel resistant toward addressing SEL because they feel ill-prepared to be effective. TeacherCoach provides a model that excites educators who go on their own personal growth journeys: <https://www.teachercoach.com/sel>

### **Actions to consider prior to school opening:**

- Provide professional development to support educators
  - Integration of SEL in their teaching, including the skills to foster positive learning environments and techniques for embedding SEL into instruction (in-person and remote and/or virtual instruction).
  - Understanding and utilization of trauma-informed practices.
  - Protocol for identifying and supporting students who may be experiencing social-emotional, behavioral, and mental health challenges.
- Establish systems that promote supportive staff-student relationships to ensure that all students have at least one caring staff member who checks in regularly with them and who their family and is able to connect with for any needed supports. In addition to in-school structures (i.e., mentors, advisory classes), schools may want to consider community partners who may be able to connect with students and families and supplement the services already being provided by the school.
- Be proactive in preparing access to mental health and trauma supports for adults and students, which may include establishing partnerships with outside entities and agencies. Planning should include the methods for continually conveying information on how to access both school and community supports to students, staff, and families in all learning environments (in-person, hybrid, and virtual).

TeacherCoach provides some of the most unique virtual training available. Our SEL themed interactive play in partnership with the Walnut St. Theatre: <https://www.teachercoach.com/sel-themed-play> was a tremendous success. Faculty and students can access a version of this training to be used in classrooms with students. TeacherCoach also offers half day workshops on SEL and Equity, in which faculty are immersed with role plays, experimentation and exposure to new skills.

TeacherCoach provides several engagements/ sets on these topics including Class Climate & SEL Parts 1-3. Our free mental health and SEL package is completely funded by our sponsor, providing you the entire platform (create your own training, generate revenue by converting solicitors into sponsors, webinars, and more) with this expert content.

<https://www.teachercoach.com/mental-health-package>

### **Actions to consider once the school year begins:**

- Create opportunities for staff and students to regularly practice and reflect on their social and emotional competencies. Consider instructional strategies that best work for your school's context (i.e. community meetings, small group mentoring, brain breaks)

Psychosocial emotional learning is based on a developmental sequence of learning, designed to help us get our needs met. At different ages, different skills can be taught, including the moral development involved with training around diversity. It is necessary to consider the role of equity in this process, as not all children have the same intensity of needs nor the same learned strategies to meet those needs. An example of our paradigm through infographic: <https://www.teachercoach.com/infographics-sample/>

- Have careful conversations with staff and students to discuss the past, current, and future impacts of COVID-19 on themselves and the world around them.
  - Conversations should take part in a safe space where participants demonstrate respect to each other. While deliberate efforts should be made to foster a trauma-sensitive environment, be mindful that these conversations may trigger emotional responses and can also lead to difficult discussions revolving around inequity.
  - Topics you may consider include but are not limited to:
    - ❖ Potential increases in bullying behavior
    - ❖ Grief, loss, and trauma
    - ❖ Mental health and supportive behaviors
    - ❖ Bias, prejudice, and stigma
    - ❖ Preparedness, hope, and resilience
    - ❖ Fear and anxiety
- Staff should be trained as necessary, and schools should be prepared to support both staff and students that may feel unnerved by these topics or conversations.
- Schools should be prepared to support an influx of students who may need counseling support.

Having these difficult conversations requires adults to develop facilitation skills. Educators are familiar with content/ outcome focused groups but not process groups. The tools to encourage open sharing without putting children at risk, involves additional training.

TeacherCoach provides virtual and real time engagements on anxiety, depression, bullying, diversity and more, for both adults and students. Engagements utilize videos at the core of the training with additional resources, exercises, homework and test questions for professional development. <https://www.teachercoach.com/video-montages/>

## School Culture and Climate

Creating a positive school climate and culture will address the issues raised by the COVID-19 pandemic and improve the conditions for learning for all students in any of the in-person, hybrid, or virtual instructional models. To optimize the learning process, students and staff need to feel cared for, reengaged, and acclimated to the school community, so schools can deliver instruction most effectively. In order to improve school culture and climate, districts should:

- Prioritize the health and emotional well-being of staff and students above all else
- Assess the school climate to identify vulnerabilities and plan to implement evidence-based strategies to address identified needs
- Plan to provide and sustain instruction on social norms, relationship building, and behavioral expectations beginning at the start of the school year. See Appendix C for statute and regulations related to School Culture and Climate.

Faculty should be prepared for a number of intrapersonal and interpersonal dynamics that will influence and be influenced by school climate. For younger children, separation anxiety, worry around rule following, the unlearning of social contact, and concern for the well-being of their teachers. This angst will be contained in environments with high emotional safety, enhanced by caring and curiosity. When students can feel safe to share their feelings without judgment and show compassion for those unlike them, tension will be reduced. Educators who experience the same conditions from their administrators and co-workers will provide the same for students.

## Utilizing the Strengths of Staff

While educators are facing a “new normal” as they work to support the academic, social emotional, and health needs of students, many of the strategies that should be applied to address these challenges are not new. Schools should recognize and empower the strengths of educators and staff and their significant role in the context of SEL. The listed considerations provide suggestions for thinking about how school staff can support the action steps outlined in the section on trauma-informed SEL.

### **Actions to consider first:**

- For school leaders:
  - ❖ Utilize newsletters, the school website, and/or social media to continually communicate with families and staff about the application and importance of SEL.
  - ❖ Evaluate staff capacity and student needs when determining essential personnel for next school year.
  - ❖ Facilitate and/or host opportunities for students, staff, and families to connect and reflect.

TeacherCoach provides you with a monthly newsletter, focused on self-care, mental health and SEL. TeacherCoach also has a regular blog which you can find in your dedicated district portal (i.e. <https://vtsd.teachercoach.com/>)

- For student support staff:
  - ❖ Provide school leaders and teachers with resources on SEL and trauma.
  - ❖ Connect with students and families to provide any needed supports.

Every engagement on the TeacherCoach platform can be made available to families with one click of a button. Bullying, Immunity, Anxiety, Trauma, and more, can be brought to your faculty and family community, helping parents become highly appreciative of the school.

Article: [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/how-this-founder-is-addressing-the-problem-nobody-wants\\_b\\_59c3ba04e4b0ffc2dedb5b4d](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/how-this-founder-is-addressing-the-problem-nobody-wants_b_59c3ba04e4b0ffc2dedb5b4d)

- For teachers:
  - ❖ Embed SEL skills and strategies in remote learning with students.
  - ❖ Provide students with opportunities to connect with other students (within learning and socially).
  - ❖ Be aware of any changes in student behavior and report concerns pursuant to district policy.

#### **Actions to consider a month before school opens:**

- For school leaders:
  - ❖ Evaluate school policies and protocols to ensure systems are in place to support students' social-emotional needs. Establish the vision of making sure all students have at least 1 caring staff member checking in on them.
  - ❖ Prioritize needed professional development for staff.
  - ❖ Collaborate with outside entities and agencies in order to establish partnerships to provide mental health and trauma supports to adults and students.

TeacherCoach can help evaluate policies and procedures to ensure they reflect the changing needs of the school community. Assessments can be done for faculty and students, consulting is offered for administrators, and coaching is available for all professionals. TeacherCoach provides a coaching university for specific faculty to be trained in support of the entire district. <https://www.teachercoach.com/school-district/training/>

- For student support staff:
  - ❖ Provide professional development to colleagues on areas of expertise and attend professional development to obtain greater understanding.

- ❖ Support school leaders in establishing protocols for identifying and supporting students' social-emotional needs and provide training to school staff on utilizing protocols.
  - ❖ Take on a leadership role in supporting student-staff relationships and connections.
  - ❖ Support students and families with accessing school and community supports and develop materials to communicate these services.
- For teachers:
    - ❖ Attend professional development to enhance skills and share strategies you have found to be successful with colleagues.
    - ❖ Continue to acquire resources/strategies which you may utilize to build strong, positive relationships in your class.
    - ❖ Familiarize yourself with any resources shared by school leaders or counselors to support students' social-emotional needs in the school and community.

TeacherCoach is a unique platform unlike anything offered in education today. By integrating personal growth with professional development, within the context of whole school health, educators and administrators are both pleased. Please read some of our testimonials from district leaders in NJ and beyond. <https://www.teachercoach.com/testimonial>

#### **Action to consider once the school year begins:**

- For school leaders:
  - ❖ Create opportunities for staff to regularly practice and reflect on their social and emotional competencies. Establish the expectation that all school staff should work to support students to do the same.
  - ❖ Provide school staff with training and support on facilitating difficult conversations and then empower them to engage students in these dialogues.
  - ❖ Ensure that systems are set-up to identify staff or students that may be struggling and best support their needs.
- For student support staff:
  - ❖ Utilize strategies to promote the continual development of staff and student social and emotional competencies.
  - ❖ Provide support to teachers as they work to increase the social and emotional competencies of students.
  - ❖ Support teachers in having difficult conversations with students and provide assistance to students as needed.
  - ❖ Continually evaluate the systems to identify staff and student needs and make adjustments to best support the school community and individuals.
- For teachers:



- ❖ Utilize instructional strategies to continually promote the development of students' social and emotional competencies.
- ❖ Facilitate difficult conversations with students.
- ❖ Apply the school's protocol for identifying students who may be struggling and implement strategies recommended by the school counselor or other professionals.

The use of strategies may be unclear to educators and support staff, who resort to more instinctive methods of interaction. Effective skills and strategies are born from in-depth understanding rooted in theory. Without an appreciation for why a student misbehaves, we will respond to that child with our own best intentions. The same behavior can be caused by multiple constellations of factors, requiring us to first explore etiology. This can vary in depth from low to high sophistication, helping the adult become a more effective intervener.

One example of a TeacherCoach engagement series that explores etiology is related to the current crisis. Understanding the three primary influences for pandemic related trauma will help educators be more receptive to create strategy development.

<https://www.teachercoach.com/covid-19/>