



Guidance for Leading Inclusive Special Education Programs: Staff Well-Being



MARCH 2022

Guidance for Leading Inclusive Special Education Programs

All students deserve equitable access to high quality instruction. Yet, school systems often face unique and complex challenges in improving outcomes for students with disabilities. Addressing these challenges is multifaceted and requires strong leaders who can effectively coordinate programming within and across departments and schools to increase equitable access to inclusive learning opportunities for students with disabilities.

To support the increased effectiveness of special education programming through effective and inclusive system-wide planning, the department will release seven guidance documents to school systems in 2022. The guidance will cover the highest impact areas of special education programming to most effectively improve outcomes for students with disabilities. Each guidance document will be accompanied by an hour long webinar to support implementation.

In partnership with and alongside school and school system leaders, special education leaders are encouraged to review the guidance documents and attend webinars. Please note: release dates and topics are subject to change.

TOPICS FOR 2021-2022 GUIDANCE FOR LEADING INCLUSIVE SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS	
Month	Topic
January	<u>Leveraging Data to Align Budgets and Spending to Priorities</u>
February	Creating Compliant Systems for Student Success <u>Webinar: February 22 at 1 pm</u>
March	Educator and Staff Well-Being <u>Webinar: April 8</u>
April	Student Well-Being and Trauma Informed Supports
May	Positive Behavior Intervention and Functional Behavior Assessment
June	Cultivating a Student-Centered Vision of Teaching and Learning Aligned to Louisiana's Vision for Student Success
June	Identifying, Engaging, and Managing Key Stakeholders



Staff Well-Being

“If school and district leaders prioritize teacher well-being in structural ways, their educators will be better equipped to tackle the myriad of student needs stemming from the pandemic and societal inequities. Teachers, their students, and the entire school community will thrive.” (Source: [Teachers Are Not OK, Even Though We Need Them to Be](#))

Purpose

As we near the end of our second year living through a pandemic, students are still experiencing the same needs that existed prior to the pandemic as well as new challenges that continue to emerge and evolve. Now more than ever, educators must commit to addressing the needs of the [whole child](#), including academic, social, behavioral, and physical needs. At the same time, it is difficult to support students in handling these additional challenges without also being responsive to the needs and well-being of teachers and staff. Educators supporting students with disabilities know the importance of maintaining high-quality instruction and a sense of consistency in order to sustain students’ progress. School systems must look at how to make sure those teachers and staff are not “pouring from an empty cup.”



“The individual anecdotes of frustration, stress, distraction, and anxiety students are experiencing this school year add up to a large, complicated reality of social-emotional and mental health needs that teachers must acknowledge and help address—at the same time that they must move children forward academically. It’s a difficult balance to strike.” ([A Tenuous Balance: Supporting Students While Pushing Their Learning Recovery](#))

(Image source: [Safe Schools NOLA](#))

A recent [report](#) by the New Orleans Trauma-Informed Schools Learning Collaborative highlighted several [takeaways](#) related to educator well-being and classroom effectiveness, including, among others:

1. Educator mental health is tied to teachers’ feelings of efficacy.
2. More than a third of educators met the threshold for a diagnosis of depression or anxiety.
3. Opportunities for mutual support among educators are rare.

Tackling these increased challenges requires school leaders to reimagine the way we approach education. It’s time to break out of our traditionally siloed ways of doing things and instead come together to reimagine how we manage staffing, provide professional learning opportunities, and collaborate to meet the needs of all students, including students with disabilities.



Supporting Staff Well-Being

There is not an easy answer when it comes to addressing these challenges. However, the [LDOE Well-Being Pillars](#) serve as a starting point for school leaders to guide their efforts in supporting student and staff well-being. Pillar #1 specifically calls out the need to build capacity among staff to better support all students:

Pillar #1: Build Personnel Capacity to Support all Students - Provide guidance to districts in supporting personnel on improving their own well-being and in building their capacity to better recognize, evaluate, and support students when they face challenges.

It's clear that school systems must become increasingly intentional in the ways they support teacher and staff well-being. One critical step is to [establish a district well-being leadership team](#) that can 1) assess current practices and beliefs related to both student and staff well-being, and 2) [take action](#) to respond to identified needs and assist in the distribution of resources. Such actions could include:

1. Maximizing the capacity of school personnel to [collaborate effectively](#) during work hours to meet the needs of students with disabilities. (Research shows that collaboration lowers elevated stress levels for teachers.)
2. Being intentionally visible in [supporting teachers and staff](#). (Gallup found that when they asked teachers whether their manager cares about them as a person, people who said yes were more likely to be top performers, produce higher-quality work, and were less likely to be sick or change jobs.)
3. Adjusting traditional [staffing models](#) to better align teacher and staff strengths with the increased behavioral and academic needs of students with disabilities.
 - Promote a supportive and team-oriented working environment. Now more than ever, [teachers need the support](#) and expertise of other professionals, including guidance counselors and mental health providers, among others, in order to address the needs of the whole child in each of the students they teach.

Adapted from: [The Best Way To Support Students During COVID-19? Support Teachers.](#)

In addition, important recommendations for school system leaders to consider from the [report](#) by the NOLA Trauma-Informed Schools Collaborative include:

- Using state and federal aid to provide stipends and hazard pay to educators
- Reviewing mental health benefits included in employee health insurance packages with teachers so they know how to activate benefits
- Improving access to mental health services through access to telehealth services
 - [Ochsner Virtual Therapy](#) (ends June 30, view [FAQs](#))



- Creating policies that intentionally support educators related to needs such as flexible work schedules or leave policies for those who have been impacted by COVID-19
- Universal screening for educators, focusing on symptoms of emotional distress as well as indicators of well-being, with the goal of identifying needs and providing supports as soon as possible
- Partnering with local community-based organizations to provide well-being services designed specifically for educators
- Supporting educators with a “Reset Day” with activities and supports that focus on the mental health of school personnel

When selecting a vendor to address staff well-being, consider the following questions during your search:

- What funding do we have available to pursue this program or service? (See p. 15 in the [2022–2023 School System Planning Guide](#) and consider [IDEA CEIS/ESSER funding, Title I, Title IV, and local funds.](#))
- What must be included so that the program or service is able to meet the needs of your staff?
- What kind of program or approach makes sense based on the needs of teachers in your district? (Consider training and support needs, school day structure, etc.)
- What district goals should be kept in mind while selecting a program or service? (Does the district have specific goals around teacher retention or performance?)

Adapted from CASEL’s [Identify Your Goals](#).

Next Steps

Self-Assessment

- How would you describe the current status of staff well-being in your school system?
- What issues related to staff well-being are of primary concern to you currently?
- Is staff well-being a visible priority in your district?
- Is there a strategic plan in place for implementing staff well-being efforts?

Additional Resources

[SEA/LEA Use of ESSER Funds \(Center on Reinventing Public Education\)](#) - database with links to SEA/LEA planned use of ESSER funds for largest school districts in the U.S.

[Enhancing Relationships and Morale \(BARR Center\)](#) - toolkit with suggestions and resources to support administrators in their efforts to address staff well-being