

# 16 WAYS

## CSDE is Supporting Social-Emotional Learning and Behavioral & Mental Health



CONNECTICUT STATE  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



- 1 A Statewide Behavioral Health Landscape Scan & Focus Group** conducted in Summer 2021, provided CSDE with a snapshot of emerging trends, concerns, and work taking place in schools regarding mental health services. Afterwards, select districts representing various demographics joined a focus group discussion, where CSDE discussed and documented collective challenges regarding building or scaling up behavioral and mental health support systems; long-term financial support; technical assistance and coaching on evidence-based practices for behavioral health; and coordinated referral systems.
- 2 The Behavioral Health Pilot** currently underway in 6 districts aims to create a scalable and sustainable system of coordinated care for all K-12 schools to provide comprehensive behavioral and mental health supports and services to students and staff. CSDE identified districts of various demographics to participate in a pilot program to implement targeted supports based on needs identified from the 2021 landscape survey and focus group discussions.
- 3 A Statewide Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) Landscape Scan** conducted in September 2020 provided insight into the great work already taking place in districts, plus emerging concerns and trends related to SEL for K-12 schools across CT. This was the [first step in providing a systematic collection of data](#) to supplement, rather than replace, existing efforts.
- 4 The Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA) System** is a strength-based social-emotional observation tool that teachers use to capture how frequently they have observed a student demonstrating positive behaviors (e.g., get along with others) rather than inappropriate ones (e.g., annoy others). A focus on strengths can build students' self-efficacy and help them persevere when they face difficulties. This helps teachers better support their student in feeling connected to school, confident, successful, and engaged in learning. and it is [available to all districts at no cost](#).
- 5 The Components of Social, Emotional, and Intellectual Habits (SEIH)** represents the knowledge, skills, and habits that form an essential blueprint for students' well-being and equip every student with the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in college, careers, and civic life. While attention to core academic subjects remains important, social, emotional, and intellectual habits set the stage for all future learning, promoting intrapersonal, interpersonal, and cognitive competence. CSDE is also developing the SEIH for Grades 4-12, which will be made available in the Fall of 2022.
- 6 The social, emotional, and mental health of students and school staff** is one of CSDE's required state-level priorities for investing the more than \$1.5 billion in federal Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Funds allocated to Connecticut districts. To date, districts plan to invest over \$183 million in this priority area. Highlights include contracting with local health providers to expand mental, physical, and behavioral services; professional development and staff training; and implementation of SEL practices in schools.
- 7 The Learner Engagement and Attendance Program (LEAP)** is providing [targeted supports to 15 districts through home visits](#) in order to improve student attendance and engagement and address chronic absenteeism. This program has provided students and families with resources, such as backpacks, access to technology, and connections to health and social services.

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- 8 **The School-Based Diversion Initiative (SBDI)** is a school-level initiative that engages teachers, staff, administrators, and school resource officers through consultation, expert training, and capacity building activities to reduce school-based arrests. SBDI [helps keep kids in school](#), by increasing access for students and families to mental health prevention supports and treatment services in the school and local community as an alternative to suspension, expulsion and arrest. SBDI reduces the rate of in-school arrests, expulsions, and out-of-school suspensions, expands access to supports and ultimately improves student social and academic success.
- 9 **Advancing Wellness and Resiliency in Education (Project AWARE)** is funded through a federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration grant to use trauma-informed, multi-tiered systems of supports to address mental health and prevent violence among school-age youth. It is currently being [piloted in 3 districts in Connecticut](#), targeting more than 650 school staff and 12,000 students.
- 10 **The Connecticut Comprehensive School Counseling Framework** delivers a range of evidence-based supports, programs, and practices to address student needs. [The Framework](#) provides a proactive, preventative, and early intervention model for school counselors to support all students in reaching their full potential and acquire critical skills in the areas of academics, career, and SEL.
- 11 **Efforts to Reduce Disproportionate Exclusionary School Discipline** have been driven by collaboration with the CSDE convened Connecticut School Discipline Collaborative. CSDE works closely with districts to operationalize the [State Board of Education Position Statement](#) to support collaboration among various stakeholders to build systems of support and learning environments that explicitly promote positive, preventive, and restorative school discipline philosophies and practices and support the reduction of disproportionality in suspensions and expulsions.
- 12 **The CT Learning Hub** features the [Social-Emotional Learning Hub with](#) on-demand educational resources for educators, students, families, and communities to embed social and emotional well-being practices into each aspect of teaching and learning spaces in order to create compassionate learning environments.
- 13 **The 2021 Healthy and Balanced Living Curriculum Framework** provides districts with standards to implement a planned, ongoing, and sequential pre-K-12 health education and physical education curriculum. This framework helps students to acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.
- 14 **Initiatives Aimed at Boosting Student & Teacher Engagement** include [TEACH CT](#) to support aspiring educators and connect them to current educators, as well as [Voice4Change](#) to honor and elevate student ideas regarding Connecticut's investments of federal COVID-19 relief funding for education. Over 71% of proposals received from students through the Voice4Change initiative focused on addressing the social-emotional well-being and mental health of students and staff.
- 15 **Community Webinars** hosted by CSDE engage attendees in social-emotional and mental health discussions. In addition to the [Spark Innovation Series](#), CSDE offers professional support webinars for both [districts](#) and [families](#) and features experts in special populations, developmental pediatrics and child behavior. Topics include helping families navigate remote learning, assisting students with special needs, ensuring meaningful early childhood experiences, and supporting student and family emotional well-being.
- 16 **Support for Youth in the Criminal Justice System** is being provided in partnership with programs and agencies serving and providing education to students involved with the juvenile justice system. Investments include: high-quality instructional staff and resources, technology and access to digital curricula, and seamless student transitions, including the timely transfer of educational records of justice-involved students to and from juvenile justice agencies and facilities to ensure no loss or delay in learning.