



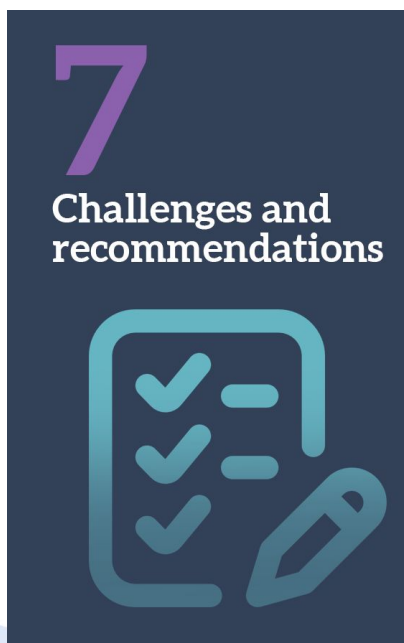
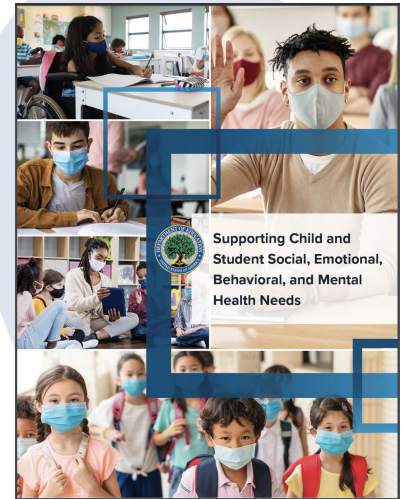
Why the Department of Education SEL and mental health guide matters for your K-12 school district

Why the Department of Education created the guide

In October 2021, the U.S. Department of Education released a new resource, [Supporting Child and Student Social, Emotional, Behavioral and Mental Health](#). The [goal](#) of the guide is to “enhance the promotion of mental health and the social and emotional well-being among children and students.” Children and teens across the U.S. face a mental health crisis that has become more critical because of the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, they are in dire need of mental health services, and school districts are in a position to help.

School districts need to focus more on students’ overall well-being and equitable access to education. Unless districts address the pandemic’s complete impact on students, educators and staff, students won’t be able to have full access to or participation in learning.

The Department of Education believes that the resource will help schools and programs build a nurturing environment for the educational community. With evidence-based support, school districts can implement prevention and intervention practices to meet learners’ full needs.



Seven key challenges and recommendations for K-12 schools

The Department of Education released seven key challenges for providing social, emotional and behavioral supports to improve students’ mental health. The guide also includes recommendations for educators to tackle the challenges.

First, we'll take a look at how the issues relate specifically to K-12 learners and school communities. Then, we'll then dive into how Hāpara supports each recommendation.

Challenge and recommendation 1

Challenge 1: Rising mental health needs and disparities among children and student groups

The Department of Education resource stresses that there are mental health challenges, especially for students based on “school level, socio-economic and housing status, race, color, national origin, ethnicity, language, or immigration status, sex, LGBTQI+ status, religious identity, and disability.”

Children and teens in these student groups often have increased mental health needs, and the pandemic disrupted any supports that schools were providing them. Concerns include student loneliness, anxiety about the pandemic and online learning struggles.

Recommendation 1: Prioritize wellness for each and every child, student, educator and provider



Educator wellness is tied to student wellness. It is essential to creating a healthy school climate, including lower rates of teacher absences. The guide suggests prioritizing stress reduction and establishing realistic workloads for teachers.

When teachers have the resources and support they need, they don't feel overwhelmed and can do a better job serving their students' needs.

Educators who create positive classroom relationships impact their students' health and mental wellness. It's also important for teachers to establish structure, routines and positive expectations during learning, as well as incorporating wellness into routines.



How Hāpara can help

One of Hāpara's main goals is to make online learning easier for teachers and learners and help teachers create positive learning experiences. The Hāpara Instructional Suite gives teachers the support they need by simplifying their workflows and making it easier to keep learners engaged and safe online. As a result, Hāpara tools ease both stress and workloads.

For example, teachers are supposed to differentiate instruction, give students personalized learning opportunities and build a positive classroom climate. However, with different backgrounds and academic levels in one classroom, it can be overwhelming to serve every student's needs.

Some students were also not able to get the mental health or instructional support they needed in person when schools closed. That's why it's important to have tools in place that support students even when they're not able to attend in-person classes. Hāpara tools help schools solve these problems whether learning is in person or remote.

[Hāpara Workspace](#) is a central hub for lessons, projects and units. Teachers can find digital learning resources aligned to standards and easily share them with groups of students or individual learners. Teachers and teams can also create culturally-responsive materials. For example, Workspaces can give learners new perspectives on race, religious identities, immigration and LGBTQI+ issues.

They can also create Workspaces in multiple languages to support EL students or versions with interventions included for special needs learners. Teachers can quickly create groups within Workspace and share different versions of learning materials with groups.

In Workspace, teachers can also select if they'd like learners to collaborate in a group, which can help promote positive relationships. Even if learners are at home due to school closings, they can work together rather than feel isolated.

[Hāpara Teacher Dashboard](#) takes all student files and pulls them into one dashboard. Teachers can quickly access student work, such as Google Docs, Slides or Sheets, and leave personalized feedback. Positive feedback promotes growth and can support mental health, and Teacher Dashboard helps educators give consistent and timely feedback.

Another tool, [Hāpara Highlights](#), helps teachers give students guidance and teach digital citizenship when they're learning online. This capability makes remote learning more manageable for teachers and gives students positive expectations and support.

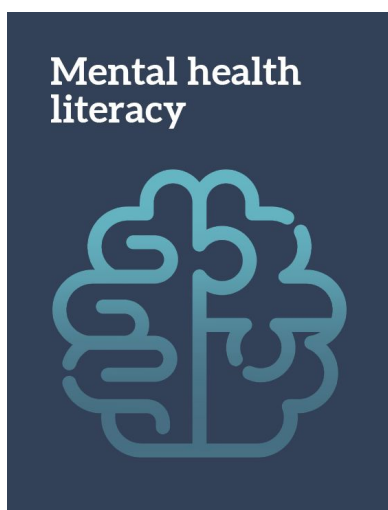
[Hāpara Student Dashboard](#) gives students one hub for all of their class announcements and files. This centralized location creates structure and routines for students so they know what to expect, even when they're learning remotely at home.

Challenge and recommendation 2

Challenge 2: Perceived stigma is a barrier to access

The Department of Education notes that “adverse events in early childhood are linked to persistent mental health problems.” Not all children and teens seek out the mental health support that they need, though. Perceived stigma in the public is one of the main reasons that students and their families don't pursue mental health care. Culture, tradition and access to healthcare also feed into public stigma.

Students who face challenges in mental health systems often get labeled negatively, causing them to self-stigmatize, agreeing with the public stigma. Because of this, they don't usually ask for help.



Recommendation 2: Enhance mental health literacy and reduce stigma and other barriers to access

The recommendation is for educators to improve mental health literacy and define mental health across the school district. Educators can provide support to students by showing understanding and appreciation for mental health and its challenges. This support includes helping students manage and express their emotions, form close relationships, explore their environment and learn to lead successful lives.

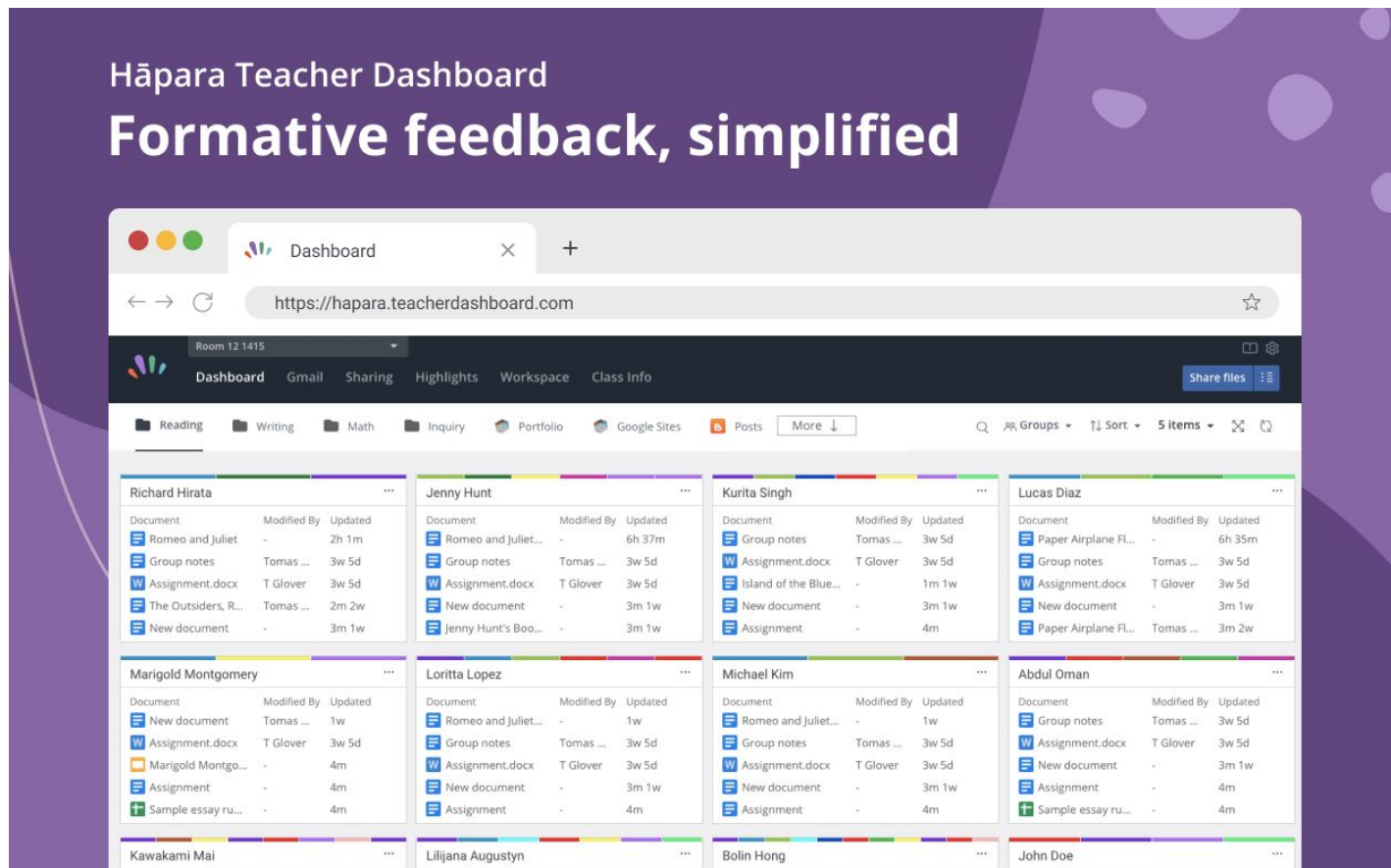
Schools should use similar processes for all of their SEL and mental health supports and discuss mental health language, terms and acronyms with students and the school community.

How Hāpara can help

Instructional teams and teachers can use Workspace to find and create interactive lessons and activities that teach mental health literacy. Teams can collaborate and share Workspaces across grade levels and subject areas so that they use similar language and processes for SEL and mental health supports. [Learn more](#) about how to add the five CASEL SEL support competencies into Workspaces.

Highlights also has a direct message feature that allows teachers to easily communicate with learners. They can send learners encouragement, in-the-moment feedback and reminders with short text and emojis. Highlights allows check-ins to be discreet so that learners don't have to feel self-conscious receiving feedback in front of the class.

Teachers can also choose to send notes to groups or the whole class. With consistent feedback in the moment, teachers can foster positive relationships with learners, helping them feel supported.



Challenge and recommendation 3

Challenge 3: Ineffective implementation of practices

Not all students have access to well-trained, experienced clinicians who can help with mental health needs. That means that school staff should be trained to support social, emotional and behavioral needs during teaching and learning.

Because schools are complex and teachers are busy, it can be difficult to deliver evidence-based supports. Schools need to identify what they should implement and also what they should stop doing. For example, they should stop any practices that result in stigma or harm to students, such as disciplinary measures that keep students from learning. If educators don't step in to help and students' mental health needs are not met, it can be difficult for students to learn and focus.

Recommendation 3: Implement continuum of evidence-based prevention practices

The Department of Education recommends that school districts use a Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) framework. It organizes evidence-based practices that support educational, social, emotional and behavioral needs.

Essential prevention is Tier 1. This prevention tier focuses on holistic wellness for students, their families and school staff. Its goal is to set positive, predictable and safe routines and environments. Teachers should incorporate positive classroom practices such as engaging instruction, SEL instruction and culturally-relevant instruction.



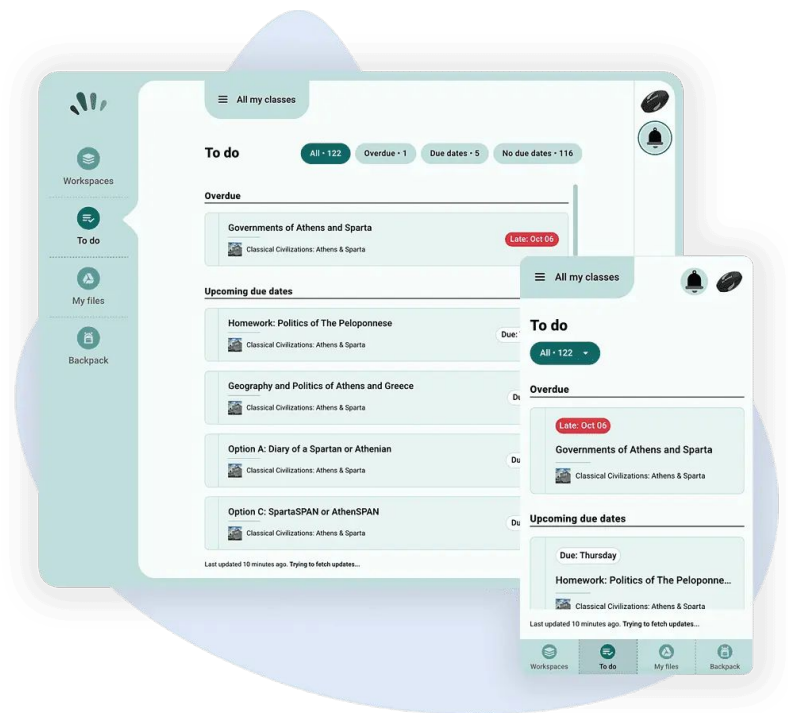
The Tier 2 prevention builds on Tier 1 but gives students additional reminders and feedback and more chances to practice skills. Tier 3 focuses on more individualized support for students with greater need, based on data.

Educators are also encouraged to address the needs of underserved students and develop specific strategies to support them. Because they are at higher risk for mental health challenges and may not receive the care they need, it's crucial to give them differentiated support.

How Hāpara can help

Hāpara tools help teachers set routines for students and create engaging learning experiences. [Student Dashboard](#) gives learners support by teaching them executive functioning skills. Learners get one-click access to announcements, Workspaces and Google Drive files.

As mentioned, Workspace allows teachers and teams to find, adapt or create interactive lessons and activities. These can include SEL-based activities and standards-based culturally-responsive curriculum. Workspaces are engaging and fun, and teachers can send personalized Workspaces to learners based on their needs.



School counselors can put together resources for learners using Student Dashboard to provide individualized support and tracking for their student's mental health needs. Parents can also sign into Hāpara with their learners and review materials together, which is especially helpful for at-home support and fostering a positive support system.

Challenge and recommendation 4

Challenge 4: Fragmented delivery systems

Teachers, counselors, school psychologists and social workers often work in isolation within the school. This seclusion affects students, especially those with disabilities. States across the U.S. are working on strengthening SEL and mental health supports for young children, but the ability of systems to identify those needs has varied. There are differences in screening, referrals and getting and providing services. Children are also being served in varying settings, such as child care, home and schools.

Recommendation 4: Establish an integrated framework of educational, social, emotional and behavioral health support for all

The Department of Education recommends again that school districts use an MTSS framework to integrate education, health and mental health. Instead of focusing on each separately, mental health should be part of students' education.

When learning and social environments are positive at school, students feel safe and are able to learn more. Teachers can create supportive environments through positive student connections, engaging learning experiences and giving positive feedback. It's also recommended that teachers give explicit SEL instruction and embed SEL into other academic content.



Teacher Dashboard helps teachers efficiently give personalized feedback to learners. That allows teachers to create a supportive learning environment where students feel connected to their teacher and to what they are learning.

The student wellness feature gathers data in real time and sends alerts via email and in the Teacher Portal. Within the Teacher Portal, educators can look into the alert further and then put prevention practices into place and help students in times of need. Hāpara is also committed to [safeguarding student privacy](#).

Teaching teams can also create mental health assessments within Workspace. They can assign these to learners at the beginning of the year and share results with counselors. These diagnostic assessments can help identify mental health needs early on, and counselors and other team members can support students and provide appropriate interventions.

Challenge and recommendation 5

Challenge 5: Policy and funding gaps

Many students don't receive the mental health services they need because there are gaps in funding. State, district and school staff don't often know enough about policy and funding, and local and state organizations struggle to provide all of the needed mental health services. That means that grants and other types of funding are necessary.

The guide also notes that education law and policy "has a less direct emphasis on mental health supports." For example, current policies don't strongly support resolving ineffective disciplinary practices. There's also concern that traditional special education supports don't fully address student mental health.



How Hāpara can help

Educators can find or create engaging Workspaces that focus on mental health topics to integrate education and mental health. Teachers can also [add SEL language into Workspaces](#) for academic instruction, explicit SEL instruction and to create a positive classroom climate.

Recommendation 5: Leverage policy and funding

The guide recommends identifying mental health needs early to avoid costs down the line and using mobile crisis team services for timely, affordable access to screening, referral and care. Schools and districts should have policies for effective SEL practices and ensure that SEL gets equal priority to academic outcomes. There should also be policy related to how data is shared so that students receive the interventions they need while also having their rights protected.

How Hāpara can help

The Hāpara Instructional Suite is more affordable than most standalone educational technology tools. Hāpara believes in providing school districts a cost-effective platform so that effective instruction and meaningful learning is available to every student.

[Deledao ActiveScan, presented by Hāpara](#), a K-12 web filter powered by artificial intelligence, has a student wellness feature option that schools and districts can add. Educators can't know all of the struggles that students deal with day-to-day. The student wellness feature monitors their website visits and email activities to alert teachers and selected school staff about wellness-related issues such as suicide, self-harm, cyberbullying and toxic language.

The student wellness feature gathers data in real time and sends alerts via email and in the Teacher Portal. Within the Teacher Portal, educators can look into the alert further and then put prevention practices into place and help students in times of need. Hāpara is also committed to [safeguarding student privacy](#).

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Challenge and recommendation 6

Challenge 6: Gaps in professional development and support

The Department of Education points out that school staff often lack mental health knowledge that can help students. On top of that, when teachers experience job-related stress, they're not able to give positive emotional support to students. Teacher stress can cause conflicts with students, lower classroom engagement, a gap in teaching SEL skills and negative disciplinary practices. The guide explains that Black students particularly "may be more negatively impacted by teacher stress, which may heighten the impact of implicit biases and lead to further inequities in discipline and academic achievement."

Recommendation 6: Enhance workforce capacity

The recommendation is for all staff in schools to be trained to support Tier 1 and Tier 2 practices. This is essential now because students are facing pandemic-related social, emotional and behavioral challenges. Schools also need to address learning loss.

One way to prepare educators is to give them planning and collaboration time to align SEL practices with instruction. Professional development time should also include mental health training, which can be in person or online.



How Hāpara can help

When teachers across the district use Hāpara tools, they support Tier 1 and Tier 2 practices to help each learner succeed. Hāpara also helps school districts make up for learning loss by giving educators streamlined tools to differentiate instruction, personalize learning experiences and feedback, share engaging and interactive lessons and activities, and equitably distribute resources to each learner.

Additionally, the Hāpara Instructional Suite supports staff collaboration, making it easy to share digital resources, including SEL-aligned materials. School teams can create Workspaces dedicated to mental health training and Tier 1 and Tier 2 practices. Teachers can move through these Workspaces asynchronously or during a collaborative professional development session.

Hāpara learning materials can also be shared with substitute teachers or teachers covering classes. That way students can continue to receive seamless learning experiences, reducing stress for educators and students.

Challenge and recommendation 7

Challenge 7: Lack of access to usable data to guide implementation decisions

The Department of Education recognizes how challenging it is for schools and districts to collect readily available and accurate data. Some measurement systems are also expensive and staff members don't have the training to use the systems. Additionally, school environments are constantly busy, making it difficult to collect data.

It's also challenging for schools to identify early risk factors for students, use data within the MTSS, address problems early, monitor student progress and document the impact of supports on students' social, emotional, behavioral and academic progress.

Recommendation 7: Use data for decision making to promote equitable implementation and outcomes

The guide recommends that school districts use data to understand the mental health needs of students. The data should identify areas of risk and areas where students are doing well. With this data, school teams can implement the correct interventions and monitor progress. For example, data may include absenteeism, student visits to specialists, learning outcomes and calls to community crisis centers.

Districts should also review data related to referrals for mental health services, interventions offered and outcomes. Teams should design goals about outcomes and review data before and during the school year. To do this, it's recommended that districts adopt a universal screening process to identify student needs.

How Hāpara can help

As mentioned, Deledao ActiveScan, presented by Hāpara offers the addition of a student wellness feature, an affordable universal screening tool which monitors student mental health risks across the district. School leaders get immediate data through mental health alerts that identify student needs. School leaders can then intervene and refer students for mental health services. Overall, schools can use this data to identify areas of risk, create goals and continue to offer interventions.

Hāpara gives schools and districts tools that make it easier to support every learners' SEL and academic needs.

Schedule a demo with a Hāpara team member to learn more.

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