



Supporting Student Well-Being and Learning: A Transition Tool

Leading schools is currently particularly intense and challenging. New research on the science of learning and development, examples of whole child approaches provide ideas about what should be done regarding the social-emotional health of students and how to start implementing in your schools and community. You may wonder where and how to start with the resources you have and the challenges your students, staff, district, and community face.

This tool is designed to support school districts and other entities (e.g., youth development agencies) to implement effective approaches to well-being and learning. The tool has three elements:

- **Transition Phase Guidelines.** These recommendations provide guidance for the transition from feeling locked into an unsatisfactory status quo to building the new system. The guidelines help you navigate the difficult issues of “getting started.”
- **Change Readiness Checklist.** This checklist help focus your transition while you make day-to-day decisions regarding immediate needs.
- **Action Lenses.** These three lenses provide a compass to help you focus on the interrelated elements of powerful whole child approaches. Like the checklist, these lenses can help you make better decisions regarding pressing short-term needs, since they focus on what is necessary for deeper change and more positive outcomes. The three lenses, which could also be considered a “North Star,” are:
 - Positive developmental relationships grounded in safety and development
 - Rich learning experiences linked to new skills, mindsets, and habits
 - Integrated support systems

Transition Phase Guidelines

The transition phase is a time when you and your colleagues determine the need for deeper change and commit to it with an understanding of what is essential when implementing whole child strategies. The transition phase guidelines can help ensure that the change will be

meaningful and produce the outcomes you desire. These six guidelines can help you lead this phase:

1. **Collaborate.** *Commit* to “joint determination”—as much consensus building as possible within the group with respect to the nature and content of what will happen. Because the work is complex, it cannot happen without collaboration as the foundation of the process.
2. **Explore the Need for Change.** *Engage* all partners and stakeholders in discussing “the need for change.” Assume that there will be disagreements about the need for change, and the nature of the changes needed. Honor the work that has already been done.
3. **Support Creative Thinking.** *Embody* a continuous improvement and problem-solving orientation to minimize the “fear of failure” as people consider new possibilities.
4. **Embrace Voluntarism.** *Demonstrate* unequivocal commitment to “voluntarism” with respect to the timing of participation.
5. **Involve Students.** *Partner* with students in identifying and addressing what needs to happen. The case for transformative change will be strengthened by the reality that our students need education to help them navigate the world successfully, effectively, and healthily. Consider the fact that students need new learning so that they can contribute to making the world a better place.
6. **Start.** *Identify* people who are on board and willing to begin the change process. Respect those who have questions and wish to proceed more slowly. Make it easy to observe what is working, and consider how other people can best join in.

Building consensus on the need for change, honoring the work that has happened historically, and facilitating effective and collaborative dialogues among partners regarding what needs to happen are the steps that will allow your district to begin this important work. There is no clear timeline or even a specific demarcation between the transition phase and the use of the three “action lenses.” The transition phase could take several months as people begin the action phases. Typically, momentum accelerates once the guidelines and action lenses begin to interact and kick in.

While leading change, you will still have to act to meet short-term needs and expectations. The action lenses can help you make these decisions in a manner that is more consistent with our best knowledge regarding how to promote learning even in tough times. You can use the action lenses as a compass or “North Star” to orient your actions while addressing immediate needs.

Change Readiness Checklist

This tool can be used by the leader and relevant teams to conduct an assessment regarding readiness for change in implementing whole child strategies that support learning and well-being.

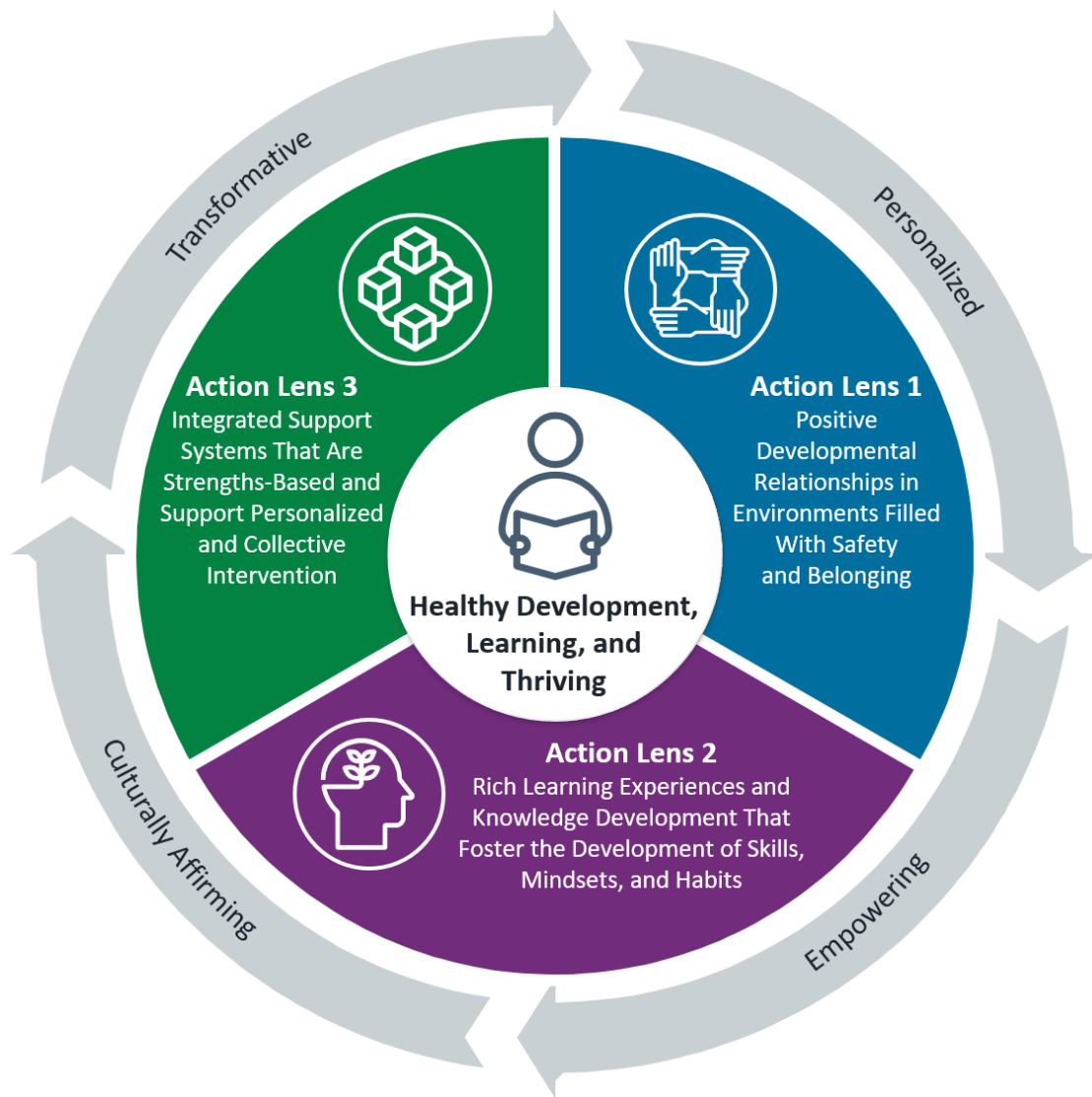
Change Readiness Elements	Needs to Be Developed	Partially in Place	Fully in Place	Actions to Be Taken
Collaborate				
The commitment to change is evident in public pronouncements.				
Meetings have clear goals focused on the identified change.				
Explore the Need for Change				
Everyone in our district understands why we need transformation.				
All communications highlight why transformation is needed and how we will proceed to gather input.				
Support Creative Thinking				
We encourage people to be curious, raise questions, innovate, and learn from interventions when they do and do not work.				
We collect and analyze all data, use the data to align our actions, develop and support staff learning, and communicate outcomes.				
Embrace Voluntarism				
We seek input from all partners, respecting individual choice.				

Change Readiness Elements	Needs to Be Developed	Partially in Place	Fully in Place	Actions to Be Taken
All decisions and actions are aligned with our public commitment to this transformation.				
Involve Students				
We involve students as partners in considering the goals and mission of the district.				
Students participate directly in monitoring progress of district goals and aspirations.				
Start				
Our district is organized to engage in this transformation in a coherent way that avoids fragmentation.				
Systems are in place to gain insights from all partners, including students, about this transformation.				
Ongoing Actions Once Started:				
Monitor implementation				
Align resources and assign roles				
Measure impact				
Communicate outcomes with respect to the transformation				

Action Lenses

The three action lenses help you consider the Guiding Principles for Equitable Whole Child Design and elevate the interdependent principles (i.e., transformative, personalized, culturally affirming, and empowering) that must be addressed to better promote student thriving, learning, and equity. The action lenses are:

1. Positive developmental relationships in environments filled with safety and belonging
2. Rich learning experiences that foster the development of skills, mindsets, and habits
3. Integrated support systems (ISSs) that are strengths-based and support personalized and collective intervention.





Action Lens 1: Positive Developmental Relationships in Environments Filled With Safety and Belonging

Think about how the proposed program, policy, structure, and practices provide **positive developmental relationships in environments filled with safety and belonging**—specifically the extent to which each indicator is addressed. Using a scale of 1 to 5, rate your level of agreement that each indicator is addressed:

- 1: Not addressed
- 2: Partially addressed for some
- 3: Partially addressed for all
- 4: Fully addressed for some
- 5: Fully addressed for all

What are positive developmental relationships?

Positive developmental relationships “are close connections through which young people discover who they are, cultivate abilities to shape their own lives, and learn how to engage with and contribute to the world around them” ([Search Institute, 2018](#)). These relationships are characterized by care, warmth, and attunement. They involve emotional attachment, reciprocal interactions, and a balance of power. Positive developmental relationships should be embodied and experienced in the interactions between all educators and all young people and their families.

Why are developmental relationships important? Developmental relationships enable students to manage stress, promote well-being, and fuel the connections that support the development of the complex skills and competencies necessary for learning success and engagement.¹

What are environments filled with safety and belonging? Environments filled with safety and belonging are environments that foster students’ sense of belonging, ownership, and agency; buffer students’ experiences of stress, trauma, and other adversities; and provide physical, emotional, identity, and intellectual safety and consistency. Safe environments have shared values, routines, and high expectations (e.g., [Springfield Renaissance School](#)). These environments support physical and mental well-being. Safe environments should be culturally and linguistically responsive and affirming for all students.

Why are environments filled with safety and belonging important? Environments filled with safety and belonging enhance student engagement, learning, and well-being, including students’ capacity to be creative and willingness to take risks.

It is crucial for our education system to prioritize the development of the full set of skills that prepare young people to be engaged, motivated, self-directed learners, learning how to learn and the other skills and mindsets that truly prepare young people for lives of productivity, fulfillment, and choice. Focusing on the development of these skills among all learners is a huge factor in closing the gaps that young people who experience inequity of learning and life opportunity experience.

Dimensions of the First Action Lens: Positive Developmental Relationships in Environments Filled With Safety and Belonging

Indicator	Rating	Comments and Notes (Including Source Data)
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As a result of the proposed program, policy, structure, and practices, school leaders and educators—in collaboration with students and families—will design schools and learning settings and environments that will facilitate personalizing relationships with students, supporting positive developmental relationships among staff, and building relationships with families.

Dimensions of the First Action Lens: Positive Developmental Relationships in Environments Filled With Safety and Belonging

Indicator	Rating	Comments and Notes (Including Source Data)
 Personalizing Relationships With Students—Example: Internationals Network		
Students experience positive, trusting, consistent, and stable relationships with educators across and within all learning settings and environments.		
Students feel welcomed, respected, and valued by educators for their expertise, knowledge, backgrounds, and identities.		
Students are known and valued by each other and by educators.		
Educators respond to students' specific needs, interests, readiness for learning, and opportunities for growth.		
Educators are attuned to the strengths, needs, and uniqueness of each student.		
Educators have established and support positive developmental relationships with individual students.		
Every student has positive developmental relationships with educators.		
 Supporting Positive Developmental Relationships Among Staff—Example: Teacher Collaboration		
Educators have structured time, opportunities, and support to work in interdisciplinary teams and collaborate with each other.		
Educators will take on leadership roles and engage in decision making on the policies and practices for learning settings and environments.		
Educators have opportunities to build positive staff culture and spirit and support individual and collective staff well-being.		
 Building Relationships With Families—Example: Parent-Teacher Home Visits		
Families experience positive, trusting, consistent, and stable relationships with educators.		
Families feel welcomed, respected, and valued by educators for their expertise, knowledge, backgrounds, and identities.		
 Building a Safe and Caring Learning Community—Example: Social Justice Humanitas		
Educators and students codevelop shared values and norms for how to handle situations in their classroom to provide a sense of communal responsibility and support		

Dimensions of the First Action Lens: Positive Developmental Relationships in Environments Filled With Safety and Belonging

Indicator	Rating	Comments and Notes (Including Source Data)
students in developing self- and social awareness, interpersonal skills, and empathy.		
Educators establish consistent routines across learning settings for students to reduce cognitive load and increase mental capacity for learning and community building.		
Schools foster empowering and inclusive learning environments that allow for all stakeholders, including students and families, to share input and/or perspectives that inform policies and practices for learning settings and environments.		



Developing Restorative Practices That Are Trauma-Informed and Healing-Oriented—Example: [Lakewood Elementary School](#)

Schools avoid zero-tolerance policies and practices. Instead, they employ restorative practices and other nonpunitive and supportive approaches to school safety and school discipline.		
Educators avoid zero-tolerance policies and practices. Instead, they employ restorative practices and other nonpunitive and supportive approaches to school safety and school discipline.		
School leaders ensure restorative and other supportive practices are implemented with quality ² and that educators have the capacity to embody these principles in their teaching and classroom management.		



Fostering Inclusive, Culturally Responsive Learning Environments—Example: [Connecting to the Community Through the Arts](#)

Educators, students, and families collaborate to create learning environments that are explicitly anti-racist by identifying, examining, and eliminating policies and practices that perpetuate prejudice and disproportionately harm historically marginalized student groups.		
Educators and students identify how their own experiences and culture affect their attitudes and behaviors and how their biases, prejudices, beliefs, and behaviors affect others (e.g., Freedom Schools). ³		
Educators and students respect and value others' and each other's cultures, sexual orientation, and gender identities, heritages, and traditions.		

Dimensions of the First Action Lens: Positive Developmental Relationships in Environments Filled With Safety and Belonging		
Indicator	Rating	Comments and Notes (Including Source Data)
Schools and educators are culturally and linguistically competent and respect, value, affirm, and leverage student and family identities, heritages, traditions, and cultural knowledge.		
Schools and educators make curricular choices and create an environment that represents all students' backgrounds and identities.		



Action Lens 2: Rich Learning Experiences and Knowledge Development That Foster the Development of Skills, Mindsets, and Habits

Think about how the proposed program, policy, structure, and practices provide **rich learning experiences that foster the development of skills, mindsets, and habits**—specifically the extent to which each indicator is addressed. Using a scale of 1 to 5, rate your level of agreement that each indicator is addressed:

- 1: Not addressed
- 2: Partially addressed for some
- 3: Partially addressed for all
- 4: Fully addressed for some
- 5: Fully addressed for all

What are rich learning experiences and knowledge development?

Rich learning experiences and knowledge development are pedagogical approaches, curricular designs, and assessment practices that enable students to understand material and disciplinary content and develop skills that will allow them to solve complex problems; communicate effectively; and, ultimately, manage or facilitate their own learning. These experiences and opportunities include

meaningful, engaging, and challenging work within and across core disciplines. Educators understand how students learn and support information processing by leveraging prior knowledge and cultural resources.⁴ Educators use these approaches to scaffold future learning and help students engage with new content and learn new skills. They believe that all students can succeed and that they have an obligation to do all that they can individually and collectively to help them succeed. Educators ensure that every student experiences rich and challenging learning environments that provide robust conditions for learning and development, provide sustained opportunities to learn, and support students' agency and groundedness. Learning partnerships between and among educators and students cultivate experiences and opportunities for development that are personalized and engaging and reflect that each student is a unique individual and will follow their own distinct pathway toward goals for student learning and development. Two sets of factors that are key to student motivation and learning are (1) the nature of learning tasks and contexts and (2) educators' and students' beliefs about student strengths and capacity to grow and learn.

Why are rich learning experiences and knowledge development important? This kind of learning process can help students develop the executive functioning and metacognitive skills needed to become more self-directed learners. These skills are essential both for learning environments within school settings and for future college and career environments.

What is the development of skills, habits, and mindsets? Development of the types of skills, habits, and mindsets outlined in the playbook⁵ foster social, emotional, and cognitive skills along with (1) content- and domain-specific knowledge and (2) mindsets that support growth, belonging, and a sense of purpose. Foundational skills (e.g., self-regulation, executive functions, self- and social awareness, and stress management) and mindsets (e.g., growth mindset, self-efficacy, and sense of belonging) lay the groundwork for higher-order skills and mindsets (e.g., agency, academic tenacity, curiosity). Development of productive skills, habits, and mindsets involves educators explicitly teaching, modeling, and reinforcing important skills and empowering students to practice these skills with growing independence. When these skills are practiced sufficiently to become habits, they support effective, productive, and engaged learning and the ability of learners to transfer their learning to new situations.

Why is the development of these types of skills, habits, and mindsets important? There are dynamic and inextricable links between social, emotional, and cognitive processes and development.

It is crucial for our education system to prioritize the development of the full set of skills that prepare young people to be engaged, motivated, self-directed learners, learning how to learn and the other skills and mindsets that truly prepare young people for lives of productivity, fulfillment, and choice. Focusing on the development of these skills among all learners is a huge factor in closing the gaps that young people who experience inequity of learning and life opportunity experience.

Dimensions of the Second Action Lens: Rich Learning Experiences and Knowledge Development That Foster the Development of Skills, Mindsets, and Habits

Indicator	Rating	Comments and Notes (Including Source Data)
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As a result of the proposed program, policy, structure, and practices, school leaders and educators—in collaboration with students and families—will design schools and learning settings and environments that will facilitate supporting diverse learners through universal design for learning, scaffolding for success, supporting effective inquiry and project-based learning, and culturally responsive pedagogy.



Supporting Diverse Learners Through Universal Design for Learning—Example: [San Francisco International High School](#)

Educators support and empower students, individually and collectively, in their distinct journeys of learning and development by both personalizing individual learning and supporting collaborative learning and classroom or school-wide learning communities.

Educators leverage students' prior knowledge and interests, support multiple ways for students to engage in learning, and provide opportunities for students to use multiple tools and modes of expression.



Scaffolding for Success—Example: [Formative Assessments](#)

Educators flexibly scaffold student learning and employ differentiating strategies to reach learning goals.

Educators employ strengths-based approaches to address students' needs.

Educators design motivating, engaging, and authentic activities and tasks that leverage students' individualized experiences, talents, and interests.

Educators provide support to students when necessary to enable students to gain and practice complex and deeper learning skills.



Supporting Effective Inquiry and Project-Based Learning—Example: [Pasadena Unified](#)

Educators create opportunities for students to regularly engage in project-based learning that incorporates setting goals, managing time and resources, and figuring out a learning process.

Schools have processes for students and educators to receive timely and constructive feedback (formal and informal) and provide opportunities for students to reflect on and revise work (e.g., [Pasadena Unified School District](#)).

Dimensions of the Second Action Lens: Rich Learning Experiences and Knowledge Development That Foster the Development of Skills, Mindsets, and Habits

Indicator	Rating	Comments and Notes (Including Source Data)
Educators use performance assessments and rubrics focused on higher order thinking skills and applications of knowledge and skills that reflect use in the real world (see more about inquiry-based learning).		
Students engage in collaborative work (see more about inquiry-based learning).		
 Culturally Responsive Pedagogy—Example: UCLA Community School		
Educators use culturally responsive pedagogy and engage with students in ways that build upon students and others’ cultures, identities, knowledge, and experiences.		
School leaders and educators review, design, and employ curricula, instruction, and assessments to (1) promote robust learning, and (2) ensure that they counter institutionalized privilege and prejudice. ⁷		
 Integrating Social, Emotional, and Cognitive Development Into Learning—Example: East Palo Alto Academy		
Educators, students, and families collaboratively identify, define, and cultivate students’ skills, habits, and mindsets across curricula and in all learning settings.		
Educators receive direct, ongoing coaching and support to ensure meaningful engagement of students in developing skills, habits, and mindsets.		
School leaders have growth mindsets, set high expectations, and provide the necessary resources and supports to educators to ensure meaningful student engagement.		
Educators provide students, individually and collectively, with frequent opportunities and dedicated time to learn, use, and practice skills, habits, and mindsets during learning, instruction, and activities across all curricula and learning settings.		
Educators foster and align content- and domain-specific learning (both academic and nonacademic) with integrated social, emotional, and cognitive skills, along with productive mindsets, across curricula and in all learning settings and environments.		

Dimensions of the Second Action Lens: Rich Learning Experiences and Knowledge Development That Foster the Development of Skills, Mindsets, and Habits

Indicator	Rating	Comments and Notes (Including Source Data)
 Developing Productive Habits and Mindsets—Example: Presumpscot Elementary School report		
Educators cultivate students' developing productive mindsets that support perseverance and academic resilience by offering opportunities for feedback and revision.		
Educators foster students' executive functioning by engaging students in planning, organizing, problem-solving, and self-management activities, including projects and exhibitions of learning.		
Students have experiences to develop interpersonal and communication skills.		
Students have routine opportunities to collaborate with peers and to assess and describe their social, emotional, and academic learning.		
Educators encourage students' development of reflective mindsets and skills that enable students to evaluate personal strengths, challenges, and progress toward goals.		
Educators promote students' development of self- and social awareness of (1) the impacts of institutionalized racism and privilege on their attitudes, experiences, and opportunities, and (2) how to counter them.		
Students have opportunities to develop compassionate and civic mindsets that encourage them to treat others with kindness, embrace different identities, and contribute positively to their communities.		



Action Lens 3: Integrated Support Systems That Are Strengths-Based and Support Personalized and Collective Intervention

Think about how the proposed program, policy, structure, and practices build **ISSs that are strengths-based and support personalized and collective intervention**—specifically the extent to which each indicator is addressed. Using a scale of 1 to 5, rate your level of agreement that each indicator is addressed:

- 1: Not addressed
- 2: Partially addressed for some
- 3: Partially addressed for all
- 4: Fully addressed for some
- 5: Fully addressed for all

What is an ISS? An **ISS** reinforces learning and learning environments by aligning and making available school and community resources for physical and mental health, social services, and expanded learning time that can be individualized to build upon the strengths, and address the needs, of every learner. Schools and educators integrate and leverage these resources and incorporate them into routine practices so that students' needs are readily identified and met holistically, without delays. The ISS should be strengths-based, be culturally responsive, and promote equity. It should do this by addressing barriers to learning, customizing support, and focusing on engaging students and families, including those that have been disconnected, in a culturally competent, family- and youth-driven manner.^{8,9}

Why is an ISS important? An ISS can mitigate barriers, enhance coping, strengthen resilience, help reduce opportunity gaps, and support student achievement.

All students have unique assets and interests to build upon in their learning journeys. All students experience challenges that need to be addressed to propel their development and well-being. Educators must address students' challenges in individualized, strengths-based ways that do not result in stigma, shame, labeling, or segregation. Practitioners also have a shared developmental approach to thinking about students through a strengths-based lens that applies to student, family, and community assets. Orchestrating culturally responsive, integrated supports that systematically assess students' comprehensive needs and strengths and coordinate resources in a unified and collaborative way is essential.

Dimensions of the Third Action Lens: Integrated Support Systems That Are Strengths-Based and Support Personalized and Collective Intervention

Indicator	Rating	Comments and Notes (Including Source Data)
As a result of the proposed program, policy, structure, and practices, school leaders and educators—in collaboration with students and families—can and will design schools and learning settings and environments that will facilitate creating comprehensive, multitiered systems of support that include assessing student strengths, challenges, and needs, and providing universal, supplemental, and intensive supports and interventions.		
 Creating Comprehensive, Multitiered Systems of Support—Example: Center for Mental Health in Schools and Student/Learning Supports at UCLA		
School leaders and educators create and sustain an ISS that include assessments and the implementation of universal , supplemental , and intensive supports.		

Dimensions of the Third Action Lens: Integrated Support Systems That Are Strengths-Based and Support Personalized and Collective Intervention

Indicator	Rating	Comments and Notes (Including Source Data)
ISS providers implement the ISS in a manner that is individualized, consumer-driven, culturally and linguistically competent and culturally responsive, strengths-based, and asset building, and avoids stigma and labeling.		
 Assessing Student Strengths, Challenges, and Needs—Example: California’s CORE Districts		
Educators use tools to regularly assess students and provide insights into students’ individual strengths and struggles; patterns across grade levels and content areas; and school and community resources that should be accessed to meet individual and collective needs for programs and services.		
Educators collaborate to analyze data and identify effective interventions to support students while keeping a keen eye on those who have unique learning needs.		
 Creating Comprehensive, Multitiered Systems of Support: Providing Universal Supports—Example: Social Justice Humanitas Academy		
Educators provide universal supports to all students that include providing structures that support relationship building , collaboration , culturally and linguistically responsive approaches , and a shared understanding of development among adults.		
 Creating Comprehensive, Multitiered Systems of Support: Providing Supplemental Supports—Example: Gridley Unified School District		
Schools provide targeted supports to students through institutionalized practices, dedicated personnel, time, and practices such as high-quality, relationship-rich tutoring and extended learning time.		
 Creating Comprehensive, Multitiered Systems of Support: Providing Intensive Supports and Interventions—Example: City Connects		
Schools have structures to coordinate, monitor, and improve intensive, individualized services, including through partnerships, coordination of services, and regular check-ins.		

References

¹ Osher, D., Cantor, P., Berg, J., Steyer, L., & Rose, T. (2020). Drivers of human development: How relationships and context shape learning and development. *Applied Developmental Science*, 24(1), 6–36.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10888691.2017.1398650>

² We are using quality rather than fidelity because it is important to both adapt evidence-based programs to specific contexts while ensuring the quality and spirit of the desired implementation. Osher, D., & Dymnicki, A. (2018). Chapter four: Selecting the right programs, strategies, and approaches. In D. Osher, D. Moroney, & S. Williamson (Eds.), *Creating safe, equitable, engaging schools: A comprehensive, evidence-based approach to supporting students* (pp. 51–60). Harvard Education Press.

³ Frances, K., & Osher, D. (2018). Chapter six: The centrality of cultural competence and responsiveness. In D. Osher, D. Moroney, & S. Williamson (Eds.), *Creating safe, equitable, engaging schools: A comprehensive, evidence-based approach to supporting students* (pp. 79–86). Harvard Education Press.

⁴ Osher, D., Cantor, P., Berg, J., Steyer, L., & Rose, T. (2020). Drivers of human development: How relationships and context shape learning and development. *Applied Developmental Science*, 24(1), 6–36.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10888691.2017.1398650>

⁵ Not all skills, mindsets, and habits are healthy or equity-promoting. In this section, when we refer to skills, habits, and mindsets, we are specifically referring to those described in the playbook. For example, it is important to promote growth mindsets and avoid the development of fixed mindsets.

⁶ Salinger, T., & Osher, D. (2018). Chapter nineteen: Academic interventions—use with care. In D. Osher, D. Moroney, & S. Williamson (Eds.), *Creating safe, equitable, engaging schools: A comprehensive, evidence-based approach to supporting students* (pp.235–252). Harvard Education Press.

⁷ Alim, H. S., Paris, D., & Wong, C. P. (2020). Chapter 15: Culturally sustaining pedagogy: A critical framework for centering communities. In N. S. Nasir, C. D. Lee, R. Pea, & M. M. de Royston (Eds.), *Handbook of the Cultural Foundations of Learning*. (pp. 261–276). Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.

⁸ Frances, K., & Osher, D. (2018). Chapter six: The centrality of cultural competence and responsiveness. In D. Osher, D. Moroney, & S. Williamson (Eds.), *Creating safe, equitable, engaging schools: A comprehensive, evidence-based approach to supporting students* (pp. 79–86). Harvard Education Press.

⁹ Wood, L., Osher, T., & Osher, D. (2018). Chapter eight: Partnering with families. In D. Osher, D. Moroney, & S. Williamson (Eds.), *Creating safe, equitable, engaging schools: A comprehensive, evidence-based approach to supporting students* (pp. 95–106). Harvard Education Press.

