

Social/Emotional Support

In-Person Learning Resources for Parents and Caregivers at Chicago Public Schools — A Resource Created by Healthy Schools Campaign for Parents and Caregivers in Chicago Public Schools

MARCH 2021

HEALTHY SCHOOLS
CAMPAIGN

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Social/Emotional Support

To ensure a safe and healthy return to in-person schooling, social and emotional health must be addressed by the school and incorporated into the school day, especially as students grapple with so many changes around them. The pandemic and the dramatic change in routines have caused multiple traumas to many students. Plus, new rules and restrictions in the school day will present challenges to students. A unified effort from all school staff will need to be incorporated to make the return to school a positive experience and to overcome these shared traumas.

What Experts Say

Addressing mental health and trauma requires a coordinated effort across the entire school. Some of the recommendations from experts in the field include:

- High-quality social and emotional learning (SEL) curricula can be a great resource to foster relationships and teach important coping skills.
- Schools should consider implementing evidence-based trauma-specific interventions.
- Schools should establish connections with consistent community-building activities throughout the day, including morning meetings, trauma-informed professional development, open discussion of new environmental stressors and social emotional skill building.
- Schools should identify a clear and consistent process for identifying and supporting individuals in need of additional mental health support and services.
- Schools should ensure that all staff know how to connect students to mental health services.
- For schools with mental health clinicians, it is important that all school staff have a clear understanding of the process for referring students.
- Schools that lack mental health clinicians should establish relationships with community-based mental health providers and develop a system for making referrals.
- Schools may consider taking advantage of expanded access to telehealth to maintain mental health services while providing distance learning.
- It is particularly important to ensure that students and their families have access to culturally and linguistically appropriate treatment.
- Schools should also pay attention to the mental health needs of school staff. Given these added stressors, schools should offer staff resources that support their own wellness—especially related to trauma.
- Social and emotional support at the school should address both in-person and distance learning situations.

Schools should be focused on building trust with families in their districts through transparency, open communication and rigorous safety measures. This trust issue is a significant barrier to success in restoring in-person learning and requires direct attention and engagement.

It will be important for schools to acknowledge that not all communities have experienced the pandemic in the same way. Black, Latinx, Native American communities and other marginalized groups have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic due to the longstanding impacts of systemic racism in the health, education, housing, and justice sectors (among others). Many students and staff may also be dealing with the impact of nationwide protests sparked by the killing of Black people by law enforcement officials.

What CPS Says

Schools will ensure students are consistently connected to their teachers and peers while maintaining safe, physically distant interactions. Teachers will create welcoming and predictable learning environments through routines and rituals to improve academic outcomes and wellbeing for students.

Social-emotional skill development will support students to connect, heal and thrive in this time of uncertainty and

transition. Schools will increase their efforts to teach student's specific language to identify and articulate their feelings and communicate their needs.

Parents and caregivers can expect their schools to share lessons and resources to reinforce the skills being taught in the remote and in-person classroom. Additionally, parents and caregivers can participate in a Family and Community Engagement in Education (FACE2) virtual workshop.

The CPS Crisis Team will be available to support school communities in the event of severe sickness or death. This support includes collaborating with the school staff to develop school support plans and ensure clinical and emotional support for the school community.

Parents and Caregivers Should Know

CPS has incorporated some considerations for a trauma-informed return to school, with resources available for staff, students and families to take advantage of. Your role as a parent or caregiver will be to continue to utilize these resources and to ensure the school is staying vigilant in providing the necessary social and emotional support for your child. Some questions to consider include:

- Will the school provide morning meetings or regular virtual meetings to discuss and explain new rules in a positive manner?
- Will CPS be providing social and emotional support to teachers and staff?
- Who is the point of contact for my family for additional emotional and social support needs?
- How will schools work to foster an environment that does not ostracize students and staff for a COVID-19 diagnosis?

The best practices included in "Social/Emotional Support" are based on recommendations from: Kaiser Permanente Report ["Planning for the Next Normal at School,"](#) [Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network,](#) [Referral Pathway Protocol for Mental Health Supporters](#) and [Addressing Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Youth Mental Health.](#)