Addressing Educational Inequities in the Wake of the COVID-19 Pandemic

Building Supportive Conditions and Comprehensive Supports to Enhance Student and Educator Well-Being and Thriving

COMMISSIONED PAPER SERIES

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Teacher and student well-being are central to teaching, learning, and the creation of a healthy and productive citizenry. Although essential to the work of schools and districts, supporting student and teacher well-being has been historically ignored, marginalized, or implemented in a fragmented and piecemeal fashion (Apple, 1979; Darling-Hammond, 2006; National Education Association, 2019; Reese, 2011; Tyack, 1974; Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Well-being has not been seen as central to teaching and learning. The role of schools in creating ill-being for some students (Gray et al., 2020; Osher et al., 2002, 2014) has also been ignored, as have the concerns of teachers and families about student and teacher well-being. This mistaken marginalization of student and teacher support contributes to educational inequities (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020, 2021b; Deschenes et al., 2001; Noguera et al., 2015). The current well-being challenges that teachers and students struggle with make it even more imperative that well-being be addressed explicitly and in a sustained manner.

COVID-19 and its consequences, and the racialized polarization of our society, compromise student and teacher well-being and have amplified education and well-being inequities. How educators and schools respond to these challenges can mitigate or amplify these inequities. Although public discourse focuses on "learning loss" and student behavior, there have also been declines in student well-being and related decreases in school engagement and student belonging (López et al., 2024; Verlenden et al., 2024). These declines in well-being, belonging, and engagement are "losses" that may be even more important to address than learning loss as these are precursors to, and amplifiers of, poor learning outcomes (Gradient Learning, 2023; López et al., 2024; Pearson et al., 2024).

This paper begins by defining thriving and well-being and delineating their critical components, examining how student and teacher well-being and ill-being are intertwined. The discussion then moves to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and consequences on students and educators, highlighting how the challenges that many students and educators face underscore the need for stronger support systems for students and educators and the particular importance of student engagement and positive conditions for learning. Following this discussion, the paper delves into overarching approaches to well-being, identifying 16 success drivers, including relationally rich multitiered strategies and school climate enhancements that are consistent with the science of learning and development and promote conditions conducive to learning and teaching. The focus of the paper then broadens to specific strategies such as social and emotional learning; strengths-based and strengths-building trauma and mental health support; restorative practices; and coordinated efforts and effective collaboration across a student's whole ecology. The paper concludes by providing two case studies and related resources to illustrate how a school and a school district can implement the 16 success drivers and many of the approaches described in the paper and do so in a manner that actively and respectfully engages the voices and perspectives of students, families, and teachers, demonstrating how these comprehensive supports can be integrated to create more resilient educational environments that support student and teacher well-being, learning, and thriving.

WELL-BEING

Well-being includes positive emotions and moods (e.g., contentment, happiness), satisfaction with life, fulfillment, and positive functioning and the absence of chronic or acute negative emotions (e.g., depression, anxiety); physical and emotional wellness (e.g., feeling very healthy and full of energy) are critical to overall well-being (Hart & Brando, 2018; WHOQOL Group, 1995). In addition, well-being, which is contextually supported and dependent, involves experiencing and feeling physically, emotionally, socially, and intellectually safe, being with others who are also experiencing well-being, or being with others who are having their well-being needs adequately addressed (Johnson & Patel, 2022; Osher & Pittman, 2024; Sandilos et al., 2023).

There is also a material resource dimension to well-being (Hart & Brando, 2018; Naz, 2020; Osher & Pittman, 2024; Osher et al., 2020b). For example, lack of access to health care, sanitary environments, nutrition, and legal services compromises a student's academic, social, and emotional well-being. In addition, well-being is a highly relational construct. A person's well-being is affected by and affects the well-being of others, particularly when individuals interact in routine and repeated ways such as in the classroom. In other words, the well-being and ill-being of students and teachers are dynamically related (Greenberg et al., 2016; Osher et al., 2020a; Rimm-Kaufman & Sandilos, 2023).

Well-Being and Thriving

Well-being is a key component of thriving (see Figure 1). Teacher and student well-being is essential to realizing what we know about human potentiality: that every child has the potential to thrive in school and life, and teachers and schools are essential to student well-being and their capacity to thrive. Physical and emotional well-being are central to thriving at school and in life, but so are groundedness (see Box 1) and the experience of being individually and collectively efficacious (being able to individually and collectively to address challenges and opportunities). Well-being and thriving are dynamic processes that involve emotional, social, cognitive, and phenomenological experiences that children (and all humans) experience across their life space and life course (Cantor et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2023; Osher & Pittman, 2024). Well-being involves experiencing and feeling physically, emotionally, and intellectually safe and fulfilled both in specific environments (e.g., school) and overall (Osher & Pittman, 2024).

Thriving is more than being problem free, competent, or resilient (Benson, 2003; Benson & Scales, 2009; Lerner et al., 2010). Thriving involves realizing elevated levels of well-being as well as experiencing groundedness and agency, both as an individual and with others who matter to you (Osher & Pittman, 2024). Thriving also has individual and contextual dimensions, and is experienced and developed in the moment, over the individual's life course, and in specific community settings and cultural contexts (Cantor & Osher, 2021a; Cantor et al., 2021; National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2019; Vossoughi et al., 2023). Unfortunately, for too many children and young people their potential to thrive is not realized due to inequity-driven or amplified physical, mental, and social ill-being. Schools can buffer, amplify, or contribute to this ill-being (Cantor & Osher, 2021a; Hankerson et al., 2022; Morsy & Rothstein, 2019; Osher et al., 2014c; Spencer & Dowd, 2024).

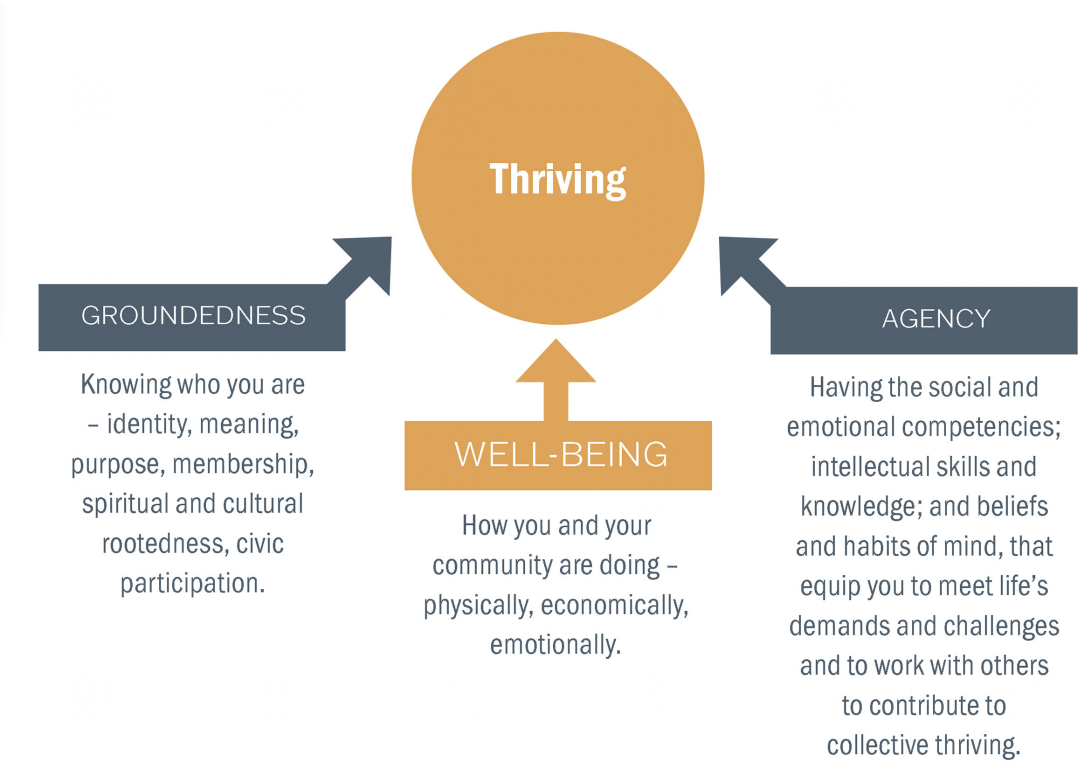

FIGURE 1 The relationship between well-being and thriving.

BOX 1
Key Definitions

Agency: Agency is both attitudinal and skill based. It includes a sense of individual and collective efficacy and the grounded belief of individuals and/or group members that they can act on the world because they have already done so successfully, and they have the skills and capacities to take on challenges.

Groundedness: The knowledge, experiences, and thinking that connect people to each other, their past, and their future.

Thriving: Realizing optimal levels of well-being, agency, and groundedness, both individually and collectively, in and across all life domains and developing the resources necessary for future.

Well-being: The presence of positive emotions and moods (e.g., contentment, happiness), the absence of negative emotions (e.g., depression, anxiety), satisfaction with life, fulfillment, and positive functioning. In simple terms, well-being can be described as judging life positively and feeling good.

Trauma and Well-Being

Trauma undermines well-being. Research shows that 45% of children in the United States have experienced at least one adverse childhood event, and 10% have experienced at least three. These rates are disproportionately higher among Black and Latinx children, compared to their White and Asian counterparts (Sacks & Murphey, 2018). These numbers are an underestimation, particularly given the recent impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The fear, anxiety, loss, uncertainty, and trauma caused by the pandemic were experienced by both youth and adults. The pandemic also brought more neglect, emotional and physical abuse, economic hardship (due to caregiver job loss), hunger, and isolation (Bullinger et al., 2023). In addition, many students and families had limited or no access to the school-based resources that had provided a layer of support for them.

Trauma and other adversities can compromise academic performance (Cantor et al., 2019). For example, children who have experienced trauma are more likely to fail a grade, score lower on standardized achievement tests, have more receptive and expressive language difficulties, be suspended and expelled more frequently, and be referred more often to special education (Goodman et al., 2012). These children may experience and/or exhibit health and behavior problems including self-destructive, self-injurious, and oppositional behavior; difficulty with problem solving and managing rules and limits; and low self-esteem. Moreover, children may respond fearfully to people and situations at school and have difficulty forming relationships and setting boundaries. They also are more likely to have trouble self-regulating emotions, behavior, and attention, resulting in responses such as withdrawal, aggression, or inattentiveness (Cole et al., 2005, 2013; Groves, 2002). In addition, trauma and adversity can cause feelings of disconnection from the school community, undermining student success. While trauma's effects are directly related to negative outcomes, the inappropriate response of teachers and schools can amplify it as in the case of exclusionary discipline (Furlong et al., 2017; Gregory et al., 2010a; LiCalsi et al., 2021; Lochner & Moretti, 2013).

Schools have the potential to be safe havens and a source of resilience and healing for youth who have been affected by trauma. However, when educators fail to recognize that challenging behaviors might be adaptive to dehumanizing experiences and/or the result of trauma, they often respond in an inappropriate, overly punitive, exclusionary way, and in some cases may retraumatize the students. These actions amplify students' ill-being and undermine school climate and the conditions for social, emotional, and academic learning (Osher et al., 2004a; Spencer & Dowd, 2024).

THE IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC AND THE RESPONSE TO THE PANDEMIC ON STUDENT AND EDUCATOR WELL-BEING

The Pandemic's Impact on Student Well-Being

Student well-being and engagement gaps are affected by teacher anxiety, stress, morale, and teacher overload, which have increased since COVID (Baker et al., 2021; Diliberti et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2022; Kush et al., 2022; Nabe-Nielsen et al., 2022; Schussler et al., 2018). Teacher and student well-being affect how students learn and behave as well as how teachers act and teach (Braun et al., 2020; Brown et al., 2023;

Carroll & Bower, 2020; Caroll et al., 2021; Dreer, 2023). Teacher and student well-being co-act in a manner that affects attendance, emotions, behavior, and engagement in teaching and learning along with their well-being (Frenzel et al., 2021; Oberg et al., 2023). Teachers' well-being influences their capacity to handle teaching and learning challenges and frustrations and their capacity to attune to, support, and work with others (Banerjee et al., 2017; Dicke et al., 2014; Hascher & Waber, 2021; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Jennings et al., 2019).

Whereas teacher well-being contributes to positive student outcomes, teacher ill-being contributes to negative outcomes including chronic absenteeism, poor achievement, problematic behavior, poor morale and task persistence, teacher attrition, and student dropout. A recent scoping review found that high levels of educator well-being contribute to innovative teaching techniques, a commitment to student input, advanced cognitive skill development, increased interaction, and adaptability to varying learning needs, which contributed to higher levels of motivation and enthusiasm (Schonert-Reichl et al., in press). In contrast, lower levels of well-being were associated with passive teaching methods that decreased student enthusiasm and engagement (Schonert-Reichl et al., in press).

The Impact of the Pandemic on Educator Well-Being

Teachers are not immune to the impacts of the pandemic or racialized conflict. The work, family-related, and personal health consequences of COVID, along with the demonization of teachers, and politicized discourse, particularly around topics related to racism, equity, gender equality, and other teaching-related issues (e.g., censorship), contribute to teacher stress and anxiety and lower teachers' morale (Prothero & Blad, 2021; Sandilos et al., 2023; Woo et al., 2022). These adversities and assaults on teacher well-being amplify, and are amplified by, the negative effects of increased workloads as well as heightened stress due to learning loss recovery efforts and student behavior and mental health (Sy et al., 2024).

In addition to dealing with their own adversities and trauma, teachers are at risk of secondary traumatic stress (STS), "the emotional distress that results when an individual hears about the firsthand trauma experiences of another" (National Child Traumatic Stress Network, n.d.). STS mirrors the symptoms associated with post-traumatic stress disorder, including negative thinking and mood, avoidance, stress, and anxiety (Borntrager et al., 2012; Caringi et al., 2015). Similarly, teachers are also at risk of compassion fatigue or emotional, social, and physical exhaustion that results in their reduced capacity to feel compassion or empathy toward others (Cieslak et al., 2014). Reports of teacher burnout and compassion fatigue were on the rise before 2020, and the challenges created by the pandemic have further exacerbated these issues as teachers experienced increased exposure to student trauma (Steiner & Woo, 2021). Educators cannot pour from an empty cup. When they are experiencing elevated levels of burnout and stress, it is difficult to support students effectively. Before school staff can best create safe and supportive environments for students, teachers too must feel safe and supported (Hirsch & Emerick, 2007; Yoder et al., 2018). Therefore, just as we focus on addressing the needs of the whole child, we must also address the cognitive, emotional, psychological, physical, spiritual, and material well-being of the "whole

adult" who interacts with the "whole child" (Grawitch et al., 2006; Hefferon & Roche, 2015; Seligman et al., 2016). Survey-based research in Chicago, which employed the UChicago Consortium on School Research's 5Essentials Surveys, indicates a decline in teacher–teacher trust, collective responsibility, collaboration, and innovativeness since the reopening of schools after the pandemic, along with a decline in teacher perceptions of student responsibility and student discussion (Hart & Young, 2024). These findings are consistent with similar findings regarding declines in teacher perceptions of school climate and teacher–teacher trust in a sample of nonurban Pennsylvania (Kozakowski et al., 2023) and Washington, DC, schools (Westerlund, 2024). Educator well-being is supported by positive relationships with, and connectedness to, others; feeling hopeful and optimistic; satisfaction and meaning at home, school, and community; and access to support. Educator well-being is undermined by job pressure and role-related stress (Greenberg et al., 2016). Educator well-being is undermined by the experience of inequality and racism; attitudes, mindsets, and behaviors that include explicit and implicit bias; macro- and microaggressions (Compton-Lilly, 2020; Solórzano & Huber, 2020); and stereotype and identity threats (Major & Schmader, 2018; Steele, 2010).

Student Well-Being, School Connectedness, and Engagement

The relationship between student school connectedness, engagement, and well-being is dynamic. Connectedness, which is contextually dependent, contributes to emotional, physical, and academic well-being (Gray et al., 2018; McNeely et al., 2002; Perkins et al., 2021). Connectedness involves experiencing belonging (membership) and feeling accepted, respected, included, cared for, and supported (Goodenow, 1993; Oberle et al., 2024; Resnick et al., 1993; Shochet et al., 2006), experiences that reflect and contribute to the experience of identity and emotional safety. This may be particularly important for Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) students. A lack of connectedness, on the other hand, is associated with suspension and dropout rates which further contribute to student ill-being (Fisher et al., 2020; Rodriquez & Blaney, 2021; Russell & Mantilla-Blanco, 2022; Takimoto et al., 2021).

A student's well-being affects their capacity to engage in learning. At the same time, student well-being is affected by their engagement in learning. Engagement, which is contextually dependent, reflects students' thoughts, feelings, and behaviors regarding their relationship to school, including their attitudes toward the classroom environment and specific learning activities (Fredricks et al., 2004; Quin, 2017). Engagement has four key dimensions: cognitive engagement (the use of self-regulatory and metacognitive strategies to plan, monitor, and reflect on one's thinking), emotional engagement (a sense of belonging and connectedness to school), behavioral engagement (positive school conduct and active involvement in academic tasks and extracurricular activities), and social engagement (interactions with peers during classroom tasks and in the broader school context). These engagement dimensions have neurobiological underpinnings which shape and drive engagement, which, in turn, supports learning and well-being (Cantor & Osher, 2021a; Immordino-Yang, 2015; Lee et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2019).

Engagement is dynamic. Interest in learning content enhances emotional engagement in a class and engagement in class fosters motivation to learn. Engagement has implications for short- and long-term learning and well-being (Reschly & Christenson,

2022). Students with higher levels of emotional and behavioral engagement in school exhibit lower levels of depression, substance use, and delinquency (Bond et al., 2007; Li & Lerner, 2011). School engagement is associated with improved school attendance (Klem & Connell, 2004), achievement (Dotterer & Lowe, 2011; Stewart, 2008), and increased academic aspirations (Wang & Eccles, 2012). School-related connectedness and engagement can be surveyed and addressed both at the student and school levels (Berg et al., 2022; Newman et al., 2022; Osher et al., 2008a; Vail & Leary, 2023; see Box 2).

Chronic absenteeism, which has dramatically increased since the pandemic (Chang & Balfanz, 2025), is not only an attendance problem, but also a connectedness and engagement problem that drives a dropout problem (Balfanz et al., 2007; Chang & Balfanz, 2023; Chang et al., 2019; Dee, 2024; Rumberger, 2011). Chronic absenteeism is defined as missing 10% of the academic year due to excused and unexcused absences and suspensions. It negatively affects social, emotional, and academic learning (Hancock et al., 2013; Kearney et al., 2022; Parke & Kanyongo, 2012; Santibanez & Guarino, 2020). The negative effects of absenteeism increase as the number of days or classes missed increases, and unexcused absences are more consequential than excused absences. Absenteeism's effects vary by student, grade level, student group, and subject area, with students who experience poverty, students of color, English language learners, and students with disabilities experiencing the greatest negative effects (Gottfried & Hutt, 2019; Kearney et al., 2022; Liu & Lee, 2022).

The factors that "push" students from school are malleable and can be addressed (e.g., climate and exclusionary discipline; Cohen et al., 2019; Gregory et al., 2021b; Osher et al., 2010). These factors include a lack of emotional, physical, and identity safety; harsh punishment; negative relationships with adults and peers; and academically aversive environments (Osher et al., 2014c). For example, microaggressions related to gender, race, ethnicity, and LGBTQ+ status contribute to hostile learning and social environments (Sue et al., 2007; Szymanski & Owens, 2008).

BOX 2
Student Engagement Resources

Communities In Schools: Engagement Monitoring and Support Tools—A resource to help educators determine a student's level of engagement in learning, and a validated survey and scoring tool to monitor a student's global level of engagement.[a]

Conditions for Learning Survey—A survey that assesses the four conditions for learning:

1. a safe and respectful climate
2. challenge/high expectations
3. student support
4. social and emotional learning

Connectedness is a key component of this survey (Osher & Kendziora, 2005; Osher et al., 2008a).[b]

[a] See https://www.communitiesinschools.org/k12/tools-schools.
[b] See https://www.air.org/project/conditions-learning-survey.

Schools function as a risk factor when there is not a strong developmental or cultural fit with students (Eccles, 2004; Eccles et al., 2013; Osher et al., 2014c; Spencer & Dowd, 2024). For example, schools that are experienced as culturally unresponsive or hostile due to bullying, physical violence, and microaggressions (from students or school staff) related to gender, race, ethnicity, and LGBTQ+ status divert students from learning and drive them away from school. Ineffective school policies and practices such as exclusionary discipline contribute to or amplify engagement-related and emotional problems (Bailey et al., 2019a; Finn & Servoss, 2015; Solórzano & Huber, 2020).

Attendance problems and chronic absenteeism are ecologically nested and malleable (Chang et al., 2019; Childs & Scanlon, 2023; Gottfried & Gee, 2017; Rumberger & Lim, 2008). They also serve as indicators and warning signs of underlying school-based problems (Schanfield et al., 2019). Although schools, policy, and research often treat attendance problems as individualized and focus on "fixing" students or families, there are underlying systemic factors that must be addressed (Kearney et al., 2023). While punitive approaches to absence such as criminalizing truancy do not appear to work, approaches that address systemic drivers of attendance problems show promise (Grant et al., 2023; Keppens & Spruyt, 2020; McNeely et al., 2023). These promising approaches, which address school practices while supporting individual students, prevent or buffer factors that push or pull students away from school *while* enhancing those factors that propel students to attend school (Osher et al., 2003; Schanfield et al., 2019; Singer et al., 2021).

The factors that "pull" students away from school include illness, poor nutrition, and housing insecurity (Patnode et al., 2018; Rogers et al., 2024; Tamiru & Belachew, 2017; Todres & Meeler, 2021). The pull factors which draw students out of school can be countered by addressing the challenges that students face, by providing support across the student's daily life and whole ecology, and by doing so in an integrated multitiered manner that is strengths based and trauma sensitive. This can be done through individualized and consumer-driven wraparound, and through community-based, school-based, and integrated support system approaches (Galib & Osher, 2023; Gandhi et al., 2018a; Malloy et al., 2019), which are described in the next section. Specific service examples include school nurses, coordinating school and health facilities, integrating schools into systems of care to better address health and mental health problems, school health centers and school-based student support centers, providing legal services to address housing and immigration status insecurity, and breakfast programs (Gottfried & Kirksey, 2022; Hoover & Bostic, 2021; Komisarow & Hemelt, 2024; Lim et al., 2023; Maier et al., 2017; O'Connell, 2023).

Schools can and should implement a relational multitiered system that promotes "pull" factors while combating "push factors." This includes building a schoolwide foundation that promotes connectedness and engagement and builds community (Williamson & Osher, 2018); employing early interventions and identifying underlying causes when students exhibit early warning signs such as missing many days of school even if they are not yet chronically absent; and targeted interventions (e.g., wraparound supports) for students with higher levels of need. Schools can align support through approaches like the Interconnected Systems Framework that links schools and community mental health services (Galib & Osher, 2023; Gandhi et al., 2018a; Malloy et al.,

2019). Strong schoolwide conditions for learning and wraparound approaches have been shown to address chronic absenteeism (Ackerman & Howard, 2017; Chang et al., 2019; Cullen & Davis, 2018; Gallagher & Doyle, 2019).

Two pervasive push-out factors are exclusionary discipline (Fisher et al., 2020; Osher & Kendziora, 2005) and poor conditions for learning (Chang et al., 2019; Gale, 2024), which reflect the experience of safety, connectedness, and opportunities to engage. Both factors strongly contribute to engagement and attendance problems. According to the 2023 Youth Risk Behavior data, 19% of high school students reported that they were unfairly disciplined at school during the past year, including 33% Native American and Alaskan students, 23% of Black students, 22% of multiracial students, 19% of Asian students, and 18% of Latinx students (census category, Hispanic) (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2024). Punitive and exclusionary discipline includes within-class removal or isolation; segregation through assignment, tracking, or disparate special education placement; disciplinary referrals; suspension; expulsion, restraint, and seclusion; and emotional abuse including humiliation and corporal punishment (Clotfelter et al., 2021; Eyllon et al., 2022; Francis & Darity, 2021; Katsiyannis et al., 2020; Skiba et al., 2014; Welsh, 2022; Whitaker & Losen, 2019). Disparities in the disciplinary referrals drive suspension disparities, which in turn drive school expulsion and dropout—the pipeline to prison (Osher et al., 2002, 2022; Prins et al., 2023; Skiba et al., 2014). Suspension, for example, traumatizes and retraumatizes students and is associated with heightened depressive symptom trajectories among students who have been suspended (Angton et al., 2024; Dutil, 2020; Lettieri & Lewis, 2022). Suspension amplifies behavior problems, disengagement, and school dropout while having collateral consequences for families' parental mental health outcomes (Bell & Craig, 2023; Mowen, 2017), which can also affect student well-being (Osher et al., 2020a). An empirical study that followed every student in New York City over 10 years and statistically employed machine learning to match students on more than 80 variables, found that suspension negatively affected attendance, achievement, behavior, and likelihood of graduating, and its negative effects increased as the number of days suspended per event increased (LiCalsi et al., 2021). Research also demonstrates that suspension has negative collateral consequences for the well-being of nonsuspended students that include undermining their achievement, sense of school safety, and connectedness with teachers and the school (Jabbari & Johnson, 2023; Perry & Morris, 2014). There are identifiable and addressable school-based root causes to suspension and suspension disparities, and these can be identified through a guide tool available through the National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments (NCSSLE). While school and district policy are the major drivers of suspension, poor classroom conditions for learning contribute to the most suspensions (Osher et al., 2020a). Teacher social, emotional, and cultural competence and capacity, which are infrequently supported, are key here, particularly given the well-being challenges that we described earlier. When teachers are under high levels of stress, they are more likely to punish and exclude students. Their lack of awareness or ability to control their biases contributes to discipline disparities (Okonofua et al., 2020; Osher et al., 2012a, 2022; Yu et al., 2016).

Overarching Approaches

The strategies and approaches described in this report represent the intersection of three overarching approaches:

- The science of learning and development (SoLD),
- Coordinated services and multitiered approaches, and
- School climate and conditions for learning.

Although the three approaches differ in their comprehensiveness, their epistemological underpinnings and their focus can be aligned. These approaches, along with related research on improvement and implementation science, are used to identify success drivers that teachers, schools, and districts can leverage in short-, medium-, and long-term efforts to support student and staff well-being.

The Science of Learning and Development

Advances in SoLD help us understand and address the dynamically interconnected factors that affect student engagement and learning, and teacher and student well-being (Cantor & Osher, 2021a, 2021b; Lee et al., 2023; Osher & Pittman, 2024) and their implications for practice (Boyd et al., 2022; Darling-Hammond et al., 2020, 2021b, 2024).

Development and learning are inextricably linked and are shaped by dynamic interactions among environmental factors, relationships, and the learning opportunities that youth and young adults experience, both in and out of school, along with physical, psychological, cognitive, social, and emotional processes (Cantor & Osher, 2021a; Fischer & Bidell, 2006; Immordino-Yang et al., 2023; Lee et al., 2023; Rose et al., 2013; Skinner et al., 2022). Figure 2 identifies the key drivers, approaches, and affordances that must be holistically addressed and available to fully realize the practice implications of the science of learning and development.

Students and teachers develop as individuals and as members of groups, in cultures and contexts with unique individual pathways that reflect individual adaptation, meaning making, and opportunities to learn and grow. Children can stagnate, develop maladaptive dispositions, or even wither when opportunities are unhealthy, aversive, and unsupported (Spencer, 2023; Spencer & Dowd, 2024). Still, even when conditions are difficult, many children are resilient. This is due in large part to their benefiting from supportive adults who buffer the effects of challenging conditions and support healthy development and learning (Cantor et al., 2019; Osher et al., 2020a; Spencer, 2024). While children learn and develop as individuals, their learning and development is socially contextualized (Cantor et al., 2019; Lewin, 1943; Spencer, 2024). Each of us influences others and helps others make meaning; we contribute to and are influenced by the individualized pathways of others as well as how others experience environments and make sense of their individual and collective experience. There is a historically nested and unfolding "web of group experience" (Simmel, 1950) that is dynamic and affected by the individualized experiences of each group member (Cantor & Osher, 2021a; Spencer & Dowd, 2024).

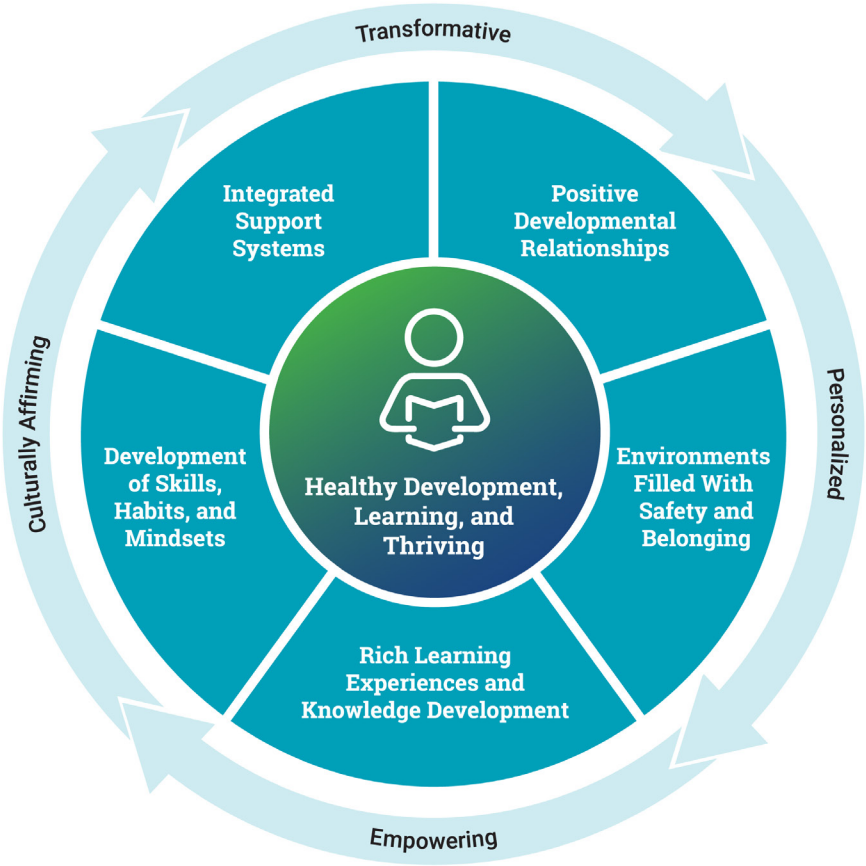

FIGURE 2 Science of learning and development practice framework.

The implications of the science of learning and development (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020, 2021b; Lee et al., 2023) can be used to identify promising interventions, strategies, approaches, and practices that have the potential to support the well-being and even thriving of all students, particularly those who have been the most negatively impacted by the pandemic, racism, ethnocentrism, and income inequities. This knowledge can help distinguish between well-intended approaches that, although they may have some efficacy, are insufficiently powerful and transformative to help realize the potentiality of the students who have been long left behind and do not address the whole person in their humanity and context (Osher & Pittman, 2024; Spencer, 2023; Spencer & Dowd, 2024). These well-intended but problematic approaches are often culturally neutral, focus on behavioral compliance and/or shallow learning, or are disabling (McKnight, 1979, 1995), victim blaming (Ryan, 1992), dehumanizing (Spencer & Dowd, 2024), and privilege sustaining (Cantor & Osher, 2021a). Resources have been developed to help educators, schools, and districts begin to operationalize the science of learning and development in policy and practice (see Box 3).

BOX 3
Implementing SoLD Principles

- Design Principles for Schools: Putting the Science of Learning Development into Action (Darling-Hammond et al., 2021a)[a]
- Educator Learning to Enact the Science of Learning and Development (Darling-Hammond et al., 2022)[b]
- Planning Tool for Developing a System for Thriving and Learning (Boyd et al., 2022)[c]
- Supporting Student Well-Being and Learning in Challenging Times: A Transition Tool (Fullan et al., 2024)[d]
- How Learning Happens (Edutopia, 2017)[e]
- Sold Alliance Resource Hub (Science of Learning Development Alliance, n.d.)[f]

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[a] See https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/product-files/SoLD_Design_Principles_Principle_3_Rich_Learning.pdf.

[b] See https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/educator-learning-sold-report.

[c] See https://www.air.org/sites/default/files/2022-10/Planning-Tool-for-Developing-a-System-for-Thriving-Learning-SoLD-Design-Principles-rev-August-2022.pdf.

[d] See https://www.air.org/sites/default/files/2023-06/Deep-Learning-Transition-Tool-508-June-2023.pdf.

[e] See https://www.edutopia.org/how-learning-happens.

[f] See https://soldalliance.org/resources.

Coordinated Services and Multitiered Approaches

Multitiered approaches are frequently employed in health, human services, and juvenile justice to allocate and target resources (August et al., 2018; Avery et al., 2021; Bradshaw et al., 2019; Darling et al., 2018; Dwyer and Osher, 2000; Flannery et al., 2019; Gage et al., 2018; Lane et al., 2019; Marsh & Mather, 2020). When used effectively in schools, they include and align three or more levels of supports for success and well-being based on known or assessed needs (Institute of Medicine, 2009): (1) a universal foundation that supports learning and well-being through preventative and promotive interventions that are available to all students and/or staff (Williamson & Osher, 2018), (2) selective interventions for individuals who have a greater level of need in particular areas (Clawson & Wu, 2019), and (3) more intensive interventions for people with greater need (Gandhi et al., 2018a). Multitiered approaches can best realize the implications of the SoLD when they are relational, are culturally affirming, and address the dynamic nature of student learning and development (e.g., Farmer, 2023; García-Carrión, 2023).

Multitiered approaches can incorporate and align school climate interventions focused on conditions for learning and attendance (Chang et al., 2019): Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) and trauma-related interventions (Osher et al., 2016, 2021), community building and restorative approaches (Colombi et al., 2018; Pentón Herrera & McNair, 2021), Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and school mental health (Bradshaw et al., 2013, 2019; Osher et al., 2008c), and school safety approaches (Bohnenkamp et al., 2021; Dwyer & Osher, 2000; Flannery et al., 2019; Osher et al., 2004c, 2012b, 2019a). Longitudinal research demonstrates the short- and long-term impacts

that can be realized by effective and well-implemented multitiered interventions. For example, the multitiered FastTrack experiment improved social-emotional competence, peer relations, and learning for elementary-aged students with conduct problems. In adulthood, FastTrack beneficiaries experienced reduced levels of personality disorders and involvement in drug-related and violent crimes, and higher levels of happiness, well-being, and civic engagement (Conduct Problems Prevention Research Group, 2020).

School Climate and Conditions for Learning and Well-Being

Emotional and physical safety, connectedness, and support undergird well-being and learning. A common thread in all the approaches and interventions identified below is that they help to improve school climate, which then improves the ways students and educators experience the environment—how they feel and how they process and make sense of their experiences in the school and classroom environment (Aldridge & McChesney, 2018; Capp et al., 2021; Cornell et al., 2016; Osher & Kendziora, 2010; Porter et al., 2023; Thapa et al., 2013). School climate is a broad construct that reflects the school's culture, the quality and character of a school's ecosystem, and relationships within the school community. It includes how students and teachers act and experience classrooms and other school settings and how those settings are organized (Osher & Kendziora, 2010; Thapa et al., 2013; Wang & Degol, 2016); how inclusive and culturally responsive the school and classrooms are (Gay, 2021; Hammond, 2014, 2021; Ladson-Billings, 2022; Nieto, 2017); how behavior is supported and addressed; and the social and emotional conditions for learning and well-being (Berg et al., 2017a). The *social and emotional conditions for learning* (often referred to as conditions for learning [CFL]) are a subset of school and classroom climate that immediately affects student and teacher stress levels, motivation, and engagement, including the quality of student–teacher and student–student interactions, student interpretation of such interactions, and the school and classroom culture as operationalized in such key areas as inclusivity, cultural responsiveness, and student-centeredness (Berg et al., 2024; Eccles, 2004; Garibaldi et al., 2015). These aspects of the school and learning environment are most proximal to learning and well-being because they powerfully support or inhibit learning through neurobiological, physical, and emotional processes (Cantor et al., 2019; Immordino-Yang et al., 2023). These affective drivers include experiencing and perceiving emotional, physical, and identity safety; connectedness and belonging; and support, challenge, and engagement (Osher & Kendziora, 2010) and are delineated in Box 4.

There are disparities in how students experience the school climate, particularly the emotional and social conditions for learning, and discipline. Aversive school climates and conditions for learning undermine student learning and well-being. This is particularly the case for students of color and other marginalized and minoritized students (Anyon et al., 2018; Carter et al., 2017; Gregory et al., 2010b, 2017, 2021a; Losen & Martinez, 2020; Osher et al., 2014c; Yeager et al., 2017).

School climate and CFL approaches can be implemented from a multitiered perspective (Osher et al., 2008c; Williamson & Osher, 2018). NCSSLE, as indicated earlier, provides vetted tools, guides, live and archived webinars, and other resources for selecting surveys and using surveys to assess and improve school climate. NCSSLE also provides resources related to SEL, trauma-sensitive approaches, and school mental health.

BOX 4
Conditions for Learning Reflect How Students Experience and Perceive

- Emotional and technical support;
- connectedness and belonging;
- respect (including cultural respect);
- safety (physical, emotional, psychological, identity, and intellectual);
- cultural competence, responsiveness, and affirmation;
- peer and adult social and emotional competence;
- academic challenge and high expectations; and
- inclusivity.

Supporting Positive Relationships, Connectedness, and Belonging

Relationships and strong social connections are at the core of interventions or strategies that improve conditions for learning and foster student and staff well-being (Blum et al., 2022; Gehlbach & Robinson, 2016; Gregory et al., 2016; Resnick et al., 1993). Supportive relationships are one of the strongest protective factors against traumatic adverse childhood experiences and their effects. Youth who have strong developmental relationships are more resilient when faced with stress or trauma (Keane & Evans, 2022; Parks et al., 2022; Search Institute, 2021). Positive relationships also help to foster a sense of safety among students, which is particularly important for students who have experienced trauma.

COVID-19 disrupted student–teacher relationships. When schools transitioned to virtual learning, opportunities to connect with students were limited or nonexistent (Hodgman et al., 2021). Now that most students have returned to in-person learning, teachers are stretched thin as they work to close the learning gaps exacerbated by the pandemic amid increased student mental health and behavioral challenges and staff shortages (American Federation of Teachers, 2024; Learning Policy Institute, 2024; National Education Association, 2024; U.S. Department of Education, 2024).

There are many strategies that teachers can employ to establish positive relationships with students, including such fundamental practices as smiling, knowing and pronouncing students' names correctly, and expressing care and concern. Other strategies include enacting and embodying identity safety (Steel & Cohn-Vargas, 2013), cultural responsiveness (Gay, 2018), authenticity (Hernandez, 2021), attunement to student emotional states (Cantor et al., 2019), and personalization (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020, 2021b).

Belongingness and connectedness are fundamental needs (Allen et al., 2022; Osher & Pittman, 2024) that are foundational to healthy human functioning in all contexts and across people's entire lives. In the school context, having and creating a sense of belonging is critical to students' and adults' cognitive, social, and emotional well-being, as are school and work satisfaction, and academic motivation and achievement (e.g., Allen et al., 2018; Healey & Stroman, 2021; Korpershoek et al., 2019; Sánchez et al., 2005). School belonging, which involves the felt experience of acceptance, respect, and inclusion by adults and peers, is strongly associated with students' social and emotional

well-being, developing healthy identities, academic self-efficacy and motivation, school satisfaction, and academic achievement (Eccles & Roeser, 2011; Gillen-O'Neel & Fulgini, 2013; López et al., 2024; McMahon et al., 2009).

School belonging is particularly important for supporting developmental outcomes among students from historically marginalized groups and communities (Battistich et al., 1997; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021a). A sense of belonging can play a pivotal role in students' engagement (Klem & Connell, 2004; Patrick et al., 2007; Tennant et al., 2015). Unfortunately, according to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, only 56.3% of students in 2021 and 54.7% of students in 2023 felt connected to people at school. These percentages decreased from 59.1% in 2019 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021b, 2024). This lack of connectedness was most pronounced among students who reported experiencing forms of prejudice and discrimination (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021b).

The Conditions for Successful Implementation of Safe and Supportive Schools That Foster Emotional and Academic Well-Being and Thriving

Too often, actions that aim to support well-being have limited effectiveness or even harmful consequences for some students (e.g., Farmer, 2020) or staff. Various factors contribute to this, including a lack of readiness (Dymnicki et al., 2021; Kingston et al., 2018; Newman et al., 2024; Osher, 2018); the failure to address individual and contextual diversity; the lack of attention to interpersonal processes and student, family, and community assets; and siloed agency-driven approaches (e.g., Gage et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2023; McKnight, 1975, 1995; Osher, 2002, 2018; Osher & Osher, 1996).

Fortunately, there are tools to help assess readiness (e.g., Fullan et al., 2022) as well as promising approaches and strategies that can be effective—when they are well implemented and with attention to individual and local contexts, approaches, and strategies—to promote the well-being of all students and staff. These promising approaches are most effective in supporting the well-being of students and staff when they have and embody the following 16 characteristics, which function as *success drivers* (see the descriptions of the success drivers and their characteristics in Box 5). These interconnected and somewhat overlapping characteristics and success drivers address the importance of providing students and staff with well-designed cohesive intentional support that builds on student, staff, and school strengths and capacities to address specific needs and their underlying causes.

BOX 5
Success Drivers and Their Characteristics

- Equity-centered and disparity eliminating
- Systematic and comprehensive
- Consumer driven with active student and family voice
- Culturally and linguistically sustaining and responsive
- Address contextual and systemic factors that contribute to problems and are key to addressing needs
- Personalized
- Engaging and coordinating with students, families, communities, and the resource ecosystem
- Relationally rich and align with and improve conditions for teaching and learning
- Support safety, connectedness, and belonging by being inclusive, restorative, trauma sensitive, and healing centered
- Attentive to the risks of stigma and prevent stigma
- Address the whole person, strengths and assets based and assets building
- Support staff and organizational readiness, problem-solving, utilizing data for continuous improvement, and effective implementation
- Collect, align, and use the right data for planning, monitoring, and continuous improvement
- Strengths based, strengths building, and identity affirming
- Include and leverage appropriately designed and implemented multitiered approaches to problem prevention, asset promotion, and support that have the capacity to individualize and to address phenomenological factors (how people experience and feel) and relational factors (how they interact and support each other)
- Eliminate harmful policies and practices and eliminate stigma

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE 16 SAFE AND SUPPORTIVE SCHOOLS SUCCESS DRIVERS: A GLOSSARY

Equity-Centered Approaches

Equity implies a focus on the condition of fairness and just opportunities for all people to succeed regardless of individual or group identity or differences. *Robust equity* involves people thriving individually and collectively in all life domains and counters inequality, institutionalized privilege and prejudice, and systemic contextual deficits, and intentionally promotes thriving across multiple domains for those who experience inequity and injustice. *Centering* means focusing on and prioritizing. *Equity-centered* policies pursue equitable access, processes, and outcomes by centering on the needs of those who have experienced systemic barriers to success and provide support so that they can succeed with others at optimum levels. *Robust equity* strategies systemically consider and address ecological factors that enhance or limit equity—macro-, societal, cultural, system, agency, mesosystemic, group, or provider-level factor. *Robust equity* strategies intentionally interrogate and counter inequality and institutionalized privilege and prejudice, address contextual deficits, and promote conditions that support individual and

collective well-being and ensure that individuals and communities that are the most marginalized, minoritized, disenfranchised, and excluded have access to, and create for themselves, processes to thrive, achieve social and political mobility, and have a voice in naming their realities and developing solutions that draw on and build individual and collective strengths.

Systematic and Comprehensive Approaches

Systematic approaches are strategic and based on analyses of the matter or matters to be addressed (including its root causes), analyses of what must be done to realize a desired goal (including the capacities that are needed, the barriers that must be addressed, assets that can be leveraged, and potential pitfalls), development of a strategy and related set of objectives and tactics to realize the goal, deploying of resources and employing of programs and/or tactics to enact the strategy and realize the objectives and goal efficiently without causing negative effects, and developing and implementing a monitoring plan and a process for reviewing progress (Mizrav, 2023; O'Day & Smith, 2016; Osher et al., 2015b). *Strategic* approaches focus on goals; target actions to realize objectives in a manner consistent with the desired end state and goals; and monitor, evaluate, and plan for sustaining when appropriate rather than being ad hoc and scattered (Barbour et al., 2018a). The UCLA Community School and the Cleveland Municipal School District examples in the concluding section reflect a strategic approach.

Comprehensive approaches "connect the pieces." They address the factors and/or domains that relate to the desired goal and end state. Although comprehensive approaches may require more resources, they are more likely to realize the desired goals and cost benefits, and to do so at a more optimum level as they address "related" factors or domains that affect each other and, consequently, outcomes. In the case of schools, comprehensive approaches may address areas including staff recruitment, onboarding, and evaluation; individual and organizational readiness; conditions for learning and teaching; school climate and culture; support for effective implementation; student and staff support; working with and supporting families; and many parts of the student's experience including peer relationships and implementation support provide examples. Multitiered approaches, particularly if they are relational and support the whole student, can be important parts of comprehensive efforts.

Consumer-Driven Approaches

Consumer-driven approaches include education and children's services center planning, intervention, and evaluation of the needs and desires of students and families. *Youth- and family-driven* approaches stand at variance to *agency- and professional-driven* services, which center on managerial and resource-driven approaches to planning, intervention, and evaluation (Osher & Osher, 2002; Winn & Richards-Schuster, 2019; Wood et al., 2018). These approaches are realized best when youth and family members are able express their goals and needs in a meaningful

manner and when youth and families play an active role in designing or selecting interventions, monitoring implementation and effects, identifying ways of improving intervention and/or outcomes, and evaluating outcomes.

Culturally and Linguistically Responsive and Sustaining Approaches

Culturally and linguistically responsive and sustaining approaches and practices center, affirm, and seek to leverage the existing cultural and linguistic identities, experiences, and the ways of knowing diverse students, their families/caregivers, and communities to promote belonging, well-being, excellence, and thriving. These approaches view and treat culture (and language) as a dynamic set of values, beliefs, and practices that varies across and among social identities (related to gender, sexuality, disability, socioeconomic status, geographical location, and age) and is essential to meaning making. As such, the specific ways culturally and linguistically responsive and sustaining efforts may vary based on the school and community context (Alim et al., 2020; Francis & Osher, 2018).

Address Contextual and Systemic Factors That Contribute to Problems and Are Key to Addressing Needs

Problems and their solutions are contextually situated and shaped. Problems and solutions often have deep contextual roots that may not be visible if one only focuses on the problem or simple solutions (see, for a palpable example, Osher et al., 2015b). Problems and root factors are systemic when they are embodied in organizational policies, practices, and culture.

In applying research evidence or assessing individuals or outcomes it is important to consider context. Approaches that just focus on problematic staff or student behavior but fail to address the factors that contribute or drive the problem have been criticized as "blaming the victim" (Osher & Pittman, 2024; Ryan, 1972). Although they may appear to eliminate problems in specific instances, decontextualized approaches are likely to be ineffective and can have harmful consequences. These victim-blaming approaches are unlikely to be successful at a school or district level as systemic factors will continue to generate the problem(s) of concern.

Personalized Approaches

Personalized approaches are individualized to the goals, strengths, and needs of the person who is being supported or addressed. Personalized approaches are not driven or based on averages (Cantor et al., 2019; Rose et al., 2013). Rather, personalized approaches build on person-centered planning that reflects the motivation, goals, concerns, and preferences of the student, caregiver, or teacher who is being supported or otherwise addressed. These approaches use timely and relevant individual data, including reports from the individual being supported and those who know them, to monitor progress and support continuous improvement. Individualized approaches may be incorporated into individualized plans or goals.

Engaging and Coordinating with Students, Families, Communities, and the Resource Ecosystem

Effective intervention approaches *engage and collaborate with students, families, and communities* in a manner that is strengths based, respectful, culturally and linguistically competent and responsive, and attentive to the importance of student, family, and community member knowledge, perceptions, and goals. *Effective intervention* approaches collaborate with and align with community resources to better support students and families. This is best done when there is collaboration between all providers and that collaboration is family and student driven (Osher et al., 2018, Chapters 5–10). Wraparound approaches, when individualized and student and family driven, provide concrete examples of strengths-based whole-person approaches and (see, for example, Kendziora et al., 2001, for thick descriptions of wraparound as successfully implemented in diverse contexts).

Relationally-Rich Approaches

Relational approaches recognize that promoting well-being and thriving requires a focus on caring, constructive relationships. Relational approaches are holistic; focus on building and sustaining relationships and supportive networks; embody and build collaboration, mutual understanding, and trust; and are culturally responsive and reciprocal (Bonilla & Valenzuela, 2022; Braithwaite et al., 2019). *Relationally-rich* approaches center respect and individual and collective meaning-making and address the fact that meaning-making and growth must occur and be cultivated within and across stakeholder groups including young people, family members, educators, practitioners in school and out of school settings, concerned community residents, and representatives of various sectors of communities and municipalities who are committed to thriving youth and thriving communities (Osher & Pittman, 2024; Osher et al., 2020a). Relationally rich approaches are trauma sensitive and culturally reciprocal (Harry et al., 1999; Keels, 2020; Keels et al., 2022). They embody safety, respect, connectedness, belonging, and engagement and the five characteristics of developmental relationships—expressing care, challenging growth, providing support, sharing power, and expanding possibilities (Scales et al., 2022). In other words, relational approaches build and support the social emotional conditions for learning and thriving.

Inclusive Approaches

Inclusive approaches include all students in the classroom and school in group activities and individual opportunities (Molina Roldán et al., 2021; Poirier et al., 2018). Inclusive approaches address the subjective as well as physical experience of classroom and school membership and belonging—they ensure that all students and families feel welcome and that they belong in the classroom and school community. Inclusive approaches avoid excluding and segregating policies and

practices. They scaffold student success through universal design and nonintrusive support. Inclusive approaches build community through routines and rituals such as class meetings. Inclusive approaches minimize problems between and among members of the community through community-building activities, social and emotional learning that focuses on relational skills, empathy, cultural competence, self-management, and positive behavioral approaches. Inclusive settings address infractions restoratively and supportively while ensuring that individuals feel accountable to each other for their behavior and develop ways to make amends when appropriate and provide support for students to act differently (Braithwaite et al., 2019; Osher et al., 2001).

Restorative Approaches

Restorative approaches are more than restorative justice, which is a subset of restorative practices. Restorative practices support well-being and learning by proactively building relationships, inclusivity, engagement, and community, and by responding to incidents in a manner that builds empathy and restores relationships while repairing harm when (Braithwaite et al., 2019; Colombi et al., 2018; Cross et al., 2019; Gregory et al., 2016; Morrison & Riestenberg, 2019; Osher & Pickeral, 2013; Osher et al., 2001). Although restorative approaches (particularly restorative justice) may include some form of restitution, they do not rely on punishment; they are relationally rich in a trauma-sensitive manner (Keels et al., 2022) and focus on learning, reconciliation, and accountability. Restorative approaches are strengths based and often employ approaches such as student creation of classroom norms or rules, classroom contacts, restorative circles and conferencing, and mediation (Braithwaite et al., 2019; Hopkins, 2023; Ko et al., 2022; Velez et al., 2024).

Trauma-Sensitive Approaches

Trauma sensitivity is a universal approach to the school climate where all aspects of the educational environment embody an understanding of trauma and its effects (Guarino & Chagnon, 2018). Universal, *trauma-sensitive* strategies in schools include (a) training all school staff about trauma and its effects; (b) incorporating strategies for promoting safety, connection, and emotional regulation in classroom settings and across the school environment; (c) reducing potential triggers for children who have experienced trauma and eliminating retraumatizing practices such as harsh, punitive, or disrespectful adult responses; (d) prioritizing youth and family voice, choice, and empowerment; (e) building social and emotional skills that promote resilience and support healing; (f) addressing the secondary effects on educators that can occur when working with trauma survivors; and, increasingly, (g) cultural responsiveness.

Healing-Centered Approaches

Healing-centered approaches address the whole person and their context, not just trauma and its consequences. As seminally conceptualized by Ginwright (2006, 2010a, 2010b, 2015, 2018). Healing-centeredness is a holistic approach that involves culture, spirituality, civic action, and collective healing. Ginwright addresses well-being in a holistic manner that is consistent with definitions of equity-centered thriving and transformative approaches to SEL and trauma (Osher & Pittman, 2024; Osher et al., 2021).[a] Healing-centered engagement is strengths based, places culture as a central feature of well-being, and embodies a view of healing.

Attentive to the Risks of Stigma and Prevent Stigma

Stigma is the pejorative characterization of a social attribute as being discrediting. Stigma, in Goffman's (2009) seminal definition and analysis of stigma, is deeply discrediting and reducing a person "from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one" (p. 3). *Stigma* often involves negative labeling and stereotyping. Social group membership, social or physical characteristics, and behaviors can all be *stigmatized* and *stigmatizing*. Stigma can also be assigned to the types of treatment that people receive, which can include suspension, classroom placement, segregating within school placements, mental health services, special education, supplementary educational services, and subsidized meals. This stigma can lead to people avoiding or resisting needed services. Although stigma is socially imposed, individuals or group members can internalize stigma. School staff should be sensitive to how labeling, language, or segregating behaviors can lead to stigma and take steps to avoid and counter stigmatizing labels and processes. School policies can minimize or avoid stigma by universal approaches (e.g., universal design, availability of services, free meals for all, building individual support into instruction rather than pull-out services).

Whole-Person Approaches

Whole-person approaches respect and treat people as whole people. These approaches enact and embody the practice implications of SoLD. *Whole-person* approaches view and treat people as more than their problem, disability, demographic status, label, or role and do not essentialize group characteristics (e.g., Serlin et al., 2019; Zilliacus et al., 2017). Rather, whole-person approaches address people's individuality while also appreciating their webs of support and affiliation. Whole-person approaches address people's embodied wholeness—their mind (e.g., their beliefs, values, emotions, identities, aspirations), their body (e.g., their physical and material needs such as health, activity, housing, transportation), their spiritual and aesthetic needs, and their cognitive needs and development

[a] Authors' interview with Sean Ginwright, November 2023.

(Eldal et al., 2019; Miller, 2010; Miller et al., 2019; Spier et al., 2019). Whole-person approaches are most effective and supportive when they identify and build on teacher and student strengths and assets and combine strength and asset development with the provision of relationally grounded individualized support as described earlier in this glossary.

Staff and Organizational Readiness

Readiness is the capacity to execute something well. Although readiness can be assessed in a practical and actionable manner (Dymnicki et al., 2014; Fullan et al., 2024; Newman et al., 2024), readiness is not an individual trait or a fixed organizational characteristic. Readiness is dynamic and can be developed, undermined, and lost. Readiness is individual, collective, and organizational. An individual's capacity to do something well (e.g., teach or learn a particular lesson or employ a new technique, skill, or practice) is a dynamic product of their motivation, *general capacity* (e.g., their well-being and social, emotional, and cognitive state and capacity), and *execution-specific* capacity that relates to a task (e.g., teaching reading) and organizational conditions (e.g., conditions for teaching learning; Osher, 2018). Collective capacity reflects the competencies of the members of a group, whether it be students in a class, teachers, or community members. Organizational capacity is a product of organizational momentum, priorities, general organizational capacities (e.g., organizational efficacy or data infrastructure), implementation-specific organizational capacities (e.g., systems to monitor and support attendance), the individual and collective capacities of organizational staff, and the exogenous factors that affect the organization (e.g., community resources, politics).

Problem-Solving Approaches

Problem-solving approaches identify, examine, and analyze negative data for purposes of improvement, not for blame. Problem-solving approaches treat poor results as learning opportunities, not as indications of failure or permanent incapacity. Problem-solving approaches work best when they are supported and modeled by leadership and reinforced by a problem-solving organizational culture. *Problem solving* and growth-oriented dispositions contribute to effective approaches to continuous quality improvement. Problem-solving approaches embody continuous quality improvement approaches (Arcaro, 2024).

Continuous Improvement

Continuous improvement involves an improvement cycle where leaders and members of the school community and their partners (a) collect and analyze data and information; (b) set measurable and achievable short-, medium-, and long-term goals; (c) plan for improvement using various strategies, resources, and actions that address implementation quality and readiness (motivation, general

capacity, and intervention-specific capacities); (d) implement short-, medium-, and long-term benchmarks and outputs; and (e) evaluate progress and modify practice when data and analyses indicate it is necessary (Anderson et al., 2023; Butler et al., 2018).

Schools can improve outcomes by collecting timely and relevant quantitative and qualitative data to assess needs, develop plans, monitor implementation and outcomes, and improve interventions and practice. For example, wellness promotion efforts can be made more effective by using systematic information on the goals, objectives, inputs, experiences, and outcomes of participating for individuals and groups. Data should be gathered from multiple sources, using multiple methods and at the appropriate intervals to ensure that the information is inclusive, valid, interpretable, and useful to the various stakeholder groups. Data should be disaggregated, aggregated, or reaggregated when appropriate. Data analyses should address variation and heterogeneity rather than just focus on the main effect or central tendency. For example, when using descriptive statistics, it may be useful to use medians rather than means as they provide better insight into variation than statistical means. Continuous improvement processes that are equity focused often employ targeted universalism (Osher et al., 2024; Perry, 2020; Powell, 2008; Powell et al., 2019).

Strengths-Based Approaches

Strengths-based approaches acknowledge that outcomes are best realized, and promotion and intervention are most effective, when student, family, and community assets are affirmed and employed to advance the initiatives, goals, and objectives. These positive approaches enhance engagement, uptake, beneficial adaptation, local ownership, and sustainability of programmatic efforts (Toros & Falch-Eriksen, 2021). Strengths-based approaches focus on individual and/or group strengths and assets, not on perceived or actual deficits and liabilities. Strengths-based approaches to teaching, assessment, and interventions identify, leverage, and build on, as well as further build, the strengths and assets of individuals, their families, and communities. Strengths include what individuals or groups can do and can do well, what they like or are motivated to do, and what works for them. Assets include internal assets such as social and emotional and/or cognitive strengths, languages spoken, physical abilities, or artistic strengths, as well as their beliefs and values, and ecological assets such as cultural resources, families and kin, and other forms of social capital. Strengths-based approaches employ tools when necessary to identify assets (e.g., strengths-based assessment instruments and community asset mapping). Strengths-based approaches "teach people to fish" as well as support and address their needs. Strengths-based approaches do not ignore needs; rather strengths-based approaches leverage strengths and assets to address needs (e.g., areas that people struggle with cognitively, emotionally, behaviorally, or socially). Identity-affirming, strengths-based approaches respect, acknowledge, and align with the identities and cultures of students, families, and teachers (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1996; Lee, 2017; Onyeka et al., 2022).

Multitiered Intervention

Multitiered interventions can be implemented in separate ways. They can be individualized, strength building and based, culturally responsive, consumer driven, and responsive to the whole person. Or multitiered interventions can be menu- and agency-driven, mechanistic, culturally unresponsive, and victim blaming. The most promising multitiered approaches align asset promotion, problem prevention, and treatment/support in a strengths-based individualized manner that is respectful of and attentive to student and family voice and goals. These promising approaches address how people experience interventions, make meaning, and feel about themselves and providers during and after the intervention. Approaches to multitiered interventions enact and embody the 16 levers described in this glossary, differ from multitiered approaches that prioritize and center clinical or behavioral outcomes and still others are agency—and provider—or menu driven. For elaboration, see the subsection on multitiered interventions in the previous section and the next section, which focuses on intervention.

Eliminate Harmful Policies and Practices

There are policies and practices that have been demonstrated to be harmful to people and groups of individuals and/or waste resources, stigmatize, and contribute to poor outcomes (Foulkes & Stringaris, 2023; Gatti et al., 2009; LiCalsi et al., 2021). Examples include suspension; segregating groups of students deemed antisocial; use of online credit recovery programs without providing students with access to, and support from, trained teachers; overreliance on technology without blending learning and supporting a student's effective use of the technology; an overreliance on punishment or medication; scared straight approaches (boot camps, and military-oriented wilderness mental health programs); zero-tolerance approaches; an overreliance on high-stakes testing; assessment processes that are not functional and adaptive to student growth; overly didactic prevention approaches that preach rather than engage; a Christmas tree approach to services that does not align or avoid duplication of effort; security processes that make students and families feel unwelcome; using security personnel and school resource officers for school discipline; changing approaches and adapting new programs without attention to coherence, innovation fatigue, support for implementers, and support for implementation. Effective approaches eliminate harmful and wasteful programs and redeploy resources for effective programming (Osher & Pittman, 2024).

There are no simple solutions. However, when schools and districts implement strategies or interventions that enact these drivers, schools and districts can create safe, equitable, and engaging learning environments and support learning, student engagement, and student and staff well-being. (See, for example, the work of Osher et al. [2018], which operationalizes the success drivers in each of its 20

chapters and provides examples of implementing the drivers in practice [Osher et al., 2018, 2023].[b]) The book, which is also available for free in Spanish, provides school and district examples. The book is backed up by a supportive website that provides free resources and by blogs and podcasts with students, teachers, counselors, and psychologists.[c]

[b] See https://www.air.org/resource/spotlight/creating-safe-equitable-engaging-schools-comprehensive-evidence-based-approach.

[c] See https://www.learningfirst.org/the-science-behind-safe-equitable-engaging-schools; https://www.learningfirst.org/safe-equitable-spanish; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iLJFT86Pewc&t=275s; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pH1UmmSDxNw&t=711s; https://www.learningfirst.org/student-voice-on-safety-in-schools; https://www.learningfirst.org/student-voice-on-engagement; https://www.learningfirst.org/student-voice-equity.

PROMISING APPROACHES, STRATEGIES, AND INTERVENTIONS

We now provide examples of promising approaches and strategies that can and should be aligned to improve student and teacher well-being. We employ a multitiered framework to organize our discussion. We focus on relational approaches to multitiered interventions and community collaboration that are strengths based, consumer driven, culturally responsive, and individualized (Billington et al., 2022; Sullivan et al., 2022; Williamson & Osher, 2018). We highlight transformative approaches to social and emotional learning, highlight transformative and healing-centered approaches to trauma that nurture groundedness and individual and collective agency (French et al., 2020; Ginwright, 2015; Osher et al., 2021), and identify equity-centered approaches to community schools and coordinated services that support deeper learning and which actively engage students, teachers, families, community members, and organizations (Blank et al., 2023; Kendziora et al., 2001; Oakes et al., 2017; Olson et al., 2021a, 2021b; Quartz & Oakes, 2019; Quinn, 2017).

The order of the presentation is intentional. First, we describe multitiered approaches because they are relevant to everything that follows. We then describe approaches focusing on teacher well-being, followed by student well-being. We do so because teacher well-being is central to student well-being as well as to teachers' capacity to implement other approaches. The same is the case with student well-being, which affects the well-being of teachers and other students. As such, we then turn attention to approaches that focus on building school and classroom communities and employ restorative practices and SEL because the nature of the school and classroom community, along with student and teacher social-emotional competency, is foundational. We then describe trauma-sensitive approaches followed by schoolwide positive behavioral interventions and support (SWPBIS), because these widely used approaches, when employed effectively, help school staff act in a way that seeks to ameliorate problem behavior and does not contribute to them. We conclude this section by describing systems that integrate student support (ISS) and community schools because both approaches provide ways of aligning with the previous approaches. We present these approaches separately for heuristic purposes and because each has distinct conceptual and epistemological roots and is backed by large bodies of specialized research. However, these approaches *can and should be aligned* in a multitiered manner across the school and community (Osher et al., 2004b,

2008a; Rider et al., 2018). SEL provides an example. Its conceptual roots are also diverse. The evolution of SEL drew on a variety of frameworks, lines of study, and areas of concern. Its development had particular foci (e.g., primary prevention, emotional intelligence, youth development; Osher et al., 2016) and can be aligned with school climate and conditions for learning (Berg et al., 2022, 2024; Cipriano et al., 2023a, 2023b; Osher & Berg, 2017), trauma-sensitive approaches (Osher et al., 2021), and SWPBIS (Bradshaw et al., 2013; Osher et al., 2008c), and incorporated in ISS and community schools.

Multitiered Interventions

Multitiered interventions are sometimes applied formulaically with menus and/or in a manner that almost exclusively focuses on behavioral approaches or problem remediation. We recommend a different approach: multitiered approaches should be customized to build on the strengths of, and address the needs and concerns of, individuals, schools, and populations; provide support that address an individual student's strengths and needs; tier supports, rather than tier students, each of whom is a unique and complex combination of strengths and needs. Multitiered interventions should also be relationally rich: they should focus on relationships, connectedness, and asset development to promote well-being and thriving—not just behavioral outcomes or changes in clinical symptomatology or on minimalist academic standards (Darling-Hammond et al., 2021a; Weist et al., 2019). Multitiered systems of support (MTSS) should utilize dynamic and ecological strengths-identifying assessments (Farmer, 2023; Farmer et al., 2022; Malti et al., 2018) that address student strengths and assets and adjust interventions as the individual builds new strengths or faces new challenges, what Spencer and colleagues (1997) termed "net vulnerability," a concept that addresses how interpersonal and ecological assets buffer risk factors (Cunningham et al., 2023; Farmer, 2023; Spencer, 2023). Tiered systems of adaptive supports should respond to the unique strengths, needs, histories, and dynamics of local communities and address relationships and trust, connectivity of people networks, and individual and collective accountability (Coleman & Osher, 2018; Harrison-Bernard et al., 2020; Harry et al., 1999; Kretzmann & McKnight, 1996; Osher et al., 2019a). Tiered practices should also embody the 16 interconnected success drivers and align, integrate, or coordinate services and approaches—at the student, school, and community levels and between and across tiers of services, ecological contexts, and providers.

The multitiered Comer School Development Program (SDP) provides an example of a relationally rich approach that supports learning, well-being, and equity. SDP is a seminal "whole-child" school improvement initiative which is consistent with the science of learning and development (Comer, 1989, 2020; Darling-Hammond et al., 2020, 2021b). SDP was launched in 1968 to improve the educational experiences of low-income Black children and youth (Comer, 1988). The model addresses and enhances school climate; well-being; and social, emotional, and academic learning by encouraging collaborative problem solving and decision making within and across (a) a multistakeholder school planning and management team, (b) a student and staff support team, and (c) a caregiver/family team to develop, implement, and monitor a comprehensive school plan. The SDP has been implemented in thousands of schools. A 2003 meta-analysis of 29 school reform programs found the SDP to be one of three

that demonstrated improvements in stakeholder relationships and student achievement (Borman et al., 2003). Evaluation studies have shown that, compared to matched controls, students in the SDP schools experience a more positive school climate and have greater social competence, psychological adjustment, and academic achievement. These findings were found among all income, language, and geographic groups (Darling-Hammond et al., 2019).

Supporting Teacher Well-Being

The increased attention directed toward adult well-being including their SEL is important, and research suggests that interventions that address adult SEL can have a positive impact on both educators and their students. For example, several randomized trials have examined the impacts of the Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education (CARE) program on teacher SEL outcomes (Jennings et al., 2013, 2017). These studies have included urban and rural teachers in the United States and an international sample. CARE is a mindfulness awareness program that focuses on stress reduction by promoting understanding, recognition, and regulation of emotion. It includes silent reflection, role-play, and other exercises intended to help teachers learn how to be more present, calm, aware, empathic, and compassionate. Findings indicate that, compared to the control group, teachers participating in CARE had increased well-being, reductions in teacher stress, and significant improvements in classroom instruction. These findings persisted into the subsequent academic year.

A more recent randomized controlled trial included ethnically and racially diverse urban teachers and demonstrated that elementary students of CARE teachers showed significantly greater classroom engagement, motivation to learn, and reading scores than students of teachers in the control condition (Brown et al., 2023). Additionally, applied research on home visits, community walks, project-based learning, service learning, and youth participatory action research all indicate that active co-learning improves teachers' attitudes and instructional practices with students from diverse backgrounds (Jagers et al., 2019).

Since the pandemic, increased reports of teachers feeling overwhelmed and burned out have led to calls for them to focus on self-care (e.g., implementing mindfulness strategies, exercising, improving sleep habits and diet). However, simply encouraging teachers to engage in self-care is insufficient, as this individualizes a contextually embedded challenge, placing the burden on individual staff. Teacher self-care efforts are undermined when systems remain the same. Instead, what is needed is a more systemic approach which focuses on organizational well-being. Strategies to support organizational well-being fall into different domains of support, including the following:

- *Work environment:* Foster a safe and supportive environment where there is physical and psychological safety, the capacity to focus on core work responsibilities (e.g., instructing students), and less on non-teaching duties.
- *Flexibility and autonomy:* Create a space where staff input is sought after and valued (e.g., integrated into policies and practices), and allow staff flexibility and autonomy.

- *Recognition:* Acknowledge and reward staff for accomplishments and successes.
- *Better compensation:* Adequate compensation can reduce the effects of financial stress and of having to work a second job.
- *Self-care:* Assess the needs of staff when it comes to self-care and provide the support needed.
- *Diversity, equity, and inclusion:* Create an environment where diverse voices are represented, engaged, and valued.
- *Supervision and support:* Provide regular supervision that allows for bidirectional feedback and career advancement, and that supports navigating work responsibilities.
- *Quality of life:* Create an environment where staff find pleasure in doing their work.
- *Purpose:* Align work with staff's personal values and strengths.

Supporting Educator Efficacy

Self-efficacy refers to a person's belief in their capacity to do the things required to produce a desired result (Bandura, 1997). For teachers, self-efficacy refers to their beliefs about their ability to plan and implement activities that foster a successful learning environment and positively influence student performance and development. A teacher's self-efficacy is positively correlated with their well-being, student achievement, motivation to teach, job satisfaction, and commitment. And it is negatively correlated with burnout, feelings of demoralization, and attrition. Teacher self-efficacy was lower during the pandemic (Pressley et al., 2021). At a time when the needs of students are great, and teachers are being asked to take on more responsibilities to help students succeed and thrive, it is imperative that they feel confident, capable, and supported. This means that schools must provide the necessary training, resources, and support. Specifically, school leaders can develop staff self-efficacy by

- Providing relevant and timely professional development (PD)—this can include replacing fragmented PD with more cohesive PD such as Communities of Practice, or professional learning communities, where teachers can interact and receive feedback from their peers on topics that are most relevant to them;
- Providing opportunities to observe other staff;
- Offering ongoing coaching and mentoring—particularly for new teachers;
- Sharing genuine feedback;
- Providing teachers with the necessary resources to do their jobs effectively; and
- Setting aside protected time for collaborative planning.

These strategies are interrelated and, when implemented well, can increase teacher well-being and better position them to provide the support that students need to thrive.

Supporting Educator–Educator Relationships

When it comes to creating a safe and supportive learning environment, belonging and positive relationships among staff are just as important for teachers as they are for students. When teachers feel included, valued, and engaged, they are more likely to report job satisfaction, feel less isolated, and can serve as better role models for students. A sense of belonging alleviates burnout, and teachers are more likely to persist. The pandemic interfered with the organic opportunities that staff had to connect with one another. With students returning to in-person learning after pandemic-related school closures, the focus has been on addressing learning loss and providing support for students' social, emotional, and mental health needs. As a result, opportunities to create a sense of belonging among staff are often limited or not prioritized. School leaders must prioritize and be intentional about fostering staff belonging. This can include strategies such as creating structures and support for staff to

- Contribute to the school community in meaningful ways;
- Build strong social connections, including opportunities to give and receive support from colleagues; and
- Develop shared vision and goals.

Supporting Students' Mental Well-Being

The well-being of students is facilitated and fostered by their families having access to a full range of culturally and linguistically competent and responsive interventions to support their mental health (promotion, prevention, treatment, and maintenance [National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2019]). A consistent body of practice, as well as evaluation data and research, suggest that effective approaches at an individual level should (a) be culturally competent, responsive, affirmative, and humble; (b) be child centered and youth, consumer, and family driven; (c) address the child and family's ecology; (d) be strengths finding, strengths based, and strengths building (e.g., Askew et al., 2020; Furlong et al., 2024; Harry & Klingner, 2007; Osher, 1996; Rogoff et al., 2017); (e) include positive psychological approaches; (f) be coordinated; (g) be provided across the relevant social fields; and (h) use relevant information for progress monitoring and improvement (see Osher et al., 2019b, Vol. II, Chapters 15–18). Effective approaches minimize the use of diagnostic labels (Weist et al., 2019), ensure that inventions build social and emotional competence (not just behavioral compliance [Jagers et al., 2019, 2021]), support positive identity formation, and foster self- and collective efficacy (Osher & Pittman, 2024; Osher et al., 2021).

All students, including students with intense and complex needs, can flourish (Howell et al., 2013; Keyes, 2002) and can benefit from a healthy and caring school environment to which they feel that they belong and where they experience emotional, physical, and identity safety; feel supported and affirmed; experience academic and social engagement; and, with their peers, have opportunities to develop their social and emotional competencies that contribute to their resilience and well-being as well as that of their school peers—in other words, strong conditions for learning (Osher et al., 2004b). Research shows that cultural competence, responsiveness, and affirmation are important to interventions (Malone et al., 2022; Owen et al., 2014; Pachankis, 2018;

Pantalone et al., 2019) and that development and positive psychological approaches can help improve well-being outcomes and foster thriving. There is a robust research base on the relationship between positive youth development, positive psychological approaches, and adolescent well-being (Cantor et al., 2021; Carr et al., 2021; Osher & Pittman, 2024; Taylor et al., 2017; Tejada-Gallardo et al., 2020).

While access to promotive and preventative universal and early interventions help students with complex needs (e.g., child and adolescent anxiety) both directly and through their effects on the student's peers, students with intense and complex needs also benefit from a comprehensive approach that includes and aligns universal approaches, with early intervention approaches, and more intensive approaches. School-based mental health services, including counseling and therapy provided by trained professionals, have been shown to be effective in addressing mental health needs (Atkins et al., 2010). Specifically, cognitive behavioral approaches, social and emotional learning approaches that address the skills children and adolescents need to succeed in school and other environments, and teacher consultation and support have been shown to be helpful. For example, cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT)-based interventions have been used effectively in schools to help students manage anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues. CBT approaches are functionally oriented and typically involve helping students identify and change negative thought patterns and behaviors (Werner-Seidler et al., 2017). Similarly, motivational enhancement, CBT, mindfulness interventions, and family involvement have been shown to reduce mental health concerns and suicide risk. The impacts of these and other interventions are enhanced when there is attention to the complexity of adolescence and the adolescence ecology, especially with the family and in school environments (Webster-Stratton, 2014) in a family–youth-driven collaboration across those who can support young people. This can be facilitated by well-implemented wraparound approaches which are strengths based, culturally competent, youth and family driven, collaborative, ecologically focused, and have been empirically demonstrated to improve well-being, academic outcomes, coordination, and collaboration (Coldiron et al., 2019; Gandhi et al., 2018b; Olson et al., 2021a). The most up-to-date comprehensive meta-analysis of wraparound found that wraparound had moderate impacts on school-related outcomes and small effects on well-being that, although small, are the equivalent to the mean effect sizes or evidence-based psychosocial treatments (Olson et al., 2021b).

Community Building and Restorative Practices

We intentionally align community building and restorative practices because restorative *practices* and restorative *justice,* although they can be aligned, have different origins. For example, restorative practices are universal, and early interventions have roots in schools, whereas restorative justice indicates that interventions came to schools from juvenile justice. Restorative practices do not just address infractions; restorative practices also transform teacher–student relationships, prevent infractions and teacher-driven disciplinary referrals, and build—as well as build on—inclusive classrooms and schools (Colombi et al., 2018; Darling-Hammond, 2023; Gregory et al., 2016; Hernandez, 2021; Kline, 2016; Osher, 2015).

Community-building approaches foster a sense of belonging, trust, shared purpose, care for each other, and connection among students (Baker et al., 1997; Battistich, 2008). They focus on relationships and develop and promote shared values and norms through facilitated student–faculty discussion to identify the norms. They work toward institutionalizing the norms (e.g., through a classroom charter), regularly restating the norms, and applying the norms in routine activities as well as when conflicts or disputes arise (Hart & Atkins, 2002). They build, as well as build on, students experiencing emotional safety and cultural affirmation. Community building helps build affirmative school climates and conditions for learning and builds on them. Similarly, community building leverages and builds student social and emotional competencies and experiences with restorative practices and builds on them when they exist.

Restorative practices, which depend on teacher mindset and capacity, provide an equity-centered way of improving conditions for learning by building and sustaining classroom and school communities and addressing student discipline (Colombi et al., 2018; Darling-Hammond & Fronius, 2022; Gregory et al., 2016). Restorative practices represent a paradigm shift—from social and educational control to social and academic engagement (Morrison & Riestenberg, 2019; Osher et al., 2010, 2022) (see Box 6 for resources for implementing restorative practices).

Universal restorative practice (tier 1) interventions build classroom community by affirming and reaffirming relationships and supporting student agency. They frequently employ restorative circles that function like class meetings in efficacious SEL programs such as Caring School Communities, PATHS, and the Responsive Classroom. Tier 2 restorative practice interventions provide more support for students so that they can be productive members of the classroom or school community. They have been employed effectively as an alternative to suspension and are most effective when they provide students with culturally affirming emotional support and help to develop the internal capacity increases to handle school stresses and respond to problems differently. Cleveland's successful use of planning centers, which students can self-refer to or are referred to as an alternative to suspension, provides an example. The planning center model, which was adapted in Cleveland to prevent classroom removal and suspension, provides a "proactive setting designed to help students problem solve, develop appropriate school and classroom behaviors, and reduce the need for classroom removal"; the Planning Center is staffed by a well-trained paraprofessional who lives in the

BOX 6
Resources for Implementing Restorative Practices

- 12 Indicators of Restorative Practice Implementation: Checklists for Administrators (Gregory et al., 2019, 2021b)[a]
- Defining Restorative (International Institute for Restorative Practices)[b]

[a] See https://www.naesp.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/12_Indicators_of_RP_Implementation__Checklists_FINAL.original.1560275926-2.pdf.

[b] See https://www.iirp.edu/images/pdf/Defining-Restorative_Nov-2016.pdf.

community and provides social and emotional support, behavioral interventions, and planning and organizational support for academics[1] (Osher et al., 2015d).

Katic and colleagues (2020) conducted a systematic review that yielded 10 recent quantitative and qualitative studies of the use of restorative justice practices. They found that seven studies used some combination of conversations, circles, conferences, and peer mediation. Study findings included reductions in office discipline referrals and out-of-school suspensions, although racial disparities persisted. Such practices prompted increases in empathy and reductions in bullying among students, resulting in more positive social relationships between teachers and students and in peer relations. More recently, Darling-Hammond (2023) examined the impact of restorative justice practices over time on the academic, disciplinary, behavioral, and health outcomes of 2 million students in 485 middle schools. Results indicated that increasing exposure to restorative practices during the transition from fifth to sixth grade improved standardized test scores in English Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics, reduced the probability of experiencing a suspension, and lowered the number of days suspended. All students benefited in terms of academic achievement. However, effects were stronger for Latinx and Black students—suggesting that restorative practices can help reduce opportunity gaps in academic achievement. School-level use of restorative practices was associated with increased grade point average (GPA); a positive sense of school climate; and declines in student misbehavior, gang membership, victimization, depressive symptoms, and substance use. However, there are disparities in access to restorative practices in classrooms and schools (Osher et al., 2022). For example, Payne and Welch (2015) found in a national probability sample that the greater the proportion of Black students the less likely schools were to use restorative practices such as peer mediation, student conferences, restitution, and community service. Darling-Hammond (2023) also reported that schools with higher proportions of Black students and/or economically disadvantaged students had lower levels of restorative practice utilization. It is for this reason that Gregory and colleagues stated that "good intentions are not enough" and called for centering equity in the work of reducing exclusionary discipline (Gregory et al., 2021a).

Restorative practices, which are generally employed as universal and early interventions, provide a foundation for restorative justice approaches being utilized as a tier 3 intervention. This makes sense as restorative justice interventions demand time and work best when there are not too many restorative practices and/or conferences required of teachers and administrators. Students and teachers also need to have the social and emotional readiness to participate in a restorative justice intervention, which responds to an emotionally salient event, usually for both parties, whether acknowledged. Restorative practices prepare teachers and students to use the restorative justice approach more efficiently and effectively because they help build the competencies that are key to restorative practices working: social and emotional self-awareness, empathy, and self-management skills.

Teacher mindset and empathy provide an example of the importance of social-emotional readiness. For example, Okonofua and colleagues (2022) reported on findings from a longitudinal placebo-controlled field study of a 45–70-minute online exercise for

[1] See https://www.clevelandmetroschools.org/Page/411.

middle school classroom teachers. The reading and reflection exercise focuses teachers on empathy and perspective taking to realize their opportunity to help students' growth by maintaining positive relationships with students even if/when they misbehave. It highlights students' social and emotional development and the teacher's capacity to help students to develop prosocial skills. The exercise was found to reduce suspension rates, with a 45% reduction in racial disparities in suspension over the year. The effects persisted into the next school year when students interacted with different teachers. We will focus on student social-emotional competencies in the following section that focuses on SEL (see Box 6 for resources for implementing restorative practices).

Social and Emotional Learning

SEL is important for students' well-being and thriving and is now seen as an integral part of high-quality whole-child educational efforts (Jones et al., 2019). There are 10 key indicators of schoolwide SEL efforts:

- Explicit SEL instruction,
- SEL integrated with academic instruction,
- Supportive school and classroom climates,
- Youth voice and engagement,
- Focus on adult SEL,
- Supportive discipline,
- A continuum of integrated supports,
- Authentic family partnerships,
- Aligned community partnerships, and
- Systems for use of continuous improvement data.[2]

A theory of action for implementing schoolwide SEL includes

- Building foundational support and planning among stakeholders,
- Strengthening adult SEL competencies and capacity,
- Promoting SEL for students, and
- Reflecting on data for continuous improvement (e.g., Mahoney et al., 2021).

There are numerous SEL frameworks which include a range of developmental competencies (e.g., Berg et al., 2017b; Jones et al., 2017; Pittman & Irby, 2024). Approaches to promoting learning that foster the growth of these competencies include programs and practices that focus on developing, for example,

- Free-standing lessons focused on student skills;
- Teaching practices that integrate academic, social, and emotional learning content;
- Teaching practices that focus on classroom community; and
- School organizational strategies.

[2] See https://schoolguide.casel.org/what-is-sel/indicators-of-schoolwide-sel.

Over the past 30 years a substantial evidence base for SEL has demonstrated the positive impacts of well-implemented classroom-based SEL programs on desirable academic, social, and emotional outcomes (e.g., Cipriano et al., 2023b; Durlak et al., 2011; Greenberg, 2023; Jones & Kahn, 2017). For example, a recent meta-analysis that reviewed more than 400 such studies shows that students in classes where teachers created an environment reflective of SEL principles demonstrated decreases in aggression, bullying, anxiety, stress, depression, and suicidality; students felt safer at school, and reported higher levels of inclusion, connectedness, and healthy relationships than nonparticipating classmates. Furthermore, students in SEL programs had higher rates of attendance and homework completion, greater school engagement, and improved grades and test scores while school climate also improved (Cipriano et al., 2023b).

When SEL is most effective it is routinely incorporated in teacher pedagogy in a manner that improves teacher–student relationships and supports students' ability to understand and manage their learning-related emotions and relationships (Immordino-Yang et al., 2019; Jones et al., 2019). SEL, school climate, and conditions for learning are inextricably linked (Berg et al., 2022, 2024; Osher & Berg, 2017) and contribute to mental health and well-being.

However, there remains considerable work to do to better understand what programs and practices work for whom, to what degree, and under what conditions. The notion of transformative SEL (tSEL) has been offered to better articulate and pursue educational equity and excellence (Jagers et al., 2019, 2021). tSEL is grounded in the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) framework and anchored in informed, engaged citizenship as a long-term outcome. It encourages a search for causes and correctives of inequities that may be located at individual, interpersonal, intergroup, and/or institutional levels, or some combination thereof. The science of learning and development is leveraged to advance the best of what is known about healthy human growth and development in diverse populations (Cantor & Osher, 2021; Nasir et al., 2021).

tSEL highlights the developmental competencies of identity, agency, belonging, curiosity, and collaborative problem solving and places emphasis on authentic school–family–community partnerships for constructing fertile local learning ecosystems for young people and adults. A cursory review of the CASEL Guide for Evidence-based SEL programs allows interested researchers and practitioners to identify programs that operationalize these and other constructs as program features and outcome assessments. Few programs have such emphases.[3] Some examples of classroom/school-based programs and approaches that incorporate elements of tSEL include the following effective programs.

- **Building Assets and Reducing Risks (BARR).** BARR is a schoolwide approach that focuses on supporting ninth graders in a successful transition from middle to high school. The approach includes (a) relationship-building professional development for teachers, counselors, and administrators; (b) restructuring the high school course schedule; (c) whole-student emphasis in instructional

[3] See the NAEd paper from this series, *Supporting Families and Communities in Children's Academic Thriving and Well-Being in the Wake of the COVID-19 Pandemic*, written by Ann M. Ishimaru and Sophia Rodriguez (2025), for more on authentic family partnership approaches.

reform—addressing each student's academic, social, emotional, and physical needs; (d) block meetings, collaborative problem solving; (e) an SEL curriculum (I-Time) focused on developmental assets; (f) risk review for persistently failing students; (g) contextual support (focus on leadership); and (h) caregiver involvement to support high school reform.

Several evaluation studies indicate the positive effects of BARR for both participating educators and students. For example, Borman et al. (2021) reported on a multicohort, multisite experimental scale-up study of BARR. They found that, compared to controls, BARR teachers had improvements on a range of teacher experiences and attitudes, with the strongest effects in the areas of teacher collaboration, data use, and teachers' views of their school's supports. Among students, those participating in BARR had improved student academic outcomes, including credit completion, decrease in course failure, and higher GPA and PSAT scores. BARR also reduced chronic absenteeism. The impact of BARR on the percentage of credits earned and courses passed was greatest for students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, and the positive effects on total PSAT scores were most pronounced for male students, students of color, students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, and English learners. BARR also had statistically significant and positive impacts on student-reported measures of supportive relationships in school, student engagement, and teacher expectations. BARR students also reported receiving more challenging assignments than control students.

- **Facing History and Ourselves.** Another example that is particularly salient at a time when students and teachers are dealing with the emotional consequences of state and local policies that suppress the teaching of issues is Facing History and Ourselves (FHaO), which offers professional development, curricular resources, and instructional supports to equip middle and high school educators to teach core academic content—including history, social studies, and ELA—in ways that address difficult issues and integrate social-emotional and civic learning. FHaO combines critical analysis, ethical reflection, and emotional engagement with rigorous content about the root causes of the Holocaust and other historical moments marked by antisemitism, racism, and intolerance. In doing so, the program prioritizes creating learning environments that promote a sense of belonging, respectful engagement with different points of view, and interpersonal trust.

  FHaO has a strong research base. Barr et al. (2015) reported that, compared to controls, high school teachers delivering a Holocaust and human behavior unit experienced more professional satisfaction and greater efficacy in being learner and community centered and in promoting tolerance and deliberation skills. The diverse group of participating students reported increases in political tolerance, civic discourse, perceived open classroom, participatory citizenship, and trust in American promise. More recently, Domitrovich et al. (2022) examined the influences and impacts of a unit on the 1957 school desegregation efforts in Little Rock, Arkansas, among students in a low-resource, diverse school district. Compared to controls, FHaO students perceived their classrooms as more caring

and democratic and reported higher levels of empathy, prosocial behavior, and stronger participatory citizenship beliefs.

SEL Programs and Approaches That Support Student Agency and Collaborative Problem Solving

- **EL Education.** A few evidence-based SEL programs like EL Education[4] combine academically rigorous project-based learning (PBL) with other program features and do so in a manner that supports student agency and collaborative problem while embodying SoLD. EL Education includes peer support, service learning, differentiated instruction, discovery, inquiry, critical thinking, problem solving, and collaboration through structures and traditions—such as EL's Crew (an advisory structure) and community meetings. School leaders and staff members also conduct ongoing data inquiry and analysis of student work and formal educational assessments to support continuous improvement of efforts to address student needs, celebrate student achievement, and build a schoolwide culture of trust and collaboration. The UMass Donahue Institute (2011) reported on outcomes among third- through eighth-grade students in schools that have been in EL at least five years compared to students in matched control schools. Results indicate that, compared to controls, students in EL schools closed citywide "achievement gaps" in ELA and math for students who are from low-income households, English language learners, Hispanic, African American, or have an individualized educational program (IEP). Rimm-Kaufman and Sandilos (2023) conducted a mixed-methods study of character growth in middle school comparing five EL schools and four comparison schools. It included a diverse group of students, with over one-third being from low-income households. Results indicated that, compared to controls, EL students felt that their teachers cared more about them, had a greater sense of purpose (a belief that their schoolwork was meaningful), experienced more alignment between their home and school environments, and reported greater acceptance of individual and group differences. EL students also had more complex, action-oriented understanding of concepts like "respect" and "empathy." EL Education teachers experience a more positive school culture which carries into their classrooms. These types of positive student outcomes from SEL programs are most likely when their teachers and administrators are ready to do this work (Jennings et al., 2021; Osher, 2018), when SEL programs are implemented with fidelity to the specified model, and SEL principles and tools are embedded in instruction to support learning and build conditions for learning (Berg et al., 2017a; Jones & Kahn, 2017), allowing students to experience positive outcomes.
- **Project-Based Learning (PBL).** PBL leverages the SEL potential of cooperative learning (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). PBL develops social-emotional competencies through engaging learning that encourages collaborative problem solving with the goal of having young people learn how to think critically, manage themselves effectively, and work well with others so that they ask and answer

[4] See https://eleducation.org.

questions that help solve real-world problems. PBL is represented in the CASEL Program Guide based on a randomized controlled trial with a Latinx and White sample of 12th graders. Findings include increases in self-reported academic self-efficacy, as well as higher economic literacy test scores compared to control group students (outcomes reported 17 weeks after baseline while controlling for outcome pretest) (Finkelstein et al., 2010). In their review of the PBL literature, Condliffe and colleagues (2017) found that PBL increases attendance and positive attitudes toward diverse classmates (Kaldi et al., 2011), and positive attitudes toward learning (Hernandez-Ramos and De La Paz, 2009). Additionally, PBL led to a reduction in the male/female gaps (cisgender males underperforming cisgender females) in science achievement and gaps between underrepresented groups and middle- and upper-income White students in math (Holmes & Hwang, 2016). Duke et al. (2021) have shown the positive impacts of PBL for elementary school literacy and social studies classrooms (Duke et al., 2016) and a recent study found that third-grade PBL students placed greater value on reflection and collaboration, and increased their science achievement (Krajcik et al., 2022). This was true regardless of students' demographic backgrounds or current reading abilities.

- **Youth Participatory Action Research.** Recently, Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) has been highlighted as an instructional method that provides an opportunity for using SEL-related skills and contributes to student agency and well-being (Osher & Pittman, 2024; Schwartz et al., 2023). Core features of YPAR approaches include (a) engaging youth in the training and practice of research skills, (b) strategic thinking, and (c) strategies for influencing change on a youth-identified topic. The use of social science research skills positions youth as experts—critical consumers and producers of knowledge—about their lived experiences and of the required processes for bringing about desired changes. Second, the research process is understood to be an iterative problem identification/analysis-design-action-reflection cycle. Finally, there must be careful attention to adults' sharing of power with students throughout the process (Ozer et al., 2010).

  Research studies that have been conducted in elementary, middle, and high school (e.g., Kornbluh et al., 2019, included trained educators, school staff, and/or university external research partners collaborating with young people. YPAR projects have, for example, offered input on school curriculum and governance (Ozer & Wright, 2012), sought to change school lunches (Kohfeldt et al., 2011), and advocated for the implementation of antibullying, behavioral monitoring, and service-learning opportunities (Voight, 2015). Ozer and colleagues (2020) reviewed the use of data generated in youth participatory action research to improve educational experiences for students in six school districts across the country. Results included, for example, establishing a partnership with school and district leadership to introduce supports to enact a mandated annual implicit bias training and home visit program, gaining student representation on the district equity council, adopting a character education program to address student bias, and revisions to a social studies curriculum to make it more inclusive and accurate. This type of informed input on improving

learning conditions reflects collective agency and promotes academic, social, and emotional well-being and thriving.

SEL Kernels

Jones and colleagues (2017) developed SEL kernels as a low-cost, lower-burden, evidence-based approach (Jones & Bouffard, 2012) that programs in and out of school can deploy to address specific developmental concerns among their students. The theory and research supporting the use of kernels are consistent with evidence supporting focusing on specific core program components that can be mastered and applied by busy teachers who work in "busy kitchens" (Dymnicki et al., 2020; Lipsey, 2020; Osher, 2012). SEL kernels were derived from a content review of effective comprehensive SEL programs and represent their core active ingredients. Kernels are thought to be more feasible to implement than comprehensive programs, potentially more impactful, and sustainable over time. SEL kernels include mindset (e.g., attitudes about oneself and others), cognitive skills (e.g., attentional control, problem solving, decision making), emotional skills (e.g., understanding emotional expressions by oneself and by others), interpersonal skills (e.g., interacting positively with others), and character (e.g., values, ethics, community engagement). Bailey and colleagues (2019b) reported that kernel implementation had a positive impact on cognitive, emotional, and social skills development among urban K–8 students from low-income households enrolled in a summer program.

Schoolwide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support

SWPBIS is an increasingly popular and well-researched approach to improving school climate that has sometimes been combined with SEL (Bradshaw et al., 2013; Osher et al., 2008c; Sprague et al., 2004). While typically framed in terms of MTSS, the SWPBIS evidence base has focused primarily on tier 1 supports or universal, schoolwide programs in elementary schools. For example, SWPBIS training was associated with positive changes in discipline practices (Nersesian et al., 2000). Furthermore, a randomized controlled trial in elementary schools found PBIS yielded reduced suspensions and office referrals, bullying, and peer rejection, and improved academic achievement and school climate (Bradshaw et al., 2010, 2012). Bradshaw and colleagues (2015) took steps toward extending SWPBIS to bullying prevention in high schools. They found that high schools with greater levels of baseline bullying tended to implement PBIS with greater fidelity.

However, Bradshaw et al. (2018) reported that implementation of SWPBIS has not had an effect on the racial disparities in exclusionary discipline practices experienced by Black students (e.g., Bradshaw et al., 2015). She and her colleagues sought to address this shortcoming by augmenting SWPBIS with "Double Check"[5] professional development in the context of a preliminary efficacy trial with 18 elementary and middle school teachers. This augmentation included additional coaching for the SWPBIS team regarding data use, promoting student engagement, and use of culturally responsive practices.

[5] Double Check is "a framework designed to improve teacher culturally responsive behavior management and practices with the goal of decreasing disproportional disciplinary referrals for culturally and linguistically diverse students" (https://doublecheckcoaching.org).

Interestingly, the coaching focused on concrete, community-building practices rather than consciousness raising around cultural responsiveness. It focused on understanding the communicative function of student behavior, encouraging interactions that reflect credibility, respect, civility, limiting judgmental verbal interactions with students, and facility with code-switching (young people effectively navigating differing demands and opportunities in school and community settings). Results indicated improvements of self-reported culturally responsive behavior management and self-efficacy for both treatment and control teachers. However, observational data revealed more proactive behavior management, better anticipation of student problems, higher student cooperation, and fewer disruption behaviors in classes led by coached versus noncoached teachers. These findings, which are consistent with other studies of coaching support for SEL and classroom climate interventions and may be particularly important for students of color, students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, homeless students, sexual minority students with emotional and behavioral challenges, and other students who are disproportionately disciplined (Early et al., 2017; Faria et al., 2013; Flores & Losen, 2024; Gagnon et al., 2016; Jain et al., 2024; Snapp et al., 2015).

Trauma-Sensitive and Healing-Centered Approaches to Support Student Well-Being

Trauma can contribute to anxiety, fear, depression, and hypervigilance while diminishing concentration, memory, and the organizational and language abilities that children need to succeed in school. Although the type of trauma, its timing, and the unique characteristics of the traumatized person and their support system affect the response to trauma, trauma often affects well-being and learning (Spencer et al., 2015). Schools have the potential to be a source of resilience and healing for youth who have been affected by trauma when they embrace and support student agency and are culturally responsive and affirming (Anderson & Stevenson, 2019; Ginwright, 2015, 2018). However, when educators are not culturally competent, responsive, and affirming, or fail to recognize that some challenging behaviors might be adaptive to dehumanizing experiences and/or the result of trauma, their response may be inappropriate, overly punitive, exclusionary, and in some cases may retraumatize students. These actions drive students' ill-being and undermine the school climate and the conditions for social, emotional, and academic learning.

Trauma-Sensitive Schools

Within a multitiered framework, trauma-sensitive schools (TSS) is a universal approach that uses a trauma lens to create a culture of safety and support for all students, while also addressing the needs of students who have experienced one or more traumatic events. Universal trauma sensitivity makes sense both because it is not possible to identify all students who have experienced trauma and because schools can unintentionally do things that are traumatizing. TSS is an approach where all aspects of the learning environment reflect an understanding of trauma's effects, and intentional efforts are made to eliminate practices that might retraumatize students. In addition, policies and practices are adapted to align with a trauma-sensitive vision and disrupt

the trajectory that may place students at risk for negative outcomes. This approach does not single out individual students; instead TSS reshapes the environment by making school staff aware of the nature and extent of trauma that their students have experienced, its effects, and the impacts on their behavior. Although the research on this approach is limited, there is promising evidence which suggests that, when schools employ a trauma lens to make systemic changes to school culture and norms, they can create a safe and supportive environment (Blanton, 2023; Cafaro et al., 2023; Dorado et al., 2016; Herrenkohl et al., 2019), which is a necessary condition to support well-being for all students, regardless of trauma experiences.

Evidence also suggests that supporting staff development in trauma-sensitive practices can lead to positive staff outcomes such as increases in understanding of trauma, shifts in mindset, and increased use of trauma-sensitive practices which set the foundation for whole-school climate, culture, and organizational change, and positive student outcomes such as decreases in disciplinary incidents, physical aggression, and out-of-school suspensions (Atallah et al., 2019; Dorado et al., 2016; Jones et al., 2018).

Examples of school-based TSS models that promote a positive school climate include the following:

- **The Inquiry-Based Process for Creating Trauma-Sensitive Schools.**[6] The Trauma and Learning Policy Institute (TLPI) developed an inquiry-based process for developing trauma-sensitive schools. This process promotes whole-school culture change by helping educators infuse trauma sensitivity into key aspects of school operations: leadership; professional development; resources, supports, and services for students, family, and staff; classroom strategies (academic and nonacademic); policies, procedures, and protocols; and family engagement. Educators are supported in thinking about and fostering whole-school trauma sensitivity through self-identified priorities that are tailored to the context of their schools and the needs of their students and staff (Cole et al., 2005).
- **Collaborative Learning for Educational Achievement and Resilience (CLEAR).**[7] CLEAR is an evidence-informed whole-school model that incorporates recommendations on trauma-informed systems change into staff development, consultation, and support for educators. The CLEAR systems change process focuses on professional development to build expertise in trauma-informed practices and integrate these into routine school instructional and student support practices (Osher et al., 2021).
- **Flourish Agenda.**[8] Flourish Agenda's approach provides transformative youth development opportunities based on healing-centered engagement. Their model is operationalized through the five principles:
  1. Culture
  2. Agency
  3. Relationships
  4. Meaning
  5. Aspirations

[6] See https://traumasensitiveschools.org/about-tlpi.
[7] See https://extension.wsu.edu/clear.
[8] See https://flourishagenda.com.

The organization's program—Camp Akili—uses healing-centered practices to guide discussions and creates a safe and supportive space where youth can confront complex issues (i.e., community violence, depression, and self- and racial esteem). Research on the impact of the program has found that 90% of youth reported that they are more aspirational, and 87% of adults report having strong relationships with youth.[9] With regards to implementation, it was found that this work is most effective and can best support mindset shift when it is done in real time and encourages honest storytelling, vulnerability, and authentic listening.

Developing Trauma-Sensitive Policies and Practices. Well-defined and intentional policies, grounded in an understanding of the impact of trauma, pave the way for implementing trauma-sensitive principles and creating a culture where all students can thrive. Policy work may not require the creation of new policies. Instead, educators can start with existing policies to determine what needs to be added, dropped, amended, adapted, or aligned to the trauma-sensitive mission and vision (Wolf-Prusan, n.d.). There are multiple entry points that educators can start with to evaluate existing policies and practices—codes of conduct, crisis response, disciplinary practices, school climate and culture, and staff capacity building. Where districts or schools choose to start will vary by their context; however, the key to effective policy development is ensuring that the policy development process and policies operationalize transformative trauma-sensitive principles. For example: Are the voices of key parties (e.g., educators, students, families) represented? Does the policy center equity and justice? Are considerations made for how the policy might have a disproportionate impact on specific groups of students? Example policy activities include

- Integrating TSS and equity principles into state standards, guidance frameworks, academic standards, codes of conduct, and school improvement efforts;
- Shifting from compliance-driven approaches to practices that suit the contextual needs of schools;
- Revising disciplinary policies with the goal of eliminating traumatizing practices that promote exclusionary discipline; and
- Incorporating equity measures into assessments of school quality, including a focus on school culture and climate (Osher et al., 2021).

Trauma-sensitive schools (like restorative practices) require a shift in mindset about teaching, learning, and addressing student behavior challenges from a more traditional viewpoint, to one that is healing centered and considers the impact of trauma and adversity on teaching and learning. This is a shift from viewing trauma reactions as a problem within the individual: "What is wrong with you?" and even moving past, "What happened to you?"—both questions that center the individual as the victim—to "What is right with you?" a more strengths-based approach which views students exposed to trauma as creators of their own well-being. This approach suggests that healing is more than repairing deep wounds, scars, and pain; it also involves the ability to empathically understand others as well as the capacity to care for yourself and

[9] See https://flourishagenda.com/our-work-impact.

to understand and act on oppressive conditions individually and collectively (Ginwright, 2015). It requires attention to culture and context, and an understanding of the role of implicit biases, prejudice, racism, and other systemic inequities that cause and perpetuate trauma. As a starting point, this can be initiated through ongoing, whole-school professional learning opportunities which encourage staff to examine their own implicit biases and privilege and regularly reflect on and interrogate their daily practices. Such awareness training has been found to have a positive impact on changing knowledge and attitudes related to implicit bias (Guh et al., 2020; Harrison-Bernard et al., 2020). Similarly, empathy-based interventions also show promise with regards to addressing implicit biases among educators (Okonofua et al., 2016; Whitford & Emerson, 2019). Table 1 provides an example of mindset shifts that would support a more trauma-sensitive learning environment. These examples reflect actions that educators should consider as they plan and implement strategies to support student and teacher well-being.

COMPREHENSIVE AND COORDINATED SERVICES THAT FOCUS ON STUDENT WELL-BEING EFFECTIVE COLLABORATION

Students learn and experience well-being and ill-being across their life space and a communitywide learning ecosystem (Cantor & Osher, 2021a; Osher et al., 2020b; Pittman et al., 2025). Learning ecosystems are frequently uncoordinated or undercoordinated (Pittman et al., 2021). Similarly, schools and communities offer many services but often do so in an uncoordinated manner that also is not equally available to all children and families (Interagency Working Group on Youth Programs, 2015; Osher, 2002). Effective collaboration between schools and communities is also frequently absent and hard to realize (Adelman & Taylor, 1997; Osher et al., 2004b, 2019c; Woodruff et al., 1999). This lack of school–community collaboration is unfortunate as the current challenges to learning, well-being, and engagement can be addressed by communitywide collaboration and effort.

Comprehensive and coordinated services in schools, districts, neighborhoods, municipalities, and counties can, when aligned and implemented collaboratively, minimize fragmentation and enable children and their families to more easily access services (Kendziora et al., 2018; Malloy et al., 2019; Mellin et al., 2015; Osher, 2002; Osher & Osher, 1996). Some comprehensive, coordinated, and interdisciplinary approaches that support student well-being do not center schools. Nonetheless they can often contribute to student well-being. For example, mental health *systems of care* involve collaborations which often include school districts, child welfare, juvenile justice, mental health, and in some cases primary care. Systems of care, which receive support from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration and some states, exemplify this potentiality when they are culturally competent, family and youth driven, collaborative (Castillo et al., 2019; Pumariega et al., 2005), and do in some cases target their efforts on schools (Woodruff et al., 1999; Zabek et al., 2023).

Other collaborative initiatives involve schools (California School Based Health Alliance, 2022; Freeman & Kendziora, 2017; Hoover et al., 2019). One powerful example is the Safe Schools, Healthy Students (SSHS) model, which was developed for an interagency federal initiative that braided funding (Modzeleski et al., 2012; Osher et

TABLE 1 Traditional Mindset Versus Trauma-Sensitive and Healing-Centered Mindset

Traditional Mindset	Trauma-Sensitive and Healing-Centered Mindset
Focused on the trauma: Views children and youth exposed to trauma as victims of traumatic events and the focus on individual pathology.	**Focus on well-being:** Views children and youth exposed to trauma as empowered agents with the strengths and assets to create their own well-being.
Trauma viewed as an individual experience: Focuses on the incident, its impact on the individual, and the individual's trauma response (What is wrong with you? What happened to you?).	**Trauma viewed as a collective experience:** Acknowledges that trauma can be the result of systemic inequities and therefore the solutions should extend beyond the individual to the systems and communities in which individuals live.
Judgmental: Takes student behaviors at face value and assumes that behaviors are purposeful and even personal. Negative labels are often applied to students experiencing difficulties (e.g., manipulative, lazy, resistant, noncompliant, attention seeking).	**Curious:** Considers whether behaviors may be ways of coping with traumatic experiences. Adults consider the purpose of behavior and negative labels are replaced (e.g., "trying to get needs met" or "triggered by authority figures").
Obedience: Considers adults as the experts who know what is best for youth. The focus is on compliance.	**Empowerment:** Educators view themselves as partners with youth and see force and coercion as antithetical to engagement and learning. Educators seek out opportunities to support healing.
Individual: Focus for change is on the individual. There is a belief that the solution is for students to "fix" their behaviors. Assumes behaviors reflect individual deficiencies, with less consideration for the larger contextual issues at play.	**Environmental:** Takes a more holistic view of healing and resilience building. Adults consider how external factors (e.g., school, community, society), including systemic inequities influence students, and work to promote positive, healing environments and communities.
Deficit-based/reactive: Focuses on reducing problem behaviors. Minimal crisis prevention planning or debrief for learning.	**Strengths-based/proactive:** Focuses on identifying and promoting strengths and opportunities for growth. Intentional focus on proactive planning and skill building.
Punitive: Punitive approaches "done to" students are most effective for addressing problem behaviors. Limited understanding of root causes. Students are isolated from the community.	**Restorative:** Positive, relational approaches "done with" students are most effective for addressing problem behavior. Addresses root causes and focuses on repair and skill building.
Siloed: Believes that support for students exposed to trauma should be left to counseling professionals.	**Integrated:** Assumes a shared responsibility for addressing trauma. All staff have a role to play.
Operate from dominant culture: Adopts a "one-size-fits-all" approach, with learning, environment, and services designed based on the perspective of the dominant culture.	**Cultural humility:** Seeks to understand and convey respect for the diverse cultural values, beliefs, and practices of all in the school community and integrates culturally responsive practices.

al., 2004b; Telleen et al., 2009). When implemented effectively, SSHS improved well-being–related outcomes through multitiered efforts that often included SEL (Darling et al., 2018; Sharkey et al., 2012). Although there is no federal funding for the program at present, free tools are available that can help schools and communities implement the SSHS model, assess the array of community resources, and take steps to strategically access these supports.[10]

Two frameworks that center schools are ISS (Moore & Emrig, 2014; Osher, 2006; Osher & Chasin, 2016) and Community Schools (Blank et al., 2023; Maier et al., 2017). Each approach is contextualized to address local priorities and leverage local assets.

[10] See https://airhsdlearning.airws.org/compmentalhealth/index.html.

Both promote student well-being when they are strengths based, culturally competent, collaborative, aligned, and meaningfully include families and students in the design, implementation, and monitoring. Although there is some overlap between the two frameworks, we describe them separately.

Integrated Student Supports

ISS have been conceptualized as "a school-based approach to promoting students' academic success by developing or securing and coordinating supports that target academic and non-academic barriers to achievement" (Moore & Emrig, 2014, p. 1). While there are numerous approaches to ISS, they all include, to some extent, needs assessment, integration of services within schools, community partnerships, coordinated supports, data tracking, and wraparound supports to improve students' academic achievement and educational attainment (Moore & Emrig, 2014). The report was followed up by a much more extensive 2017 report (Moore et al., 2017) that identified the eight leading ISS providers: Beacon Initiative, Children's Aid Society Community Schools, City Connects, Comer School Development Program, Communities In Schools, Elev8, Say Yes to Education, and School of the Twenty-first Century. We describe three of these models to illustrate how ISS approaches can support student well-being and thriving in a manner that is consistent with the science of learning and development. The first is the School Development Program (Comer, 2020; Darling-Hammond et al., 2019, 2020, 2021b), which we described earlier. The second is Communities In Schools, which links school and community services and now emphasizes the importance of relational context and conditions for learning. The third is Say Yes to Education, a comprehensive model that links school, municipal, and community agencies and services and, when implemented well, targets and supports thriving.

Communities In Schools

CIS is the most prevalent ISS model. Rey Saldaña, President and Chief Executive Officer (CEO), who as a first-generation student benefited from CIS supports, described CIS as "rely[ing] on trained and dedicated professionals/caring adults following proven evidence-based models to identify interventions and connect resources to measure and scale impact with students." Saldaña spoke of his experience with Mrs. Reyes, saying she was "a site coordinator who was a presence and navigator when I struggled to make sense of my future, and [who] connected my family when school was not an inviting place" (Hernandez et al., 2023, p. xiv). CIS works through local affiliates who hire the coordinators. The quality and nature of its impacts are influenced by whether coordinators are experienced as Saldaña experienced Mrs. Reyes, by local school administrators, and by the readiness of community providers to adapt their approaches (Parise et al., 2017). CIS's national office provides grants, capacity-building training, technical assistance, and tool development and evaluation to enhance implementation quality and outcomes. CIS's approach to multitiered services is organized by a site coordinator who was a single point of contact working inside the school to coordinate and provide ISS through developing with the school a comprehensive needs assessment to determine which supports need to be increased or improved and which

services need to be added. The coordinator also works with student support teams to identify individuals or groups of students needing early intervention services and they develop a plan to address needs through universal services as well as individual plans for students who need early intervention and thus "tiering services not students" (Clawson & Wu, 2019). CIS, whose case management services focus on early intervention (tier 2), is now building conditions for learning by focusing on developmental relationships and family and student engagement in a manner that is consistent with the science of learning and development (Young et al., 2023a, 2023b).

CIS employs the developmental relationships framework, which focuses on fostering relationships that express care, provide support, share power, are challenging, and expand possibilities. Developmental relationships contribute to school success and youth well-being (Scales et al., 2020, 2022). CIS builds affiliate capacity to realize developmental relationships by providing training of trainers and direct training, tools, and resources. For example, in Elko, Nevada, CIS of Northern Nevada trained all freshmen advisory teachers on the developmental relationships framework and how to employ CIS tools, developed with support from the Search Institute, to integrate developmental relationships into school practices. This includes the Developmental Relationship 360 Survey, which provides data around student perceptions of their relationships with caregivers, siblings, peers, teachers, and other adults in their life. Site coordinators in Elko schools will use the data from these surveys to create school and student support plans in the 2024–2025 school year.

As the pandemic unfolded with its attendant effects on students' attendance, engagement, and overall well-being, CIS national and many affiliate sites focused on student recovery and reengagement. CIS provided grants to affiliates to intentionally address engagement and to be sites to learn about reengagement strategies through research; CIS also worked with the American Institutes for Research (AIR) to develop simple instruments and protocols to understand student and educator engagement, assess their engagement along with family support for student engagement, and use assessment data to improve individual and school planning. The tools include a conversation guide for educators and other school personnel for a one-on-one check-in with students (grades 5–12) or caregivers (of students in grades K–4) to understand students' levels of engagement; an Excel tool to record the results; brief 2–3-minute student surveys regarding their social, emotional, and cognitive engagement; an Excel tool to record, aggregate, and disaggregate data for planning; an educator engagement survey (Communities In Schools, 2022); tools to support conversations with caregivers; and a short survey for caregivers.[11]

Recent evaluation data indicate that those CIS schools that focused on engagement and recovery were successful. For example, evaluation data for schools that only started using CIS in 2019, and targeted well-being and engagement supports, were successful. Students receiving case management services exhibited significant improvement in social support, social awareness, self-control, and self-perceptions, despite initial declines, on average, following the onset of the pandemic during the 2019–2020 school year (Kahn & Osher, 2023[12]). Attendance also improved over the period. Chronic absenteeism, which was not targeted, and which is influenced by many school policies that

[11] See https://www.communitiesinschools.org/tools-schools/?_z=1732593332061.

[12] Interview with Kevin Leary, August 2024.

CIS can only address through advocacy for systems change (Chang et al., 2019), did not improve (Galib & Osher, 2023; Swanlund & Osher, 2023). CIS is now addressing chronic absenteeism, and it focused on chronic absenteeism at its 2024 national convening.

Say Yes to Education

Say Yes to Education is an ecological, population-based model that addresses the variety of social environments and service domains that affect child and adolescent development (Gold et al., 2005; Maeroff, 2013; Osher & Chasin, 2016; Osher et al., 2006). Although Say Yes no longer has a national office, the four cities and counties and school districts that implemented Say Yes continue to do so. The Say Yes model is a place-based approach that includes, but is not limited to, schools. The model focuses on building community capacity (including schools) to address the barriers to postsecondary access and completion. It also involves collaboration among school districts, city, county governments, community foundations, universities, faith-based communities, and other community groups to sustainably fund and effectively coordinate the holistic support services that students need to succeed in school and to ensure that Cleveland graduates can cover their college tuition. The model entails collaboration around data-driven decision making and continuous improvement at student, school, district, and community levels and shared leadership. For example, the operating committee that oversees and guides the strategy and implementation includes the Executive Director of Say Yes Cleveland, city and county council members, the city's Chief Education Officer and Chief of Youth and Family Success, the county's Chief Economic Growth and Opportunity Officer, senior leadership from five foundations, the executive director of the United Way, a vice president from a large bank, enrollment-focused administrators from Cuyahoga Community College, Cleveland State University and Case Western Reserve University, the CEO of College Now Greater Cleveland, a prominent Black pastor, the executive director of a Latinx community-based organization, the school district superintendent (CEO), a school board officer, a caregiver representative, presidents of the teachers and principals unions, and the CEO of a charter school network.

Say Yes employs a care coordination approach to organize an array of services. Student-level assessment and planning is dynamic and facilitated by the Postsecondary Planning System (PPS), which collects and aligns information collected from students, families, teachers, the school, and community service providers, regarding students' strengths, needs, and progress from a whole-child perspective. The PPS, which was based on a systematic review of evidence in each domain, addresses cognitive and academic factors; social, emotional, physical, and mental health; and resource-related factors and drives planning and continuous improvement at student, family, school, district, and community levels. It identifies whether students are off track, on track, *or* on track to thrive on each indicator (Kendziora et al., 2007). Unlike traditional early warning systems, when implemented appropriately (as in the case of Cleveland), the Say Yes model focuses on enrichment as well as addressing problems (Kendziora & Osher, 2014). The Say Yes model, which requires school district readiness (Osher et al., 2015a), has flourished in Buffalo (Bifulco et al., 2019)[13] and Cleveland;[14] improved access to

[13] See https://sayyesbuffalo.org.

[14] See https://sayyescleveland.org/about/mission-history.

well-being, social, academic, and enrichment supports in each Say Yes community; and contributed to improved graduation rates and college enrollment in the three cities and one county where it was implemented as a district-level strategy. Say Yes Cleveland's services and support, for example, include a family support service specialist in every school who implements PPS and links students and their families to free services that address their identified needs (Cleveland Foundation, 2021). Support services include after-school programs, legal assistance for every student and family, academic tutoring, food assistance, behavior and mental health services, mental and dental services, vision testing and services, clothing and home needs, technology access and remote learning, and housing assistance. Say Yes Buffalo offers a similar array of supports and partners with the Buffalo school district, and its Community Schools efforts have affected school outcomes and improved postsecondary access and persistence (Bifulco et al., 2019). Cleveland's recently retired CEO described Say Yes Cleveland, and the outcomes realized since the January 2019 launch of the "asset-focused" Say Yes approach, as having "provided the resources and social capital that middle-class children have access to." Say Yes provides family specialists in all schools who focus on health and legal support, as well as mental health, youth development, and academic opportunity enrichments; after-school opportunities available in all schools; sanitary support; food; legal services; and (according to teacher reports) reduced teacher burden.

PUTTING THE PIECES TOGETHER

Schools can support student and teacher well-being and promote deeper learning by building and sustaining strong conditions for learning and well-being. Schools can be safe havens filled with care, engagement, cultural affirmation, and learning that support and leverage teacher and student voice and well-being. Unfortunately, that is not often the case, particularly for marginalized and minoritized students and their families. Schools for them may contribute to and/or amplify ill-being and push students out through an unwelcoming and/or uninviting or even hostile environment for some, most, or all students and their families (Valencia, 2002; Valenzuela, 2010). Compelling teachers to teach to the test and to adapt to administrative churn, and fragmented and incoherent school improvement efforts, undermine teacher morale and, at least in some cases, mental well-being (DeMatthews et al., 2022; Finnigan & Daly, 2017).

The unwelcoming environment for students and families starts outside of the school (e.g., a lack of people who are friendly, safe, and easy to access), moving to the architecture (e.g., lack of windows), interior design (e.g., lack of culturally affirming materials on the walls), materials (e.g., lack of translations), policies (e.g., intrusive policing suspension), protocols and procedures (e.g., culturally disaffirming dress codes), school rituals and culture (e.g., a lack of inclusivity), and unwelcoming or unhelpful staff behavior (Osher et al., 2004a; Sorensen et al., 2021). Challenges faced by culturally and linguistically diverse students and families include cultural disaffirmation and insensitivity; a lack of cultural competence and responsiveness; student or family unfriendliness; a deficit orientation to students, their families, or their community; harsh or punitive approaches to student behavior (such as suspension); a militarized environment; staff surliness; or an inability to respond to student and family needs

(e.g., Valenzuela, 2010). These experiences imperil connectedness and engagement, the importance of which we highlighted in the introduction, as well as student well-being, and create poor conditions of learning where students do not feel physically or emotionally safe, connected to and belonging at the school and their classes, supported, engaged, or challenged. School leaders and the school leadership team can play a key role in this process by modeling welcoming and affirming behaviors and embodying those values in their personal behavior as well as by developing and supporting staff capacity to care, collaborate with families, and enact and embody cultural responsiveness (Barbour et al., 2018b; Osher & Hanley, 2001; Quinn et al., 1998).

Fortunately, we know more from research about what to do and not do and why (see the bulleted points on pages 20–29). We provide two examples that illustrate what can be achieved by economically disadvantaged BIPOC students as well as other students when districts, teacher unions, schools, teachers, students, families, and community organizations collaborate effectively. We have selected the two examples intentionally. The first example, the UCLA Community School (UCLACS), illustrates how a public school can support students' social, emotional, and academic thriving that includes deeper learning and individual and collective well-being, groundedness, and efficacy. The second example, the Cleveland Municipal School District's (CMSD's) Humanware work, illustrates how a school district starting out under unsupportive conditions can start to address student well-being immediately, but also be transformed so that it can address social, emotional, and academic thriving.

We have chosen to provide a district example because school districts have powerful effects on student and faculty well-being and can support well-being and learning at scale (Kendziora & Osher, 2016; Osher et al., 2014a, 2014b, 2015a). Although schools and classrooms are more proximal to students and teachers and key to student/faculty well-being, districts are a key part of a school's ecology and they also have the capacity to help (or harm) at a greater scale (Kellam & Langevin, 2003; Kendziora & Osher, 2016; Osher et al., 2022). There is also a great deal of student and staff mobility in many districts, and only districts can provide the type of ecological coherence that can facilitate student or teacher transfer. In addition, districts have decision making and funding authority that affect all areas including curriculum, instructional practice, student support and safety, human resources, professional development, and even (if the district so chooses) cultural competence and family engagement. Consequently, district policy, regulations, protocols, and infrastructure support can be harnessed to support students and faculty as well as the transformation of schools. Say Yes to Education, described earlier, provides an example in moving from a boutique classroom and school model to a district model. The Collaborating Districts Initiative, which has demonstrated effects on social and emotional learning, school climate, and academically relevant outcomes, provides an example of what districts can do to support transformation at scale (Kendziora & Osher, 2016; Schwartz et al., 2022).

The school and district examples illustrate the importance of addressing the whole child and addressing social, emotional, and academic development together and across the student's whole ecology and provide examples of how public schools can implement and embody the SoLD practice principles as illustrated in Figure 3.

FIGURE 3 SoLD principles of practice.

The first example highlights one school: UCLACS, which opened under relatively favorable resource-related conditions. This example illustrates how to do the work in one school. The second example focuses on the transformation of CMSD, which began in fall 2008 under less favorable resource-related conditions. We describe in depth both the steps the school and district took and the strategies and approaches the school and district employed because strategies and approaches can be leveraged by other teachers, schools, districts, agency school leaders, and other stakeholders to promote student and faculty well-being within their unique contexts. We conclude this section by identifying the similarities between the school and district approaches from the two examples and identifying practitioner-friendly resources that can be leveraged to apply the lessons of the school and district.

UCLA Community School

There are examples of how Community Schools, and schools adapting the Community Schools model, can support the learning, well-being, and thriving of students of color (who often also face the challenges of racism, immigration, first- or second-generation status, language, and economic disadvantage), while also supporting teacher well-being (Blank et al., 2023). UCLACS provides a powerful example of how a school that embodies the 16 success drivers (see the Characteristics of the 16 Success Drivers: A Glossary on page 20) can support BIPOC student–teacher well-being by leveraging student, family, community, and educator assets. This school embraces family and community cultural wealth and assets (Bonilla & Valenzuela, 2002; Murillo et al., 2017; Yosso, 2005), utilizes community and family assets, and applies culturally responsive approaches and relational pedagogies that focus on the whole child—in other words, promoting equity-supporting thriving (Osher & Pittman, 2024; Spencer et al., 2019).

UCLACS serves almost 1,000 BIPOC students and families, two-thirds of whom are immigrants, from the adjoining Los Angeles Pico-Union and Koreatown neighborhoods. The school's students, in aggregate, face greater socioeconomic disadvantages than other Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) students (Kane et al., 2021). During the 2022–2023 school year, the school served 957 culturally and linguistically diverse students from low-income families, 14% of whom had identified disabilities and 32% of whom were classified as English learners. Most students were Latinx (83%), 8% were Asian American or Pacific Islander, 4% were Filipino, 2% were African American, and 2% were European American. In addition, 95% of the students were from low-income families (Quartz, 2023). The families and their communities also have cultural and social capital that the school respects, nurtures, and leverages.

The school, which opened in 2009, was created through the collaboration and planning of UCLA faculty, LAUSD, the United Teachers Los Angeles, and a grassroots coalition of community-based organizations. In 2006, these partners studied the feasibility of creating a UCLA-partnered community school, and in 2007 UCLA applied to become one of the first pilot schools in Los Angeles (Martinez & Quartz, 2012; Murillo et al., 2021). The school focuses on and embraces the whole child—including their families. The school builds strong conditions for learning and development (Quartz et al., 2020). The school employs practices that operationalize and embody the practice implications of the science of learning and development. The school also fosters equity-centered thriving by focusing on student well-being, agency, and groundedness along with their academic learning (Boyd et al., 2022; Darling-Hammond et al., 2020, 2021b; Osher & Pittman, 2024).

The school's policies and operational and staff practices embody the school's equity-focused mission and vision. The school vision centers stakeholder collaboration, teacher autonomy in professional learning and curriculum design, and student-focused and -driven learning opportunities, pedagogy, and curricula development. Specifically, the school's approach enacts three core beliefs, which have grounded its development and evolution:

1. Language and culture are central to learning and human development.
2. Individuals learn as members of a community that values their participation and is respectful, productive, and inclusive.
3. The purpose of schooling is to guide all learners, both students and adults, to think critically about the world around them, engage as agents of social change, and promote democratic practices.

These core beliefs are reflected in the core competencies that each student is supposed to master being (a) a self-directed, passionate learner; (b) a master of academic content and skills; (c) an individual who is bilingual, biliterate, and multicultural; and (d) an active and critical participant in society.

UCLACS employs a strengths-based, relational approach that promotes student and teacher agency in its culturally responsive curriculum, pedagogy, and governance. Its newcomer-centered classrooms and practices and ongoing engagement with and support of families nurture individual and collective agency and groundedness (Kane et al., 2021; Quartz et al., 2021b). The school's comprehensive approach also addresses all the elements of James Banks' comprehensive approach to multicultural education (2008): school policy and politics; school culture and hidden curriculum; teaching styles and strategies; the languages and dialects of the school; community participation and input; the counseling program; the formalized curriculum and course of study; assessment and testing procedures; instructional materials; and school staff attitudes, perceptions, beliefs, and actions.

The school's focus on language and culture is important to its success as students speak 16 languages in addition to English (Quartz, 2023).[15] According to Leyda Garcia, the principal, biliteracy "permeates every space … it tells a student that 'everything about you belongs here, and you are proud to do what you are doing'" (Garcia quoted Blank et al., 2023, p. 92).

The affirmative centering on language and culture starts when new students are enrolled in one of two dual language programs: English–Spanish and English–Korean.

> From transitional kindergarten through 3rd grade, students in the Spanish–English program receive instruction mostly in Spanish. For the Korean–English program, students receive instruction mostly in English, with one day each week dedicated to learning Korean, an approach that was developed in collaboration with Korean-speaking parents and caregivers. (Quartz, 2023)

Teachers combine classroom-developed and standardized assessments to formatively assess students' biliteracy development. High school students enroll in a pathway of Spanish courses that range from Spanish I through AP Spanish Language and Literature. Students who choose Korean as their second language take Korean courses at the local community college. In addition, the school provides a newcomer class to support newcomer students emotionally and pedagogically. The school honors students' home language, and students are encouraged (not just permitted) to use their full linguistic repertoire through translanguaging practices (Herrera, 2023)—permitting students to

[15] Languages spoken in the school include American Sign Language, Arabic, Bengali, Bisaya, Chinese, Dutch, Filipino, French, German, Irish Gaelic, Japanese, Mongolian, Russian, Tagalog, Urdu, and Zapotec.

use their language of choice in projects and learning, providing materials in two languages, and enabling students to translate when necessary (Rivera-Torres & Keating, 2020). The school's capacity to mentor and support students and to prepare them to succeed upon graduation is enhanced by hiring and retaining bilingual teachers and teachers who bring a readiness for bilingual teaching and often share lived experiences with students or their families (Blank et al., 2023; Oyaga et al., 2023; Quartz, 2023). Perhaps not surprisingly, almost 40% of the school's graduates can be awarded the California State biliteracy seal on the diploma (Quartz, 2023).

The school also creates a respectful, productive, and inclusive community of learners through structures, processes, and pedagogies that support physical, emotional, and identity safety; senses of belonging and connectedness; and academic challenge and support. For example, the school promotes the physical and psychological safety of immigrant students and their families by being a sanctuary school, whose preamble speaks of the importance of proactively protecting and providing resources "for our families" and to "be a refuge where families can seek safety, information, and resources, if they feel threatened or afraid." It also houses an immigration legal clinic on campus which is integrated into the life of the school (Murillo et al., 2023; Quartz et al., 2021b). The school supports undocumented students' access to college, and teachers create a zone of safety and cultural affirmation by displaying pro-immigrant imagery on the classroom walls and including discussions of immigration and emigration challenges in the classroom (Murillo & Trinchero, 2017).

The school supports connectedness among students and teachers and learning environment continuity through a looping approach in which students stay with the same students and teachers in "dens" for two years and continue to be in dens for two successive years throughout their time in elementary school. This peer as well as teacher looping fosters a sense of belonging and provides consistency of relational and academic support that, while important for all students, may be particularly important for some immigrant students. The looping approach continues during middle and high school: sixth grade students have two core content teachers who also serve as their advisors, seventh and eighth graders work with a consistent advisor for the next two years, and high school students participate in advisories and work with the same advisor for all four years.

Leyda Garcia, the school's principal, observed that "[s]ocial justice permeates [the school and] informs everything we do" (as quoted in Blank et al., 2023, p. 95). The school cultivates grounded student agency through learning opportunities that focus on collective agency and culturally grounded social change efforts (Lee et al., 2020). This transformational focus is reflected by murals and posters in the library as well as in the daily curriculum where students can actively learn about equity-salient issues and to develop the critical and analytical skills to interrogate marginalizing systems. Principal Garcia notes that social justice is "not just 30 minutes twice a week, but in everything we're doing" (as quoted in Blank et al., 2023, p. 95).[16] Student passion-based seminars, senior internships, and its Multilingual Interdisciplinary Social Action (MISA) project embody culturally grounded agency in a manner that also supports academic learning.

[16] For palpable examples, see the article and video by Quartz and Garcia (https://imaginingamerica.org/what-we-do/storytelling/stories-of-change/public-scholarship-at-the-ucla-community-school) and the student blog (https://edsource.org/2021/finding-our-voices-and-our-research-skills-during-the-pandemic/654552).

The MISA project provides students with an opportunity to conduct interdisciplinary research on issues affecting their community and to do so in their home language when they present what they have learned about social change to the community. In addition, 10 community partner organizations extend and enrich learning after school and during the summer through tutoring, mentoring, internships, field trips, recreational activities, and access to college classes (Quartz, 2023). The school's promotion of individual and collective agency and groundedness may contribute to why elementary, middle, and high school students at UCLACS report that they have a voice in decision making at higher rates than do students districtwide on the LAUSD student experience surveys for the school years 2016–2017 to 2022–2023. For example, the comparative ratings for the high school and district high schools during 2022–2023 for this item were 61% to 50%, respectively, and the overall ratings for opportunities for leadership and participation were 71% to 60% that year.

Data and interviews with staff indicate that the school, which fosters deeper learning, promotes student well-being and inclusion and, while being academically productive, reflects and contributes to student and faculty well-being. For example, the school annual state data from 2017–2023 document an extremely low suspension rate[17] and the school's students report higher levels of academic challenge and social and emotional competence than the average ratings for students.

Survey responses also demonstrate the impact of the school's commitment to connectedness, belonging, emotional safety, cultural affirmation, healing, and transformative social and emotional learning, and student practices on student connectedness and well-being. The scale items address the experience of connectedness and belonging, being known and cared about by staff, having kind peers, and experiencing respect and identity safety and affirmation—items that relate to well-being. On average, the school's elementary, middle, and high school students gave higher ratings compared to students at other LAUSD schools (e.g., being happy at school and feeling a part of the school). For example, the comparative high school overall connectedness scores for 2022–2023 were 67% for the school compared to 59% for the district, and scores for growth mindset and self-efficacy were 75% versus 67% and 59% versus 51%, respectively.

The school's readiness and capacity to realize the three core beliefs depend, in part, on a strong scaffold of social and emotional support for students and their families. School leadership and teachers understand the importance of family voice, knowledge, engagement, and partnership. This was reflected in interviews with families, teachers, and school leaders which emphasize connectedness of teachers, staff, and caregivers who described the school community as an inclusive and culturally affirmative school family. These findings were further supported by caregiver responses on the LAUSD School Experience Survey. For example, on the 2022–2023 survey 86% of the caregiver respondents indicated that they felt welcome to participate at the school, and 85% of caregivers indicated that the school includes them in important decisions about their child's education, that they are treated with respect, and that their concerns are taken seriously by school office staff, and teachers responded to concerns in a timely manner.

The school and its teachers also understand how essential social and emotional support is to their students' academic and life success, and they are backed by a school

[17] See https://www.caschooldashboard.org/reports/19647330119693.

psychologist and a full-time psychiatric social worker. For example, interviews with counselors, teachers, and school leadership indicated that teachers see social-emotional support and family engagement as part of their role and not as an added burden. When students have greater levels of need, they receive coordinated support from two school-wide teams, community–staff teams, and six community partner organizations. The two-team model is like the interdisciplinary teams in the Comer School Development Program and to other approaches for creating safe, caring, and academically productive schools (Dwyer & Osher, 2000, 2005; Osher et al., 2004b). The first school team is a school support team, which is led by two general education and two special education administrators, which can include a school psychologist, a psychiatric social worker, a community representative who engages with families and community, three counselors, an intervention coordinator, or an instructional coach. Team members communicate with each other regularly and at weekly meetings where they review students who are receiving tier 2 and tier 3 services. The second team is a community resource team that reflects the school's whole-child ecological approach. A full-time community representative leads the second team, which is staffed by a school clerk. Team members work at an accessible, welcoming, family-friendly family resource center where staff help families access legal services (through the school's legal clinic), access local food resources, and meet other needs such as free tax preparation, job training, and a women's empowerment program. The six community partners provide students with access to culturally responsive dental and health care and case management (Quartz, 2023). For example, approximately 20% of students in 2017 were referred to partner agencies.[18]

The school's capacity to realize the three core beliefs and goals hinges on teacher commitment, well-being, and capacity to care, which, in turn, depend on both teacher attributes and organizational support (Jennings et al., 2019; Quinn et al., 1998; Keels et al., 2022). Teacher and staff responses on the LAUSD School Experience Survey from 2016–2017 to 2022–2023[19]) provide a quantifiable picture of some of the factors that contribute to a higher level of teacher well-being at UCLACS compared to Los Angeles schools in general. For example, the 2022–2023 data for teachers, which, like the surveys administered for 2018–2019 and subsequent years, only addressed teaching satisfaction, had the following comparative responses: I enjoy teaching at the school (92% to 85%); I have sufficient autonomy to implement instructional strategy that meets the needs of my students (94% to 89%). The overall teaching satisfaction scale was 76% to 71%. Data from the 2017–2018 survey provide other important responses: parents treat staff with respect (97% to 90%); parents talk to me about how to help the children learn at home (90% to 75%); I get the help I need to communicate with parents (98% to 90%); the school is a supportive and inviting place for staff to work (95% to 86%); the school promotes trust and collegiality among staff (95% to 83%); the school promotes personnel participation in decision making that affects the school's practices and policies (97% to 82%); I feel comfortable talking with the school leadership about issues and concerns (98% to 82%).[20]

[18] See https://uclacs.org/community/parent-center-services.
[19] See https://www.lausd.org/Page/19073.
[20] Ibid.

Educator selection by the school and the self-selection of the school by educators; respect and support for teachers and their union; and a shared common mission among leadership, staff, the union school leadership, and families and students contribute to faculty and staff retention and continuity. For example, the school retained 90% of teachers between 2019–2020 and 2020–2021, and annual teacher retention and reported teacher satisfaction between 2018 and 2023 has been more than 80%. One example of respect for teacher and teacher union voice is that the teachers have an opportunity to review potential innovations before they are adopted, which provides an opportunity to build readiness and commitment and minimize teacher overload. This approach to innovation, which is consistent with a concerns-based adoption, reduces teacher burnout and contributes to more effective and sustainable implementation.

Although teachers desired even more support for their needs as whole people, they described the many school-driven factors that already contributed to their well-being. These include

- Their connection with students and families over many years and experience of the school community as a family;
- The school's coherence and operationalization of its vision over the course of its history;
- The respect, trust, and support of teachers' experiences from leadership; and
- Teachers' ability to both propose and evaluate proposed changes and the involvement of the teacher union in these processes.

These four sets of factors contribute to observable well-being. One teacher expressed it this way:

> A traditional school model would not have allowed me to flourish in the same way, perhaps because my energy would have been spent navigating more oppressive systems and policies or fighting to be seen and valued. Perhaps, I would have been pushed out of teaching because I wasn't allowed to do transformative work for my students.

The school has helped students and staff thrive in hard times by affirmatively responding to crises in a manner that reflected an ecological whole-child perspective. The school's Immigrant Family Legal Clinic provides support to families to avert or buffer challenges that can affect their children's capacity to engage, learn, and thrive. The school responded to the COVID and post-COVID education challenges by helping students and their families access basic resources and by doubling down on social-emotional support for students, knowing that the learning would follow. Not surprisingly, UCLACS has not experienced the attendance or engagement challenges that many other schools have faced.

UCLACS's success emerged from strong partnerships between and among the community, including the local public university, community activists, community organizations, and families, and the school's leaders and teachers, the school district, the teacher union, and the school's students. Community organizers drove the political will for transformation (rather than just technical reforms) that led to community schools to serve the Pico-Union and Koreatown neighborhoods (Oakes & Rogers, 2006)

and to secure property through eminent domain for the people-friendly facility that serves six community schools (the property had originally been purchased to be a massive Trump office building; Martinez & Quartz, 2012). Community members and organizations provided their rich family and cultural resources as well as professional resources and physical space to enrich student learning and development in and out of school; the teachers and school leaders embraced, leveraged, and, as we will see, nurtured family, student, and community strengths (Quartz, 2020). The university provided support from researchers (who believed in the school's goal and strategies and learned with and from the school) as well as art students, social work and teacher interns, law students, a law clinic, and support for teacher learning and professional development. The school district provided a local district superintendent who was open to creating the school as envisioned, as one of six small autonomous pilot community schools located at the RFK Community Schools complex. The district and the teachers union created contractual and operational space for the school to develop in a manner that was consistent with the mission, including two years for planning, a pilot school memorandum of understanding that allowed for local autonomy, and an elect-to-work agreement that allowed teachers to work extra hours while the union was assured that the teachers would lead the reform rather than have reform habit imposed on them (Martinez & Quartz, 2012; Quartz et al., 2021a).

Cleveland Municipal School District

In 2007, students, teachers, and schools served by CMSD also faced many challenges to well-being and learning that UCLACS's students and families faced. Like schools in Los Angeles' Pico-Union and Koreatown, Cleveland's schools (and its districts, students, and families) faced challenges that were uniquely shaped by the city's segregated history, demography, geography, and the state and county's political context. Cleveland was (and still is) once one of the most segregated cities in the country with significant issues such as high levels of lead poisoning (and lead effect). Most students in Cleveland were from families with limited incomes (all students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch) and faced housing insecurity. In addition, the school district struggled with a lack of trust from most taxpayers who had not passed a tax levy in 17 years. Cleveland schools also experienced poor conditions for learning, with high rates of school withdrawal, exclusion, and chronic absenteeism, resulting in a 38% graduation rate (Osher, 2008b). The schools struggled valiantly to address these challenges, but their efforts were fragmented, deficit oriented, and driven by the needs of principals, agency leaders, teachers, and service providers. Cleveland families were disengaged and there was no meaningful effort to engage families (Osher et al., 2008b). Although the external challenges remain great (greater, due to the Great Recession, COVID, and politicized racial conflicts), the learning environment in Cleveland's schools looked very different by spring 2024. The school district was trusted, chronic absenteeism was down, the graduation rate was approaching 90%, and the conditions for learning improved dramatically (Cohen et al., 2019; Giraldo-García et al., 2023; Osher et al., 2015c). CMSD moved from the lowest- to the highest-rated urban school district in Ohio, earning four-star ratings in 2022 for value-added growth in closing achievement gaps. In fact, CMSD was the only large urban school district that year to earn four stars

for exceeding standards for reducing educational gaps among subgroups of students.[21] This improvement continued into 2023–2024 for grades 3–5, while slightly declining for middle school, and remaining the same in high schools. Cleveland's long-term turnaround was grounded in how it centered and coherently focused on student well-being and the conditions for learning in a manner that also prioritized staff capacity and student learning and by enacting all the "to dos" listed on page 20 of this paper (Osher et al., 2014, 2015d, 2018).

Looking at how Cleveland built on existing school and community assets to operationalize the "to dos," the school district

- Focused on "Humanware," not on hardware;[22]
- Focused on conditions for learning, utilizing CFL as a metric to drive school and district change, and actively involving students in unpacking the CFL (Cohen et al., 2019; Giraldo-García et al., 2023; Mayo & Osher, 2018);
- Trained staff on trauma-sensitive approaches (Chang et al., 2018; Children's Defense Fund-Ohio, 2015);
- Implemented districtwide SEL and assessed SEL formatively by adding SEL-related items to the conditions for learning survey (Cohen et al., 2019; Osher et al., 2015c);
- Eliminated harmful and ineffective approaches such as in-school suspension (Osher et al., 2014) and ineffective approaches to attendance problems that focused on punishment and "bean counting" rather than on prevention and support (Chang et al., 2018);
- Reduced exclusionary discipline and implemented multitiered restorative practices with attention to building staff and student capacity to enable restorative approaches to be successful (Osher et al., 2015d); and
- Implemented a Say Yes to Education model in a manner that fully utilized the monitoring system (unlike other districts where outcomes were limited by a lack of motivation and capacity to do this (Osher et al., 2015a) and placed a family resource specialist in every Cleveland school to help link students to supportive enrichment services (Cleveland Foundation, 2021; Higher Education Compact of Greater Cleveland, 2021).

Cleveland rejected a silver bullet and quick-fix mentality (Osher et al., 2015d). Cleveland's focused change efforts started in 2007 when the mayor, school superintendent, and chief academic officer (who would serve as CMSD's superintendent and CEO from 2011 to 2022) commissioned an independent audit in December 2007 to identify challenges and recommend research-based actionable solutions (Osher et al., 2008b). The audit's recommendations emphasized the importance of harnessing resources in a sustained, measurable, and strategic manner that

[21] See https://reportcard.education.ohio.gov.

[22] See interview with CEO/superintendent Eric Gordon at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rO2erpkCeS4.

- Builds a climate for change and sustains it over multiple years using data on a small number of metrics to refine interventions and enhance the district's approaches to improving student outcomes and well-being;
- Avoids single solutions or unaligned multiple solutions for complex but interrelated problems;
- Eliminates ineffective or counterproductive practices and behaviors;
- Employs a three-tiered approach to building conditions for and capacities to learn and teach;
- Aligns promotion (e.g., SEL) and prevention (e.g., positive behavioral support), early intervention (e.g., attendance interventions), and treatment (e.g., therapy) in a manner that both addresses immediate needs as well as prevents the incidence and magnitude of problems;
- Supports the capacity of schools, agencies, and staff to systematically implement proven practices and programs with quality;
- Integrates cultural and linguistic competence into policy and practice as a conceptual framework, operating principle and professional skill to guide the educational success of Cleveland's diverse students;
- Leverages the district and Cleveland's strengths and resources;
- Fosters collaboration and coordination between and among schools, agencies, families, and community organizations;
- Systematically leverages public and private resources such as Medicaid, the Cuyahoga County Community Mental Health Board, the Cuyahoga Tapestry System of Care, and the Youth Development Initiative; and
- Uses data for planning, monitoring, continuous improvement, and evaluation.

Notably, the audit's recommendations rejected both a short-term approach and an approach that narrowly focused on one or two strategic levers such as improving teacher capacity or doubling down on academics alone.

CMSD focused on building staff readiness and capacity. For example, the district utilized the additional federal monies that were made available and accessed through the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act and COVID recovery resources to support staff training and build a sustainable implementation system, rather than invest in a particular service that it would not be able to sustain once the one-time money vanished. The district rejected a piloting approach. Rather, it enacted changes comprehensively and systematically, employed continuous improvement to refine interventions, and addressed contextual and systemic factors using strategies that the 2007 audit recommended (Osher et al., 2014, 2015d, 2018). CMSD became increasingly family and student driven (Hill et al., 2019) and actively engaged the voices and perspectives of families, students, and teachers. CMSD continued to move away from punishment and exclusion and to focus on support and inclusion. The district collaborated with the Cleveland Teachers Union to build staff and organizational readiness for effective implementation of restorative practices. Chronic absenteeism, which was high in Cleveland and similar districts, provides another example. CMSD repurposed its attendance office from an office that focused on bean counting for state reports and punishing students and/or their families to an attendance office that focused on intervention and support. This strategy, which was grounded by efforts to improve

conditions for learning, reduced chronic absenteeism so dramatically that Cleveland was highlighted by Attendance Works in a brief on chronic absenteeism that focused on attendance and conditions for learning (Chang et al., 2019).

Another impactful Cleveland initiative was the creation of student advisory boards for schools and the district. These boards, which both leveraged and developed student agency, were institutionalized in policy that required every high school to establish a student advisory committee (SAC) that met four times per school year to discuss its community's concerns. SAC members were not to be traditional "student leaders" or honor roll students; instead, they were meant to represent a social and academic cross section of each school community—including the voices of students who are not necessarily doing well in all areas of high school student life. SACs initially met in their individual school teams to problem solve around tough topics such as police–youth relationships, chronic absenteeism, school discipline, and obstacles to widespread academic achievement. SAC members reviewed their school's CFL survey reports to identify strengths and weaknesses and then developed actionable recommendations focused on improving identified areas of weakness and formally took these recommendations back to their school leadership teams. SAC members also met quarterly with the superintendent, where they interpreted CFL districtwide data and addressed matters of interest (Mayo & Osher, 2018).

By the beginning of the 2019–2020 school year, the school district was ready to even better support student well-being, groundedness (e.g., connectedness and sense of the future), and efficacy (e.g., SEL and civic engagement) in a manner that included but was not limited to deeper learning. Cleveland was at an inflection point where an increasing number of teachers and schools could meaningfully address and support equity, personalized learning, student agency and engagement, restorative practices, cultural responsiveness, and deeper learning practices that support robust thriving (Osher & Pittman, 2024). For example, the Humanware team invited Zaretta Hammond as a keynote speaker at its annual districtwide conference and the superintendent was an active participant in the Science of Learning and Development Alliance. This inflection sustained through 2022–2024. This continued focus was embodied in CMSD's post-pandemic vision:

> In our pursuit of a more fair, just and good system of education, we want each of our learners, both each of our scholars and each of their educators, to be individually and collectively presented with academically/intellectually complex tasks that are worthy of their productive struggle and allow them authentic opportunities to demonstrate their work and their learning of academic content and transferable skills in a joyful and adventurous environment.[23]

Examples of the post-pandemic vision being realized can be found in YouTube videos about the Wade Park Elementary School,[24] a pre-K–8 school, and Facing History New Tech High School.[25]

[23] See https://www.clevelandmetroschools.org/learningvision.
[24] See https://www.clevelandmetroschools.org/wadepark.
[25] See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aeSLGw4-kTc.

By 2022–2023, every CMSD campus had full-time health professionals focusing on the whole child's learning needs and every student and educator had the appropriate modern iPad, Chromebook, or laptop to meet their anytime/anywhere learning needs. In addition, the library/media centers in all CMSD schools had been transformed into modern community, college, and career hubs; cyber cafes.[26] The media centers were open to students before and after school and during their lunchtime. These transformed settings provided students with a modern library/media collection and a one-stop shop to sign up for clubs and activities. The transformed media centers also provided access services and supports like their Say Yes Family Support Specialists (see below) and gave students the opportunity to explore their career interests and aptitudes and get help with college applications, essays, and scholarships. Lastly, the campus centers gave the students a space to just hang out together to work on those intellectually complex tasks.[27]

CMSD's enhanced readiness to focus on equity and deeper learning was due to the district and teachers' willingness and capacity to extend and deepen whole-child support. For example, in collaboration with the city, county, union, and local funders, the district, city, and county agencies adopted and institutionalized Say Yes to Education[28] as a central part of student support efforts (i.e., not as supplementary as it was treated in two of the other 3 Say Yes districts; Osher et al., 2015a). Cleveland had the will and capacity (i.e., readiness) to use and adapt the student monitoring system and put a family support specialist in every CMSD school. Say Yes Cleveland enhanced district capacity to respond to the impact of COVID-related changes on families. For example, the family support specialists made several hundred home visits to provide food, clothing, computers, cleaning supplies, and other requested items, and worked closely with Legal Aid to try to prevent evictions.[29]

Getting to the 2019–2020 inflection point was, as is always the case with systematic change, a jagged process that required relentless continuous improvement (Kendziora & Osher, 2016). Some changes came more easily than others (e.g., addressing chronic absenteeism) and some schools were more ready to change than other schools (e.g., using SEL effectively). A 2014 follow-up audit (Osher et al., 2015c), which replicated the 2008 audit, documented what CMSD had not accomplished between 2008 and 2014: CMSD improved student ratings of physical safety in grades 5–8, improved student support at all grade levels, and improved peer social and emotional competence in grades 2–4 and grades 9–12. By 2014, CMSD had also made substantial progress in prioritizing and addressing many of the 2008 audit's recommendations. CMSD had

- Developed a strong, collaborative executive leadership team to oversee Humanware and other initiatives;
- Developed staff buy-in for the importance of Humanware and SEL training for teachers;

[26] Eric Gordon interview and communications with David Osher, August 2024.
[27] Interviews with Roseann Canfora, August 2024.
[28] See https://sayyescleveland.org.
[29] Interview with Diane Downing, August 2024.

- Implemented a universal, systematic Humanware effort and sustained a focus on Humanware despite unanticipated financial challenges during the 2008–2012 period;
- Focused extensively on building universal strategies for improving SEL through the implementation of a research-based SEL curricula such as PATHS (for prekindergarten through grade 5) and Second Step (for grades K–12 and teachers);
- Adopted an interdisciplinary model for high schools called "Facing History and Ourselves" which integrates civic education, social-emotional learning, academic rigor, and attention to equity;
- Began implementing classroom meetings, facilitated daily by students and teachers, in some grades that are designed to engage discussion on developmental SEL-related needs of all students, K–12;
- Expanded tier 2 supports through the development of planning centers staffed by instructional aides, through which students could seek assistance in problem solving or could be referred for targeted support;
- Implemented student support teams as a tier 3 resource in schools to provide a problem-solving group of school staff who met weekly to address students' problems in a timely manner so they could be successful;
- Developed and implemented quality standards for screening and selecting school-based services;
- Focused intensively on improving conditions for learning through a data-based approach, which was used for continuous quality improvement, assessment, accountability, and performance review; and
- Included conditions for learning in reform efforts and labor contracts.

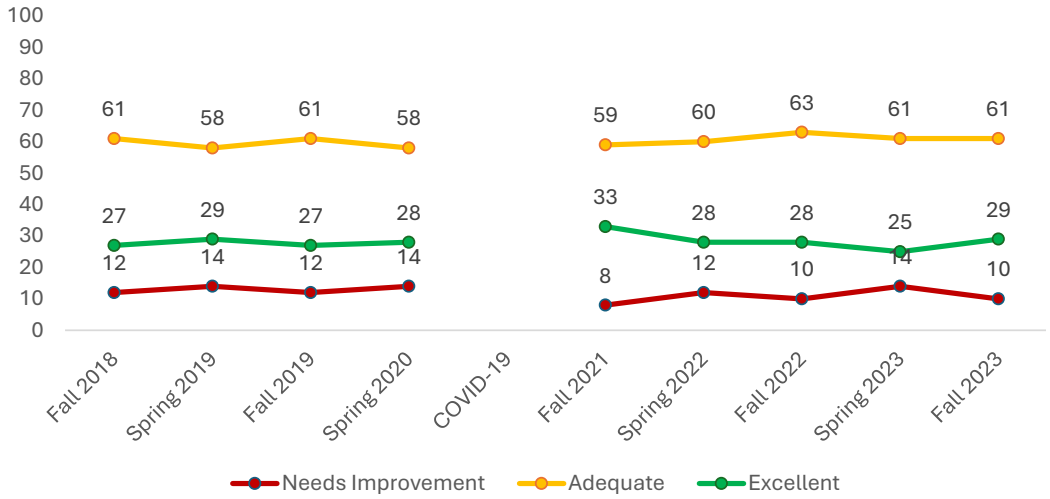

FIGURE 4 No meaningful change in peer social and emotional competency in elementary schools.

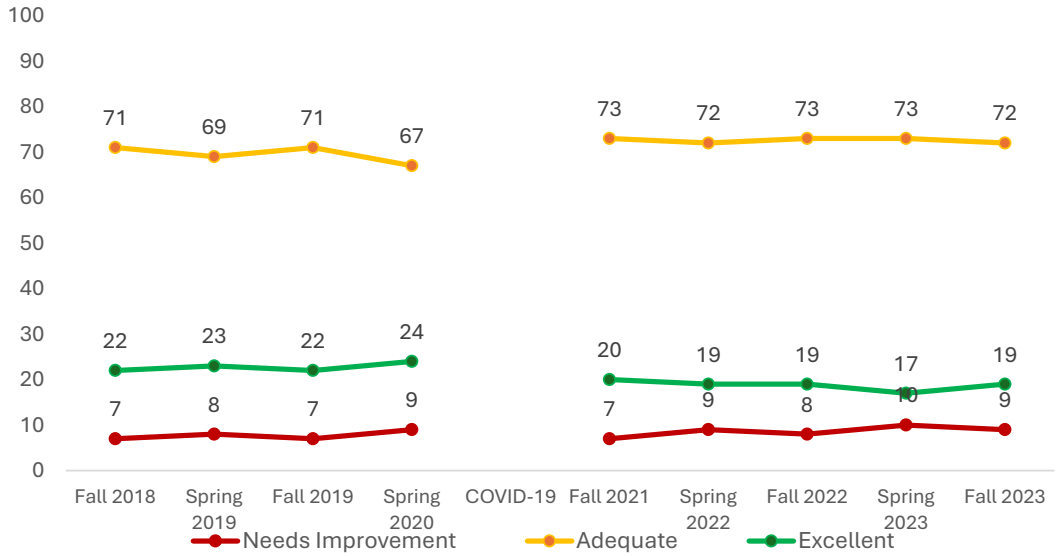

FIGURE 5 No meaningful change in support, care, and connection in middle schools.

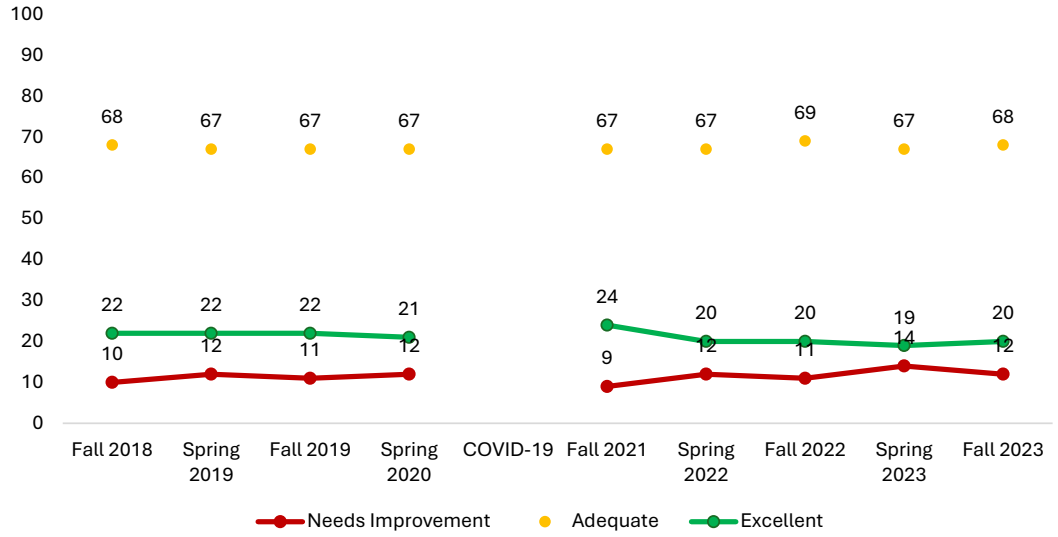

FIGURE 6 No meaningful change in safety in high schools.

The 2014 follow-up audit also identified key areas for improvement. The follow-up areas included

- Improving Humanware monitoring and execution across all CMSD schools so that schools receive timely support;
- Enhancing the quality of PATHS, planning centers, and student support teams, and building school capacity to implement these with quality;

- Expanding the penetration of CMSD's systematic efforts, which is constrained when adults do not buy in;
- Addressing unmet student mental health needs—and further building CMSD capacity to address these concerns, including through provision of trauma-informed care;
- Implementing middle and high school SEL programming;
- Reducing high levels of exclusionary discipline;
- Enhancing teachers' social and emotional skills and their understanding of child and youth development; and
- Enhancing cultural and linguistic competence of school staff to engage with diverse students and families.

By 2019, Cleveland had sustained its earlier accomplishments and made significant progress in addressing the 2014 recommendations. Although getting to the 2019–2020 inflection point was not easy and was complicated by COVID, Cleveland created a district readiness to deal with the pandemic and racialized climate in a manner that addresses the mental well-being of students and staff. This conclusion is consistent with an AIR study of Cleveland's conditions for learning after COVID. This study (Merrill & Osher, 2024), which employed an interrupted time series design, showed that Cleveland's conditions for learning, which earlier studies found had improved since 2008 and stabilized before the pandemic (Merrill & Osher, 2024; Osher et al., 2015c), did not decline directly after COVID. In fact, middle and high school students' perceptions of support improved when students returned to school after COVID closures (Merrill & Osher, 2024), a pattern that continued through spring 2024 (Kazi, 2024). These data contrast with declines on similar scales in Pennsylvania schools that employed the Pennsylvania School Climate Survey (Kozakowski et al., 2023). Figures 4, 5, and 6 exemplify the pattern of consistency pre- and post-COVID shutdown, which are consistent on all scales and all school levels. For heuristic purposes, we provide one chart per school level: elementary school students' perceptions of support, care, and connection competency (Figure 4); middle school students' perception of peer social and emotional competency (Figure 5); and high school students' reports on physical and emotional safety (Figure 6).

This stability on the CFL survey may reflect district leadership prioritizing student and teacher well-being during and after COVID. CMSD leaned in "aggressively on reinvigorating our social and emotional learning in an even more holistic part of a learning vision" that "was more front and center than ever coming out of the pandemic" and that included teachers and staff who were also "hurting."[30] For example, Cleveland devoted the entire first week of the students' return to the schools after closure for SEL-based reset activities on the premise that student well-being would undergird students' ability to learn.

CMSD was centering on "whole human learning, which was focused on social, emotional, cultural and physical wellness and personalized learner pathways that really created agency."[31] Whole-human learning entailed making sure that students' physi-

[30] Eric Gordon interview and communications with David Osher, August 2024.
[31] Ibid.

cal, cultural, and behavioral health was a part of their larger learning by developing a vision of learning that was more competency based with students having even more agency and ownership and ensuring that students had the opportunity to demonstrate their learning in authentic ways, which required a competency-based pedagogy and a nimbler learning environment that included, for example, flipped classrooms and schools without walls. CMSD further strengthened its SEL programming and implementation by enhancing middle and high school SEL programming and enhancing teachers' capacity to focus on SEL by, for example, creating SEL toolkits that schools could use in just-in-time ways. CMSD attempted to systematically support scale-up of quality SEL efforts in every school and penetration of those efforts into classrooms.

CMSD also enhanced its support for student and family physical and emotional well-being and agency. CMSD coordinated with the United Way and reached out to families to make sure they knew about and could access the local United Way's 2-1-1 system that provides 24-hour access to the United Way 2-1-1 Help Center, which provides free and confidential access to a compassionate professional who will review options for help, develop a plan, and act as an advocate when families experience barriers to service (Canfor, 2024). CMSD enhanced parent agency by creating caregiver ambassadors who were selected from parents who had children attending the school that they worked in. These family ambassadors complemented the student ambassadors while promoting family access to the school. Cleveland also established a representative caregiver advisory committee that was modeled after the student advisory committee.

CMSD secured a grant to fund four school-based health centers that addressed physical and behavioral health and were accessible to other schools through a hub-and-spoke strategy. CMSD also had invested in a broad array of out-of-school providers and started to develop "tier one and tier two supports and incentives for students, caregivers, and educators focused on stress, fear, and behavioral health needs."[32]

Cleveland also ratcheted up its attempt to reduce exclusionary discipline and discipline disparities in all schools, which started when Cleveland replaced punitive in-school suspension with supportive planning centers in 2011. These centers were jointly developed with the Cleveland Teachers Union (CTU) and incorporated in the union's contract. This alternative to in-school suspension provided students with academic and social-emotional support from paraprofessionals who came from the community. They receive one day of training monthly and had professional mental health backup when needed. CMSD's move to scale up restorative practices built on the CTU's commitment to the universal approaches of building conditions for learning and social-emotional learning which were also built into its labor contract. The union and its members' commitment to universal approaches was grounded in the outcomes produced and the fact that the CTU had been actively involved in both the 2008 needs assessment and in the audit's follow-up planning, Humanware team, and the selection of PATHS as the district's foundational SEL program. The union's experience with and commitment to Humanware, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) promotion of restoratives approaches, and the CEO's tasking of his staff and the AIR consultants to develop an alternative to Cleveland's punitive code of conduct paved the way for a

[32] Ibid.

CMSD–CTU work group that (a) revised the punishment-oriented code of conduct to one that focused more on prevention and (b) developed a plan to scale up restorative practices as long as Humanware supports were in place—a plan that COVID closures and post-COVID behavioral challenges interrupted. CMSD, however, still found a way of moving ahead during and after COVID: CMSD developed discipline dashboards to identify exclusionary discipline hotspots and created with the CTU a collaborative team to go into schools to identify why this was happening. In addition, CMSD further revised its code of conduct to distinguish between infractions that could be measured objectively and subjective measures that drive high levels of discipline disparities (Gregory et al., 2021a; Osher et al., 2022).

Although there are profound differences between UCLACS and CMSD in terms of geography, structure (a school versus a district), the ethnic composition of the students and staff, available resources, and where they started their journeys, the school and district converge in terms of what they did to support student and faculty well-being, deeper learning, and equity. Both school and district created strong universal conditions for learning and created caring environments that supported student social well-being, agency, and groundedness—in other words, they built conditions for equity-based thriving (Osher & Pittman, 2024). Cleveland moved from physically uninviting schools to inviting schools like those at Los Angeles's RFK Community Schools complex. Cleveland's transformed library/meeting centers "illustrate the importance of the built environment to well-being."[33] Cleveland pivoted from punitive and exclusionary discipline to student support and restorative approaches while also pivoting from teacher-centered pedagogy, shallow learning, and teaching to the test, to student-centered, project-based, deeper learning. The community school started out embracing families: the largest block of hundreds of new employees hired during Humanware's early stages were family liaisons and an ombudsman to help caregivers navigate the school district bureaucracy, file paperwork, and obtain answers and services. The second largest group of additional staff hired early were described by Eric Gordon, chief academic officer and then CEO/superintendent, as staff to support social and emotional conditions for learning.[34] Cleveland, which the 2008 audit described as family and student unfriendly, became increasingly family-friendly, family-driven, student-centered, and student-driven (Hill et al., 2019; Osher & Osher, 2002).

Both the school and district created common language and rituals for all members of the school community. Cleveland, for example, selected the evidence-based PATHS program for SEL, generalized its language regarding social and emotional competencies to all other interventions, and incorporated PATH rituals into school and district culture. These rituals included class meetings and elementary school students using the turtle model to stop and think when they are fearful. The common language and rituals made it easier for students and teachers to move in a district that had a very high level of student mobility. Both UCLACS and CMSD moved from fragmented approaches to social, emotional, and academic support, to coherent support coordinated by two teams; from unproductive district–union conflict (which was avoided in the creation of UCLACS) to district–union collaboration; and from fragmented community sup-

[33] Roseann Canfora unpublished note to David Osher, August 2024.
[34] Ibid.

ports to coherent comprehensive supports. In other words, even under adverse fiscal conditions, Cleveland, which used the CFL survey data and student voice to anchor and drive continuous improvement, developed many of the inclusive and supportive features of the more adequately resourced UCLACS and found ways to implement these inclusive and supportive features at scale.

The similarity of processes across the two diverse contexts reflects common underlying factors that facilitated success. There was continuous committed strategic leadership at the school and district levels that modeled what was important, including cultural responsiveness and emotional intelligence, in the two settings. This continuity included the UCLACS leadership and some of its staff and Cleveland's mayor, school board, superintendent, and union leadership (except for one retirement), whose involvement in Humanware planning and Humanware began soon after Eric Gordon, who had been a teacher, had just arrived in Cleveland as chief academic officer. Gordon was tasked by the superintendent, Dr. Eugene Sanders, and Cleveland's Mayor Frank G. Jackson to lead the Humanware work. The school board selected Gordon to be Cleveland's CEO/superintendent in 2011 after Sanders retired and he led the district until he stepped down at the end of the 2022–2023 academic year, paralleling the mayor's retirement. This continuity of leadership eliminated disruptive churn and enabled faculty and staff to develop the skills in a consistent manner under leadership that was, again in both places, committed to justice, equity, and student and family engagement and voice. Coherence was enhanced by the fact that leadership in both settings combined a commitment to coherent school and district culture and practices with an understanding that universal approaches should be adapted to specific contexts and students. Gordon consistently articulated a coherent approach to student social, emotional, and academic support and meaningful family engagement while modeling SEL and cultural competencies in his day presence: "Our [SEL] strategies were designed to positively affect conditions for learning, and by integrating the SEL framework into educational instruction in grades K–12, all students would be both academically and socially equipped to succeed."[35] Gordon's consistent bottom line was that, if implemented systemically, SEL, social and mental health support, and supportive social and emotional conditions for learning could undergird all other educational priorities in ways that shape the district's staff culture, family and community partnerships, and student outcomes. Dr. Leyda Garcia, the UCLACS principal throughout the period, also had a coherent strategic vision demonstrated in her behavior:

> Social justice education is the foundation of UCLA-CS. Social justice permeates [the school].… It's a stance that informs everything we do…. Teachers have the autonomy to create curriculum that is responsive and affirming to students. But it's also expanding their understanding of the world, helping them become critical and interrogate a lot of systems that often have marginalized their communities and who they are…. Not just 30 minutes twice a week, but in everything that were doing…. We are offering a space for human beings to learn to feel safe, to feel like they can ask questions, that they can develop that they understand where they are, and that there's always a continuum of learning…. We want all of our students to be self-directed, passionate learners. (Garcia quoted in Blank et al., 2023, p. 95)

[35] Quoted by Roseann Canfora in unpublished note to David Osher, August 2024.

Both leaders and their colleagues leveraged planning and data-informed continuous improvement and strategically selected external support to move forward. The Community School leveraged two years of planning; Cleveland, which had to build the plane while it was flying, utilized the 2007–2008 audit and the following year to plan its rollout of Humanware, while addressing the exigency of preventing further violence (Wright et al., 2015). Both settings benefited from the sustained collaboration of funders, community agencies, and the teacher union, and support from local universities to move forward. Both settings gained the support of their surrounding community. This was evidenced in Cleveland by the passage of successful tax levies after 17 years without a levy. Both settings leveraged external professional development support and school/district–university partnership. The leaders of both settings and the unions had the political will to implement their unique policies and gain the support of public authorities—LAUSD in the case of the Community School and the state of Ohio in the case of the Cleveland Plan.

> By building a community-wide partnership that included city and county officials, higher education partners, the business and philanthropic community, Gordon launched the "Cleveland Plan"—a blueprint for education reform that would not only save the district from an academic takeover by the State of Ohio but would guide the district's effective and continuously-improving academic and SEL initiatives throughout the next decade.[36]

The school's principal and the district's superintendent/CEO combined being strategic and relentless focus on all students thriving with an understanding of the challenges that their students and families faced to inform and drive their and their colleagues' work. CMSD's leader, Eric Gordon, who led CMSD's work throughout the period, first as Chief Academic Officer and then as CEO/superintendent, exemplified his focus on equity and understanding of need when he told a reporter after leveraging short-term stimulus money. "There is no space to get this wrong. We have a very short time not just to put the resources in place but to use them as effectively as they can be used."[37] At the same time, Gordon understood that transformative change was both a marathon and a sprint, which he characterized in his farewell address:

> Good leadership is often characterized as either a marathon or a sprint. Some say the best leaders are those who are consistent for a continual period. Others say it's best to go "all out" to more quickly achieve their goals. In my more than 11 years as CMSD's CEO, I have attempted to do both, leading with what I would describe as a persistent urgency, to quickly achieve significant goals, while simultaneously working to embed those wins into a culture that can nurture and sustain them over time.[38]

Gordon brought to this work a great love for Cleveland's students, respect for their families, an understanding of the need to create "an academically safe place," and a "fierce sense of urgency."[39]

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[36] Roseann Canfora unpublished note to David Osher, August 2024.
[37] As quoted by Roseann Canfora in unpublished note to David Osher, August 2024.
[38] Ibid.
[39] See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rO2erpkCeS4.

Garcia shared Gordon's passion and perspective. She also spoke about emotional safety and leveraged her lived experience to connect with students and families and drive the school's approach:

> I was part of the immigration wave of the 1980s. That informs my practice. I connect to the experience of the students.… I know that my education and role give me privilege and our circumstances are not the same. I come to this with respect for the families here and now, their struggles, resilience, and strength. That's the lens I come with. It took me a long time to see my experience and language as an asset rather than as a deficit. (Garcia quoted in Blank et al., 2023, p. 95)

Practitioner-friendly resources exist to leverage the two examples. The work that UCLACS and CMSD did will look different in other communities, cities, tribal communities, states, and territories, as every context is unique. However, the strategic approaches and practices that the school and district employed can be adapted and applied. Hence, we conclude by identifying resources that can extend knowledge about the school and district built on community assets and collaborated with students, staff families, and community organizations to support student well-being, thriving, and deeper learning.

The UCLA Center for Community Schools[40] and the Learning Policy Institute[41] have published practitioner-friendly briefs describing UCLACS. These resources and their focuses are collaborative leadership (Kang et al., 2021), teacher leadership in addressing the whole child (Saunders et al., 2021), creating conditions for deeper learning (Daniel et al., 2019), supporting student agency (Lee et al., 2020), student self-assessment (Cerda et al., 2019), integrated data systems (Fensterstock et al., 2020), the role of the arts (Kane et al., 2021; Quartz and Garcia, n.d.),[42] internships (Murillo et al., 2017), utilizing play (Franco & Pérez-Swanson, 2019), supporting college attendance (Quartz et al., 2019), and the immigrant family clinic and integrated supports (Murillo et al., 2023). The school is also documented in The Community Schools Revolution.[43]

Resources describing Cleveland's work exist in reports and publications. Description of CMSD can be found in each of the 20 chapters of *Creating Safe, Equitable, Engaging Schools: A Comprehensive Evidence-Based Approach to Supporting Students* (Osher et al., 2018), which is backed up by a website that provides additional practical resources[44] and by a Spanish version, *Creando Escuelas Seguras, Equitativas E Involucradora,* which is freely available from the Learning First Alliance and which, in order to support multilingual collaboration has the same pagination as the English version (Osher & Long, 2023).[45] Additional descriptions of CMSD's efforts, which were co-authored by CMSD personnel, can be found in Volume 1, Chapters 10, 11, and 20, of *Keeping Students Safe and Helping Them Thrive: A Collaborative Handbook on School Safety, Mental Health, and*

[40] See https://communityschooling.gseis.ucla.edu.

[41] See https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/topic/community-schools.

[42] See https://imaginingamerica.org/what-we-do/storytelling/stories-of-change/public-scholarship-at-the-ucla-community-school.

[43] See https://www.communityschoolsrevolution.org.

[44] See https://www.air.org/resource/spotlight/creating-safe-equitable-engaging-schools-comprehensive-evidence-based-approach#chapter1.

[45] See https://www.learningfirst.org/safe-equitable-spanish.

Wellness. The chapters deal, respectively, with school safety, wellness, and learning (Cohen et al., 2019); conditions for learning and academic performance (Voight et al., 2019); and school–family–community partnerships that contribute to school safety, mental health, and family resilience (Hill et al., 2019). Cleveland's approach to creating an academically safe district and academically safe schools is described in the previously cited 2018 panel discussion.[46] Cleveland's approach to reducing chronic absenteeism is described in an Attendance Works blog[47] and in a PBS segment.[48] Its approaches to Humanware, including restorative practices, SEL, and conditions for learning for 2009–2014 are described by Osher and colleagues (2015d) and by Faria and colleagues (2013). The 2008 and 2014 audits are described by Osher and colleagues (2008b, 2014).

The strategic approaches that the school and district used are consistent with and, in the case of Cleveland after 2018, were specifically informed by work on the science of learning and development on whose national advisory board Cleveland's superintendent sat. Practitioner-facing documents and tools include

- "The Implications for Educational Practice of the Science of Learning Development"[49]
- *Educator Learning to Enact the Science of Learning Development*[50]
- *Design Principles for Schools: Putting the Science of Learning and Development into Action*[51]
- *Science of Learning and Development Alliance Design Principles for Schools Planning Tool for Developing a System for Thriving and Learning*[52]
- *Supporting Student Well-Being and Learning: A Transition Tool*[53]

CONCLUSION

Schools can be additive or subtractive settings that support the well-being and learning of all students or create ill-being and prevent or limit the learning of some or all students, particularly those who are minoritized. Additive schools are culturally and identity affirmative, emotionally and instrumentally supportive, and culturally and linguistically responsive. They are engaging environments for learning that are inclusive; value and embrace student, family, and educator voice; and function as safe harbors when necessary. Subtractive schools are disaffirming, unsupportive, harsh, and culturally incompetent or tone-deaf. They are deadening places that focus on performance rather than learning and exclude or push students out. These schools create emotional adversities that generate unproductive stress and can even include trauma. Additive schools provide strong conditions for learning and teaching; they function as protective factors and promote student and faculty well-being and thriving. Subtractive

[46] See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rO2erpkCeS4.
[47] See https://www.attendanceworks.org/reducing-chronic-absence-with-a-trauma-informed-approach.
[48] See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ELacS6N7ZGc.
[49] See https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/10888691.2018.1537791.
[50] See https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/product-files/Educator_Learning_for_SoLD_REPORT.pdf.
[51] See https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED614438.pdf.
[52] See https://www.air.org/resource/guidetoolkit/SoLD-design-principles-planning-tool.
[53] See https://www.air.org/resource/guidetoolkit/supporting-student-well-being-and-learning-transition-tool.

schools have poor conditions for learning for minoritized students and function as a risk factor for these and other students who experience poor conditions for learning while their teachers experience poor conditions for teaching.

While contributing to student and teacher thriving, student and teacher well-being is also key to creating healthy and academically productive schools. Student and teacher social-emotional and physical well-being affects the readiness and capacity of students to learn and support their peers and of teachers to teach and support students. Student and teacher well-being was and still is challenged by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly when and where schools do not sufficiently address student and teacher well-being. Well-being is not just individual; student and teacher well-being is dynamically interactive as is the individual well-being of all members of a classroom community and all family members.

Supporting the well-being of both educators and students requires a comprehensive, systemic relational approach that emphasizes mental health, emotional well-being, and positive, nurturing relationships at every level of the educational ecosystem. For educators, this means that creating an environment that fosters psychological safety, flexibility, recognition, and autonomy is crucial. When teachers feel supported in these ways, they experience a heightened sense of self-efficacy, which in turn enhances their ability to foster successful learning environments and meet the needs of their students. Key strategies such as providing relevant professional development, coaching, mentorship, and creating protected time for collaboration are essential in bolstering teachers' confidence and capacity. Respecting teacher voice and agency and cultivating a strong sense of community among staff through intentional relationship-building, shared goals, and a collective sense of purpose further strengthens educators' resilience and job satisfaction. This holistic approach not only mitigates burnout but also reinforces the foundation for a supportive school culture where teachers feel valued, motivated, and empowered to remain committed to their work.

Equally important is prioritizing students' well-being through a relational multitiered approach that is based on a strong social and emotional foundation and is buttressed by targeted strengths-based and strength-building interventions that are culturally and linguistically responsive and by creating a culture that fosters connectedness, emotional safety, academic engagement, and social-emotional and academic learning and growth. Culturally competent, strengths-based mental health services, alongside restorative practices, help create inclusive environments where students feel affirmed, safe, and supported in their development. Restorative practices, when integrated at the universal level and implemented with consistency, build strong relationships between teachers and students while reducing or eliminating reliance on punitive and exclusionary disciplinary measures, which disproportionately affect marginalized students and communities. Furthermore, social and emotional learning plays a pivotal role in helping students develop the competencies needed to manage emotions, resolve conflicts, and foster positive relationships. By embedding SEL principles into classroom instruction and school culture, educators create an environment where students can thrive emotionally, socially, and academically. Ultimately, by integrating these strategies into the fabric of the school, educational institutions can significantly reduce disparities and promote equitable access to opportunities, especially for students from historically underserved communities. This approach, particularly when it is transformative, nur-

tures the holistic development of all students and educators, creating a more supportive and inclusive educational ecosystem where both educators and students—can flourish in an environment of mutual respect, empathy, and empowerment.

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