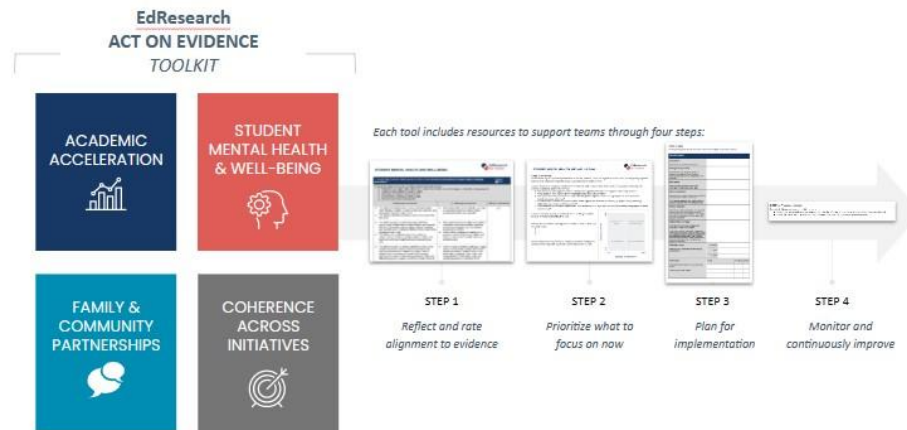# STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING[1]

This tool is part of the *EdResearch Act on Evidence Toolkit* which was created by EdResearch for Action[2] in partnership with DeliverEd[3] to support education leaders to assess the degree to which their existing programs are aligned with the relevant evidence-base and determine a pathway towards improving alignment and student success. While the toolkit is designed primarily for school and district leaders (e.g., Superintendents, Assistant Superintendents, Chief Academic Officers, and Principals), leaders at other levels of K-12 education (e.g., SEA leaders, policy-makers, advocacy groups, etc.) may find this tool helpful to understand the most critical, effective, evidence-based strategies to support student mental health and well-being.

This tool takes approximately 2 hours to complete. Remember very few (if any!) programs will meet all of the expectations for "strong alignment" so don't be discouraged - strive to reflect as honestly as possible to best understand and plan for impactful next steps.

STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

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STEP 1: Reflect and rate alignment to evidence

Use the rubric below to capture reflection ratings and rationales based on the team's assessment of your current alignment to evidence:

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Strategy (*click to be taken to rubric*)	Rating	Rationale
1. Structures and systems to support safety, belonging, and culture		
2. Supports and strategies for SEL and well-being		
3. Monitoring students' well-being		
4. Effective and proactive mental health interventions		

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1. To what extent does the district support schools to create **structures and systems to support safety, belonging and culture?**[4]		Strategy: ▮☐☐☐☐
To arrive at a rating for this area, consider evidence from these sources: ● Stakeholder perception data (staff, families, students) on safety, sense of belonging, school culture, disaggregated ● Classroom observations focused on culture ● Interviews with counselors and SEL staff ● School safety initiatives, priorities, budget ● Discipline outcomes, disaggregated		
(4) Strong alignment looks like…	*(1) Weak alignment looks like…*	*Rating (4-1) and rationale*
● The district intentionally works to ensure all stakeholders (staff, families, students, community) feel safe, welcome, and respected at the district and school. ● The district proactively addresses and rectifies issues when they arise.	● Many stakeholders do not feel safe, welcome, or respected at the district and/or school; avoiding interactions when possible.	
● The district supports schools to leverage restorative practices and Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS) to create safety and belonging; behavior strategies give students voice in decision-making and encourage family engagement and input. ● The district consistently and proactively centers its evidence-based school safety interventions on efforts and practices to improve mental health and social emotional skills.	● Many classrooms have a culture of academic competition and harsh discipline prioritizing exclusionary practices (e.g., suspensions, expulsions) over PBIS. ● School Safety initiatives emphasize police presence, increased funding or training over efforts to improve mental health and social emotional skills.	
● The district supports schools to proactively monitor school climate through anonymous information-gathering and sharing protocols across stakeholder groups. There is evidence of a consistent culture districtwide of safety, belonging, and caring. Data is disaggregated to understand different subgroups' experience of school climate, follow up	● There is a lack of tracking, analyzing, or using data on school climate, culture and safety to identify and address stakeholder concerns. When data is analyzed, there is little to no disaggregation to understand subgroups' varying experiences or efforts to solicit	

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[4] For more see the EdResearch for Recovery [Bringing Evidence-Based Decision-Making to School Safety](#) brief.

for gathering data of stakeholders who are not responding, and evaluate any school safety concerns.	additional insights from those not responding.	

2. To what extent does the district provide **support and strategies for social emotional learning and well-being?**[5]	Strategy: ▢▮▢▢▢

To arrive at a rating for this area, consider evidence from these sources:
● Student perception data on well-being, relationships with adults (disaggregated) ● Educator perception data on alignment and priority of SEL and well-being, disaggregated ● Description of district and/or schools' SEL and well-being supports for students ● District resources for staff mental health (incl. PD plans) ● Focus groups with staff

(4) Strong alignment looks like…	*(1) Weak alignment looks like…*	*Rating (4-1) and rationale*
● The district prioritizes intentional development of students' SEL and well-being, recognizing these as core to students' 'readiness to learn.' ● There is a clear and comprehensive strategy for how schools support students' social emotional well-being (e.g., opportunities for student voice and agency, welcoming rituals and positive peer interactions, opportunities for student self and collective reflection). The system supports a full continuum of care within a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) that is ongoing, school-wide, and integrated into core lessons. SEL skill development is continually assessed to monitor progress and inform improvements.	● The district does not prioritize developing students' SEL and well-being or treats this as "nice to have" lessons separate from core instruction. There is little to no sense of urgency for these efforts. ● SEL and well-being supports are inconsistently implemented and/or insufficient to meet students' needs (e.g., administering assessments without providing supports). Many educators assume a false tradeoff between meeting students' SEL vs. academic needs.	
● The district focuses on ensuring students have at least one stable and committed relationship with a supportive adult. Schools are encouraged to invest in student and staff relationships to further support students' well-being; educators in turn take every opportunity to get to know	● There is no encouragement or systemic support for staff to foster stronger relationships with students. Students must seek out and build their own relationships with adults; many students are overlooked.	

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[5] For more see the EdResearch for Recovery Evidence-Based Practices for Assessing Students' Social and Emotional Well-Being and Preparing Schools for Meeting the Needs of Students Coping with Trauma and Toxic Stress briefs.

students deeply.	
● The district proactively attends to and regularly (>annually) assesses staff mental health and well-being. Staff receive pre- and in-service training on mental health literacy, managing professional stress, compassion fatigue and secondary trauma, and resources for prevention, management, and mitigation of mental health symptoms.	● The district has no systematic supports in place to support their staff to understand, prevent, manage or mitigate their own mental health and well-being.

*3. Does the district have a comprehensive system for ongoing **monitoring of students' well-being** through validated assessments and/or survey instruments?[6]*		Strategy: ☐☐▮☐☐
To arrive at a rating for this area, consider evidence from these sources: ● Wellbeing assessment tools, processes, results ● Evidence of using data to inform supports ● Mental health resource map		
(4) Strong alignment looks like…	*(1) Weak alignment looks like…*	*Rating (4-1) and rationale*
● There is an articulated and comprehensive system in place for monitoring student well-being across the district. ● The district ensures all schools have validated instruments on social and emotional well-being, learning conditions, and other non-academic measures. Assessments are concise, efficient, protect privacy, and follow 3M key principles (meaningfulness, measurability, and malleability). Students and families understand and consent to the screening. ● Ongoing data analysis allows for understanding progress and matching students with appropriate supports. The district regularly maps its resources to identify and secure other in-school or external supports as needed.	● Data on students' mental wellness are not routinely collected or used to understand students' needs and improve support system wide. ● Students' well-being assessments are overly burdensome, inefficient, and/or include questions that unintentionally re-traumatize, stigmatize or marginalize students. ● Data is not regularly analyzed or used to gather insights or make improvements to the system. A robust mental health resource mapping exercise has not been completed to identify and secure additional supports as needed.	

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[6] For more see the EdResearch for Recovery [Evidence-Based Practices for Assessing Students' Social and Emotional Well-Being](#) brief.

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4. Has the district implemented policies, procedures, and practices to help schools provide **effective and proactive mental health interventions**?[7]		Strategy: ▢▢▮▢
To arrive at a rating for this area, consider evidence from these sources: ● Comprehensive system for referring students in need of supports/ interventions ● Policies, procedures, articulated practices for addressing student mental health needs ● Training and supports for trauma-informed care for educators, security, and school nurses ● Student data on mental health supports, disaggregated		
(4) Strong alignment looks like…	*(1) Weak alignment looks like…*	*Rating (4-1) and rationale*
● The district has established strong information-gathering and sharing systems to proactively support students who need targeted mental health supports or interventions. Systems leverage multiple data to match interventions with students strengths, needs, and ideal outcomes. ● There are protocols and systems for referral-making and following through, with clear information for students and families to self-refer and connect to services. Referral processes account for students' and families' unique cultural needs and assets, and address the impact of stigma and mistrust of education and mental health institutions. Schools regularly hold referral feedback meetings or use feedback forms to assess outcomes and adjust. ● The district has clear, consistent procedures for providing mental health supports for students including those coping with trauma[8], at risk for suicide, in need of psychological evaluations, and/or requiring remote supports.	● Existing information-gathering and sharing systems for supporting students in need of targeted mental health supports are nonexistent, insufficient, and/or inconsistently used throughout the district. ● There are no clear or effective systems for making and following through on referrals, or the district's referral process is cumbersome, confusing, and/or doesn't take into account students and family's unique cultural needs and assets. As a result, student needs are unknown and/or unaddressed. ● The district does not have clear procedures or practices to address identified student mental health needs, or current practices are insufficient to or not effective in meeting existing needs.	
● The district encourages schools to involve students and families in all aspects of the school mental health system including prevention, intervention, and health promotion	● The district and schools do not engage students and families in design of mental health supports based on their experiences	

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[7]For more see Cleveland State University Center for Urban Education's Promoting a Positive and Equitable School Climate During the Pandemic resources.

[8] For more see the EdResearch for Recovery Preparing Schools for Meeting the Needs of Students Coping with Trauma and Toxic Stress brief.

design, implementation and evaluation.	and expertise.	
● The district supports schools to build educators' awareness of and ability to respond to student trauma with trauma-informed strategies to support neurological regulation. Others are trained in a team approach (e.g., de-escalation strategies for security staff, trauma-focused PD for school nurses).	● There is no systematic or consistent support for educators and staff on how to identify and address student mental health needs including those related to trauma.	

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5. Does the district support schools to **effectively support and leverage school-based staff** to provide evidence-based therapeutic supports?[9]		Strategy: ☐☐☐☐▮
To arrive at a rating for this area, consider evidence from these sources: ● District policies and procedures around teaming ● Educator training on supporting mental health supports ● Staff roles and responsibilities, rosters ● Focus groups with school-based mental health staff ● School counselor ratios		
(4) Strong alignment looks like…	*(1) Weak alignment looks like…*	*Rating (4-1) and rationale*
● The district has clear policies and procedures around integrated mental health supports and staff, taking a team approach to ensuring supports are coordinated and transparent. The district proactively partners with community-based agencies to augment services offered. ● The district effectively leverages multi- disciplinary and diverse school-based mental health staff (counselors, school psychologists, social workers) to provide evidence-based therapeutic supports. Roles and responsibilities are clear and aligned to the skills, training, and expertise of each role; the same is true for supervisors. ● Educators are supported to implement universal practices for all students through a tiered system of interventions. Training is provided to identify concerning behaviors, use validated and reliable screening and assessment tools, and reliably track mental health and behavior improvement.	● Nearly all of the burden for supporting students' mental health falls on clinical staff (school social workers, counselors) or external community-based agencies rather than seen as school-wide effort. ● School-based mental health roles are vacant, undefined, underleveraged, or used inefficiently. Clinical staff are supervised by those lacking in training for effective coaching, supervision and evaluation of school mental health staff. ● Educators are not proactively trained and supported to implement; One-shot awareness building PD that don't connect strategies for responding to students' needs.	
● *School counselors:* School counselors are staffed at or below 250:1 (per recommendation of the American School Counselor Association). They focus on academic, social emotional and postsecondary domains, use data to target supports, and advocate for reform of policies and practices that perpetuate inequities.	● *School counselors:* School counselors are in place beyond the 250:1 ratio recommended by the American School Counselor Association. Their roles are not clear and/or they are often assigned to completing non-counseling tasks.	

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[9] For more see the EdResearch for Recovery [Preparing Schools to Meet the Needs of Students Coping with Trauma and Toxic Stress](#) brief.

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STEP 2: Prioritize

Prioritization is key for successful implementation of recovery initiatives. Teams should prioritize where to focus on strengthening alignment based on what will provide the greatest impact, opportunity, and results for students.

Analyze: Based on the ratings and look-fors from the reflection rubric, consider which areas should be top priority to better align with evidence. In particular, consider the following:

- Which areas are least aligned to evidence currently, and might benefit the most from progress in the coming months?
- Which areas are most aligned with internal strategic goals and existing priorities?
- Which areas have the greatest need or would allow the greatest improvements in reducing inequities in performance and experiences across subgroups?
- For which areas or aspects do you already have district capacity and resources to execute (e.g., people, money, technology, stakeholder buy-in and or system momentum)?
- Which areas would you need to cadence first - either as required to be in place for others or would enable faster progress on others down the road?

If needed, map your top ideas on a chart like the one to the right based on the level of importance and difficulty of each.

Prioritize: Based on above, select up to three priorities to focus on for at least the next 6 months:

1.

2.

3.

Review: Reflect and revise priorities as needed based on how well they will contribute to more equitable opportunities and/or outcomes for students.

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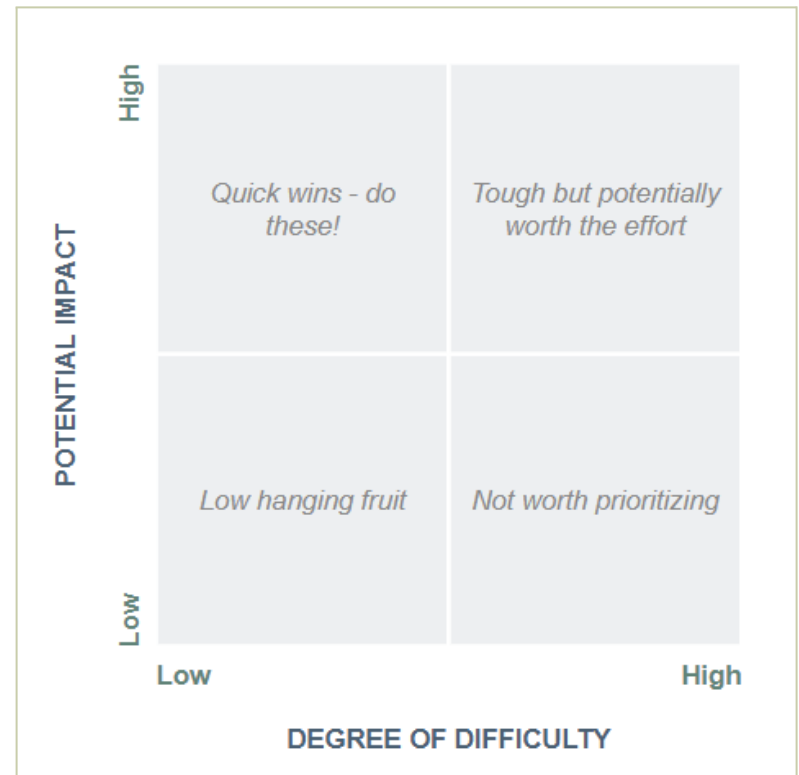
STEP 3: Plan

For each priority listed above, work with your team to complete the planning roadmap:

PRIORITY NAME	
Description *What is this you are focused on doing?*	
Rating and opportunity *What is the current rating of alignment to evidence (per reflection rubric, above)? What opportunities exist for strengthening this over time?*	
Root cause *What is currently standing in your way? Why haven't you achieved this to date?*	
What it would take *What would the district need to commit to, secure, or build to be successful in this work?* **E.g., resources needed ($, tech, people); policies or practices to establish; skills or knowledge to acquire…*	
Reduce inequities *How will this priority contribute to more equitable opportunities and/or outcomes for students? What specific equity considerations will be taken*	

into account to ensure this work results in more equitable outcomes?		
Stakeholders to engage *Who needs to be informed, engaged, and supported to make this successful?* **Make sure to consider stakeholders throughout the chain of people required to do the work: those involved in the design and decision making, those implementing and supporting, those possible or likely to block or resist the initiative, those with relevant expertise and/or resources, and the end users or recipients most affected by the initiative.*		

Defining success *What could you realistically and meaningfully accomplish in…*	…6 months	
	…1 year	
	…3 years	

Action plan *What specific action steps will you take to get there?* **Add more rows if/as needed*	Action	Timeline	Owner

STEP 4: Progress monitor

Periodically (ideally each quarter), revisit this tool to:
- Reflect on progress and alignment of this priority using the reflection rubric above to determine if/how rating has changed.
- Revise the plan in Step 2 accordingly to further advance the work and ensure even stronger alignment.