

# Creating Safe Havens: Confronting Digital Threats and Supporting Student Well-Being



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## EDITOR'S NOTE

School is more than just a place for academic learning—it's a space for connection, personal growth, and self-discovery. But increasingly, it's being overshadowed by threats like bullying, deepfakes, and online harassment. These issues are affecting not only students, but also teachers and entire school communities. The **emotional toll** is real: many students report feeling lonely, frustrated, and overwhelmed—with 1 in 5 admitting to thoughts of suicide. In this Spotlight, we confront these **urgent challenges** and explore **innovative solutions** being implemented across the country to protect students and restore schools as safe, supportive environments.



Sonia Purido for Education Week

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## A Third of Public Schools Require Mental Health Screenings. Then What Happens?

By Lauraine Langreo

**N**early one-third of K-12 public schools in the United States now require mental health screening for students, but ensuring that they receive adequate follow-up care after a diagnosis is often much harder, concludes a recent study from RAND, a nonprofit research organization.

The study, based on a nationally representative survey of 1,019 K-12 public school principals conducted in October 2024, found that 30.5% of respondents said their school required screening students for mental health problems.

If a student is identified as having anxiety or depression, most principals reported their school typically notifies their parents (79%), offers in-person treatment (72%), and/or refers the student to a local mental health care professional (53%), according to the report. Less than 20% offer telehealth treatment.

About 40% of principals surveyed said it was very hard or somewhat hard to ensure that students receive appropriate care, while 38% said it was easy or very easy to find adequate care for students, the report found.

The findings, published in the journal *JAMA Network Open* on July 18, come as young people struggle with record-high rates of depression and anxiety. Youth mental health has become a top policy priority for school, district, state, and federal leaders over the past few years.

The RAND results show that barriers remain for schools to provide appropriate mental health care for students or ensure they receive it, but educators and school-based mental health professionals who spoke with Education Week said the results are encouraging.

“It actually was a little bit better than I anticipated,” said John Gies, the principal of Shelby High School in Shelby, Ohio. “You wouldn’t have gotten those numbers five years ago. There’s still a lot of work to be done, but it looks like we’re making some progress.”

Kelly Vaillancourt Strobach, the director of policy and advocacy for the National Association of School Psychologists, said that



Rebecca Blackwell/AP

Miami Arts Studio students, wearing green shirts for World Mental Health Day, gather around a table where members of the school's mental health club pass out information and give away stress balls and awareness-raising pins at the public 6th-12th grade magnet school in Miami. Youth mental health has become a top policy priority for school, district, state, and federal leaders over the past few years.

while the percentage is lower than what NASP would like to see, “it represents an increase in the number of districts that indicate they’re doing some type of universal screening, which is a positive.”

Indeed, an EdWeek Research Center survey conducted in the fall of 2023 found that just 10% of district and school leaders said their district used universal mental health screenings for students in every grade level.

While the RAND report found that most schools offer in-person treatment or refer students to community-based resources, it didn’t ask about the quality or effectiveness of those services or whether the available resources match student demand.

Jonathan Cantor, a policy researcher at RAND and the lead author of the study, said the results provide researchers with a baseline and that there needs to be more research into the barriers schools face when addressing mental health challenges.

“Data is really important for trying to answer these questions,” Cantor said. That means having comprehensive longitudinal data, to identify disparities, where there’s

growth, where there are declines [in services offered], and which areas of the country are struggling, he said.

### The barriers schools face in addressing student mental health

Screening students for signs of poor mental health is one of the best strategies schools can use to support students, according to experts. But districts have been slow to adopt screenings due to a lack of resources, and, in some cases, because of parent pushback.

“One of the challenges in deciding whether or not to do a screener is looking at, do we have the capacity, and do we have the resources to support the students who are at risk?” Strobach said. “We know that there is a shortage of school mental health professionals. I’ve heard from some district leaders that they would love to do this, but they don’t want to tell a parent, ‘Hey, your child has been flagged for potential mental health concerns, but we can’t help you.’”

Often, whether districts have access to appropriate mental health services depends on

their location, experts say. Districts near big cities tend to have more access to these services than those in more rural areas or smaller towns. Some districts are turning to telehealth to provide services to students, but that comes with its own challenges.

Even if schools have mental health professionals, their workloads are often overwhelming, experts say. The NASP recommends a ratio of 500 students to 1 school psychologist, but the national average ratio for the 2023-24 school year was 1065 to 1. The American School Counselor Association recommends a ratio of 250 students to 1 school counselor, but the national average ratio for the 2023-24 school year was 376 to 1.

Gies, the principal at 400-student Shelby High School, said the school has two counselors whose responsibilities are wide-ranging. They don't just check in on students' mental health. They also ensure students are meeting graduation requirements, help students with picking classes, and talk to students about post-high school plans.

"Sometimes they don't get the opportunity to just be counselors, and so we have to be aware of that and try and take some things off of their plates," Gies said.

Principal organizations in Ohio and nationally are pushing policymakers for more resources, Gies said.

So far, only two states have laws that provide funding and resources for schools to implement mental health screenings. Illinois is the first state to require schools to offer universal mental health screening for students in grades 3-12. New Jersey has a grant program for schools to provide mental health screening. Colorado had a law that created a mental health screening program for students in grades 6-12, but it was repealed during the 2025 legislative session, with the bill sponsors citing concerns that the law infringed on parents' rights.

"Even though we're making some strides, we still need help," Gies said. "We need continued funding to help us with this mental health crisis in our schools." ■



# No Skimping on Student Safety:

## How GoGuardian Beacon Helped Save a Life at an Arizona Elementary School

When Justin Price walked back into Elfrida Elementary School after 25 years away, he found himself sitting in a very familiar room.

"I'm actually sitting in my old principal's office," he said with a laugh. "Not much has changed at this school."

While the building may have looked the same as when he attended as a student, the world around it had evolved drastically, and with it, the needs of its students.

Elfrida Elementary is a small K-8 school in rural Arizona, with around 125 students. Price returned to take over as principal after decades away from the community. His journey back wasn't a straight line through education. In fact, it was never part of the original plan.

After serving 12 years in the Arizona Army National Guard, including two tours in Iraq, Price found himself transitioning into civilian life after an injury. It wasn't long before a substitute teaching job led to a full-time teaching opportunity, and eventually, administration.

But it was during his current role that he witnessed the power of having a solution like GoGuardian Beacon. This digital safety tool helps schools

identify and respond to students who may be at risk of suicide, self-harm, or threats and violence towards others, which could change the lives of those under his care.

### Life-saving alert

As someone with technology experience, it made sense for Price to be the one to initially keep watch over the alerts being generated by GoGuardian Beacon.

"I had all the alerts going straight to my phone, 24/7. That had been going on for a couple of months," he recalled.

That dedication would prove critical one night when an alert came through with a disturbing search query.

"It was something along the lines of: 'How many Tylenol do I need to take to not wake up in the morning?' And I thought, 'Whoa, that's specific, that's real-time, and that's dangerous.'"

Realizing the urgency, Price sprang into action.

"I went over to my home office, logged in, and pulled up the alert. I jumped into our student information system, looked up the parents' phone numbers, pulled out my cell phone, and immediately

called them. I said, 'Hey, where's Johnny\*? You need to find him right now and make sure he's okay.'"

Thankfully, the student's parents found their child before they could take their own life. Price was shaken, but also profoundly grateful.

"Even if that was the one and only time GoGuardian Beacon ever worked, it was worth it. The whole thing. Any cost. It's worth every penny."

### Tech with a purpose

That experience shaped how Price now views student safety and the responsibility that comes with tools like GoGuardian Beacon.

"If you're going to purchase GoGuardian Beacon, someone has to pay attention to the alerts being received. There needs to be a person watching at two or three in the morning. Because you never know when a student is going to decide to make an attempt on their life."

For Price, it's not about acting like Big Brother. Presence and intervention in moments that matter most are what solutions like GoGuardian Beacon help facilitate.

## Advertisement

### GoGuardian Beacon stands above the rest

"I tried Bark for two years and honestly wasn't impressed," Price said. "I don't think I got a single alert. People say, 'Well, it's free,' and I'm like, 'Yeah, but it doesn't do anything.' It's like receiving a car with no engine."

GoGuardian Beacon, by contrast, delivered results instantly.

"When I started using GoGuardian Beacon for the first time, I was impressed within 24 hours. And it's only gotten better over time. [GoGuardian's] AI keeps improving it."

The system learns and adapts, even distinguishing between genuine threats and harmless content over time.

"There's a band out there called Suicidal Tendencies... Eventually, [GoGuardian Beacon] understands, 'Oh, this is just music.' But if the next kid is googling instructions to harm themselves, I'm going to get an alert about that."

### Safe in more ways than one

While GoGuardian Beacon plays a critical role in identifying self-harm risks and other concerning behaviors, Price also leans heavily on GoGuardian Admin and Teacher to keep students engaged.

"It keeps students focused and on task in the classroom, and prevents them from going down some weird YouTube rabbit hole when they think I can't see their screen."

He's seen how classroom dynamics shift when students know they can't goof off.

"Once kids realize Mr. Price can sit in his office, send them a message, close out a tab, and still keep them on task even if he's not in the room, they stay pretty engaged."

He doesn't do this to be mean or overstep boundaries. It's this level of visibility and discreet support that

reaps benefits for learners – even if it might frustrate them at the time.

"It means more academic work gets done. That leads to higher test scores, and that's what we all want. That's what caregivers want, too."

He also praised how GoGuardian Teacher helps educators offer personalized support.

"You can message a student and say, 'Hey, it looks like you're struggling with this,' without anyone else knowing. You're helping them discreetly. The other students don't have to know."

### Bringing tech to a rural school

On top of keeping students safe, leading the charge to modernize a rural school can be challenging. Thankfully, Price was able to secure some grants last spring, which enabled him to purchase 80 new Chromebooks for his learners.

But those devices didn't go into students' hands without one key requirement.

"I knew I wasn't going to hand out Chromebooks to junior high students without the GoGuardian suite installed. It's like handing over car keys before teaching them how to drive. You just don't do it."

As a school administrator, Price feels a duty to not just his students, but their caregivers as well.

"We owe it to our students to make things as safe as possible. We owe it to their guardians to show we're not just caring for kids during school hours. If we send a device home, families need to trust it's secure."

### For any admin on the fence

Asked what he would say to a school administrator unsure about purchasing an edtech safety tool like GoGuardian Beacon, Price didn't hesitate.

"Do it. Get it. Cut your copy paper budget. Cut markers. Cut something.

**“Do it. Get it. Because this is going to save students' lives.”**

Because this is going to save students' lives.”

As his school continues to grow its technology program, the GoGuardian suite remains a central part of how Elfrida Elementary balances innovation and responsibility.

"Handing a Chromebook to a student is like handing them the keys to the internet. As a school, we have to take responsibility for that. My mindset used to be: 'What they do at home or on the weekend is their parents' problem.'"

Today, he sees his role — and his school's role — differently.

"Now, I've realized that with GoGuardian, I can step in and help in ways that matter...Especially in cases where parents might overlook something, intentionally or not."



**Justin Price**  
Principal

Want to see how GoGuardian Beacon works in action for yourself?  
**Request a demo today.**





Mustafa Bassim for Education Week

Students wait at a bus stop outside DeWitt Clinton High School in New York City. Teenagers are experiencing more loneliness than any other age group in the world, a new report from the World Health Organization found.

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## Teens Are the Loneliest People In the World, a New Report Finds. Why?

By Jennifer Vilcarino

**L**oneliness affects people of any age, but rates are higher among teenagers. Are social media and smartphones making the problem worse?

One in 6 people worldwide are affected by loneliness, and the percentage is highest among 13- to 17-year-olds (20.9%), according to the latest report by the World Health Organization's Commission on Social Connection. Teens who reported feeling lonely were 22% more likely to get lower grades in school, the report also found.

Some experts point to smartphones as a main culprit for the uptick in loneliness, but past research shows that owning one isn't necessarily the issue—kids using their phones to be active on social media is what can result in mental health problems. For example, being unfriended on social media or getting bullied for posting a picture online could lead to feelings of depression or anxiety.

Rates of loneliness have increased since the pandemic, the WHO researchers found. Teenagers are spending less time hanging out with friends in person than they did a decade or two ago.

Loneliness “has really serious impacts,” said Alana Officer, who worked on the report and is the unit head on demographic change and healthy aging at WHO. It can harm both physical and mental health, she said, and it reduces life expectancy.

In a conversation with Education Week, Officer discussed the role technology plays in loneliness and youth mental health. This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

### What affects 13- to 17-year-olds the most—loneliness or social isolation?

Social isolation is that objective state of when you have few relationships or few social interactions with others. It's something easily counted and quantified—how many friends you have, how many times you see them, etc.

Loneliness is a much more subjective state. It's more of a distressing [experience]—people report a painful experience that arises from this disconnect or this discrepancy between the social connections that you do have and those that you want or you feel like you really need.

If you look at the differences between those two forms of social disconnection in younger

people, the report shows that young people are most affected by loneliness. There's about 21% of teenagers aged 13 to 17 who report experiencing it—that's 1 in 5. That's pretty high, and then this number steadily decreases with age—down to 11.8%—when you get to people who are 60 and older.

But if we look at social isolation, it looks like older adults are, in fact, more affected than adolescents.

### Why do you think loneliness is such a big issue for young people?

I think there's insufficient research, really, in terms of the topic. We just talked about the fact that adolescents have higher rates of loneliness but lower rates of social isolation. They tend to have more frequent social interactions, for example, at school or with their peers.

But what seems to be driving the high rates of loneliness in younger people is a sense of dissatisfaction with the quality of the relationships that young people have—an unmet expectation in terms of what they're looking for from their peers.

### What role do you think technology plays in all of this?

[Social media] might reduce the quality and the quantity of the in-person interactions that people have. We know that when you've got excessive use of digital platforms, they might replace more face-to-face interactions, which we know are really essential for healthy social development.

There's evidence that says that frequent use of social media can increase the likelihood of social isolation and loneliness and can lead to things like unhealthy social comparisons, maybe exposure to misinformation. You might see more modeling of more negative behavior [like] cyberbullying that replaces the real-world interactions that kids and adolescents can have. And that's more of a problem, I think, for adolescents with poor social skills or social anxiety.

There's also things [called] “phubbing,” where people [who are physically in the same space] are being ignored because people are using their phone rather than interacting [with each other]. That has an impact on the quality of those relationships.

Other negative impacts that we know of are depression and anxiety, poor self-esteem and body image, disrupted sleep, fear of missing out on stuff so you keep engaging [online] and [have] fewer face-to-face interactions, but

also the harmful interactions that people can have online as well.

The potential positive benefits of social digital technologies is that it can strengthen existing relations. When you use them to connect with your friends or family, they can help reinforce those bonds. We know that sometimes for children with disabilities, for example, [social media] can provide a mechanism whereby they can connect, feel supported, and feel a sense of belonging. So that's really positive—building new communities.

And it's also fantastic for removing geographical barriers. It can expand your social network and it means that you can have support across distances.

### **What safeguards can be put in place in schools to improve the mental health of students?**

We didn't look that much in terms of school setting, but I think from our side, it's [asking schools], are digital technologies needed for education? Do they play an important role within the education process, within school settings? And I think the question is, if they do not, then why are they there?

There are many schools that have no phone policies within their school, and that seems a reasonable approach until they can evaluate what are the benefits and harms within those educational settings.

But I think really it's a matter of understanding what's our purpose in education and what are the tools needed to be able to educate young people.

I think we're going to get a lot more evidence of this going forward. But I think educators and teachers and school directors need to be asking questions around, what do these tools bring to that education process? And then families, they have to ask different questions around digital technologies and social media access. ■

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# The Online Behaviors Most Harmful to Kids' Mental Health, According to a New Survey

By Caitlynn Peetz Stephens

Children who post publicly online even occasionally are more likely than their peers to report feeling depressed and anxious and get too little sleep, according to the results of a new, large-scale survey that sheds new light on how young people's use of social media and devices can affect their lives in profound ways.

The survey—which will be repeated annually with the same group to assess how their experiences change over time—included about 1,500 11- to 13-year-olds in Florida who participated last November and December. It questioned them about a wide range of online behaviors and how commonly they engage in them or experience them, including news consumption, sharing false information, cyberbullying, and engagement with social media influencers, many of which previously had not been studied, according to the report.

The report offers fresh insights for school and district leaders as they continue to navigate rapidly evolving technology and its effect on children's mental health, engagement in class, attendance, and more.

"The data clearly shows that some things that kids are doing on these devices are harmful to them," said Sharon Hoover, a licensed clinical psychologist and professor at the University of Maryland School of Medicine in the Division of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, and formerly a co-director of the National Center for School Mental Health. "The takeaways for schools are that, yes, the use of phones, including social media use, impacts kids' mental health and that schools really do have a role to play in terms of digital literacy and ensuring kids are set up with proper knowledge and guardrails around these things."

Hoover was not involved in the survey.

## The mental health harm is about more than simply using phones, the report says

Overall, 78% of respondents said they have their own smartphone, and 99% said they often use at least one kind of electronic device.

But the report says that owning or simply



Georgievic / E+

using smartphones doesn't "appear to be the culprit in the adolescent mental health crisis." Rather, "publicly posting or sharing things online was associated with adverse outcomes," the report says.

"Of course, the act of posting itself is not likely what contributes to depression and sleep deprivation in children, but instead what potentially follows: negative feedback from peers and/or strangers, cyberbullying, unfriending or blocking, doxxing, or any number of other online ills," the report states.

A majority of students who participated in the survey said they post or share things publicly online sometimes or often, with students from higher-income families more likely to report posting. Fifty-six percent of kids from families that earn less than \$50,000 annually reported posting something or often, compared with 77 percent of kids from families earning \$150,000 or more.

Kids who post publicly online were more likely to report experiencing moderate or severe symptoms of depression and anxiety compared to those who did not make public posts online. Similarly, children who use social media daily were more likely to say that technology "impairs their daily lives" and affects their ability to get enough sleep because they're on their phones late at night, the report said.

The report did show some potential positives

to young people owning their own devices, though.

Respondents who had their own smartphone were less likely to agree with the statement that "life often feels meaningless" (18%) than those who did not have their own smartphone (26%). Smartphone-owning kids were also more likely to say they felt good about themselves (80%) compared with kids without their own phones (69%), the report said.

The researchers believe that children in the 11- to 13-year-old age group may report more positive well-being if they have a phone because they feel more connected and socially in line with their peers, said Stephen Song, an assistant professor in the University of South Florida's Department of Journalism and Digital Communication, who was part of the team that conducted the survey.

"The devices are an extension of social interaction, and without those devices, they're cut off in some ways from their peer group," he said. "There's also research that shows having autonomy is a good predictor of being happy and feeling good about things ... so when they don't have a phone they don't have as much autonomy."

He suggested that "forcing kids to not use phones more than needed," like restricting access to cellphones and social media outside of class time, "might backfire."

## Digital literacy is key to safer phone and social media use

Hoover argued, however, that such conclusions may be premature.

She said more research is needed to determine the longer-term impacts of phone ownership and social media use on young people's mental health and well-being before making broad policy decisions based on the survey's findings.

Regardless, Hoover said parents and schools should have clear "guardrails" in place to ensure children are using their phones and social media in safe and healthy ways.

Schools can implement "digital literacy" courses that teach students skills like online safety and how to identify misinformation, and can host parent information nights to discuss how social media use can affect children and offer recommendations about how to navigate challenges related to the use of devices and bullying, Hoover said.

"I think one of the tenets that we think about with schools is if it impacts learning, schools have to play a role in addressing it—not the sole role, but they have a role," she said. "Just like how schools partner to do hearing and vision screenings—it's something we know is predictive of kids' academic success because there is evidence that social media use, public posting, and cyberbullying are harmful to children."

Cyberbullying was found to be particularly harmful to the adolescents who responded to the survey.

The report asked kids if they'd experienced any of several forms of cyberbullying in the previous three months, including: having hurtful photos or videos posted about them; being called mean or hurtful names on social media; and having rumors or lies about them spread.

Students were categorized as cyberbullied if they reported that any one of those things had happened to them in the past three months. More than half (57%) reported that they had been cyberbullied in some way, and 20% said they experience cyberbullying weekly or more frequently.

Cyberbullied kids were nearly three times as likely as un-bullied kids to say they felt depressed most days in the prior year—32% vs. 11% respectively.

"This helps shed light on how destructive even minimal cyberbullying can be," the report concluded. ■



# GoGuardian Beacon & Gemini for Education

## Partners for safer schools

AI is transforming K–12 education, offering unprecedented potential for learning and creativity. While the benefits are clear, concerns about student well-being and potential misuse mean schools and districts need trusted solutions with robust safeguards and critical visibility.



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### Prioritize student well-being

Schools can embrace AI's educational power with guardrails that ensure safety and support, setting educators and students up for success.



### Use insights for proactive student safety

Together, our solutions provide comprehensive safety, seamlessly connecting digital insights with real-world innovation to support student well-being and prevent self-harm across all environments.

\*GoGuardian Beacon's comprehensive safety capabilities extend across all student online activity, including Gemini usage when accessed within the browser.

Published October 03, 2024

## This District Is Enlisting a Powerful Ally in Preventing Youth Suicide

Sometimes left out of district planning on mental health, school nurses can serve as a front line of support

By Caitlynn Peetz Stephens

**T**he country's largest school district is training its 1,500 school nurses in suicide prevention best practices as America's youth increasingly struggle with mental health problems and as suicide rates among young adults rise.

The New York City school district this academic year launched a new partnership with the city's health department and The Jed Foundation—a national nonprofit that focuses on suicide prevention and youth mental health—to develop a standardized suicide prevention course for health professionals in the district that serves nearly 1 million children in kindergarten through 12th grade.

By the end of October, all 1,500 of the city's public school nurses will complete the 90-minute online course, designed to bolster their ability to identify students at risk for suicide, conduct a screening test to determine their risk level, and refer them to other supportive services.

"Our schools aren't just places where our children go to learn—they're where they go to grow up, to find themselves, to make friends, and to have the support they need to get through whatever's going on in their lives," Camille Joseph Varlack, chief of staff to New York Mayor Eric Adams, who oversees the two city departments involved in the training initiative, said in a statement. "With this new partnership, we're making sure that our school nurses have the training they need to identify warning signs of suicide and get at-risk young people the help they need."

The training better positions school nurses to aid other school-based mental health professionals like counselors and psychiatrists in supporting students in need—a tall order as approximately 9 percent of the city's public high school students reported a suicide attempt in the past year, according to a report from the city's health department.

If successful, JED hopes to replicate the school nurse training initiative for other districts that are interested, which could help bol-



istock/Getty

ster much-needed support systems, said Tony Walker, JED's senior vice president of academic programs.

Nearly 40 percent of U.S. high school students last year reported feeling so sad or hopeless for at least two consecutive weeks in the previous year that they stopped engaging in their usual activities, according to the most recent U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's biennial Youth Risk Behavior Survey. Suicide is the second leading cause of death for people aged 10 to 14. Nationally, 9.5 percent of high school students in 2023 reported attempting suicide in the past year, according to Youth Risk Behavior Survey.

"At the end of the day, nurses really are just perfectly positioned as one of those very first bases for mental health services, so we want to make sure that they are trained and know exactly what to do and what procedures to follow to support students," Walker said.

"Oftentimes, when school district leaders are having this conversation around school mental health, they think of the school counselors and psychologists and nurses are left out of the equation, and that's unfortunate because we know nurses are often the very first places pre-K through 12th grade students turn when hurting either physically or emotionally."

Kate King, president of the National Association of School Nurses, agreed that nurses are often students' first contact when they're struggling with mental health problems.

Most school nurses have "foundational education in mental health," she said in a statement, but "ongoing education for current and evidence-based practices is important for school nurses to continue to provide the best possible mental and behavioral health services for students."

“  
**We know nurses are often the very first places pre-K through 12th grade students turn when hurting either physically or emotionally.”**

**TONY WALKER**

Senior vice president of academic programs  
 JED

**The training equips school nurses to serve as a front line of mental health support**

The JED partnership with New York City schools was prompted by the variability in the confidence of the district's school nurses to administer a suicide screening, according to

Walker. The screening is a brief set of questions that determines a person's risk level for self-harm and suicide. Some were very comfortable with the concept, while many others were asking district leaders for help and guidance because they were unfamiliar.

So the organization, school district, and city health department partnered to develop a standardized training. It includes modules that outline the current landscape of youth mental health challenges and common problems, as well as defining the nurse's role in supporting students; identifying suicide prevention liaisons in the school and community; recognizing the signs of a student in distress; assessing and screening students for their risk of dying by suicide; outlining the steps nurses can take when they determine a student is at risk of suicide; and how school nurses can care for themselves, manage burnout, and identify signs of distress in themselves as they continually work through challenging situations with students.

The training and its objectives align with existing New York City schools procedures about responding to tragedies and mental health challenges, Walker said.

"This training kind of just further links the how-to to the policy," he said.

The training also covers the ways in which the nurses and other mental health professionals in the school can and should work together to provide care. For example, the training outlines the steps a school nurse should take to loop in mental health support if a student comes to their office with self-inflicted wounds, Walker said.

As of Sept. 30, about 700 school nurses had completed the training. At its completion, participants are asked to fill out a survey to gauge its effectiveness. More than 9 in 10 participants reported they felt well prepared to incorporate the training into their daily work, and all participants reported an increase in their confidence in administering a suicide screening and helping students in crisis.

JED and the New York school district officials are discussing whether other groups of staff in the district should undergo the same training, and JED is hopeful it can be replicated for other districts, Walker said. ■



iStock/Getty Images

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## Students Are Sharing Sexually Explicit ‘Deepfakes.’ Are Schools Prepared?

By Lauraine Langreo

**S**chools are falling short in meeting the rising threat of artificial intelligence-enabled sexual harassment, concludes a new report from the Center for Democracy & Technology, a nonprofit that advocates for online civil liberties.

Forty percent of students and 29 percent of teachers say they know of a “deepfake” depicting individuals associated with their school being shared during the 2023-24 school year, according to the nationally representative survey of high school students, middle and high school teachers, and parents. (A deepfake is a digitally-manipulated video, photo, or audio recording created using someone’s voice and/or likeness without their permission.)

The primary perpetrators—and victims—are students, the report found.

While the act of sharing non-consensual intimate imagery is a long-standing problem in schools, the rise of generative artificial intelligence has made it easier to create and share fake intimate images, videos, or audio that seem real. In recent months, there have been several reported instances of students using AI tools to generate fake, pornographic images of their classmates and fake videos of their teachers or principals.

“The surface area for who can become a

victim and who can become a perpetrator is significantly increased when anybody has access to these tools,” said Kristin Woelfel, a policy counsel for the Center for Democracy & Technology and one of the authors of the report. “There’s really no limit as to who could be impacted by this.”

For those who are victims of real or deepfake non-consensual intimate images, the experience is “scary” and “traumatic,” said Anjali Verma, the National Student Council president and a senior at a charter school in West Chester, Pa. “I’ve seen it happen with friends and people in my life.”

Students, teachers, and parents report a lack of support and awareness about deepfake non-consensual intimate imagery. For instance, few students say their school has explained what deepfakes are (19 percent), how they affect those depicted (13 percent), and who to tell at the school if they see or hear about them (15 percent), the report found.

And 60 percent of teachers and 67 percent of parents surveyed say they have not heard of their school or school district sharing policies and procedures with teachers about how to address authentic or deepfake non-consensual intimate imagery.

Still, a third of students said their school does a good job of catching students who share deepfake non-consensual intimate imagery, while 1 in 10 students who have heard of such incidents

at their school said the student who shared it was never caught, according to the report.

### Questions to ask to help prevent future ‘deepfake’ incidents

In the current environment, a lot of schools focus on “severe discipline” for the perpetrators, Woelfel said. Those methods might include suspension or expulsion, as well as getting law enforcement involved, she said.

The problem, Woelfel said, is that there is almost no focus on preventing the conduct in the first place and on supporting the victim after the incident.

Woelfel and Anjali acknowledged that schools need a lot of guidance from policy-makers in order to have better response and prevention strategies, but they had some suggestions for where schools can start.

For prevention, Woelfel said schools need to better educate students and staff about deepfakes, asking questions such as:

- What is a deepfake?
- What is the harm of creating one?
- What are the consequences of making and sharing them?
- Who can they go to when they see or hear about these incidents?

Education and awareness shouldn’t just start at the high school level, Anjali emphasized. It should be a conversation that begins in elementary school, in age-appropriate ways.

“We have to start students very young, making sure that they’re aware of the [digital] world and the amount of power that comes with having this technology access,” Anjali said.

Support for victims could include providing counseling and resources for how to get deepfakes taken down if they were posted online, Woelfel said.

It’s also important to “take a step back and reevaluate” the school climate to ensure that students feel “empowered” to tell an adult when something bad has happened, Anjali said.

“We have to make sure there’s an environment where students are able to come to administration about these things without the fear of being judged,” she added.

The Center for Democracy & Technology survey included 1,316 9th- to 12th-grade students, 1,006 6th- to 12th-grade teachers, and 1,028 parents of 6th- to 12th-grade students. It was conducted this summer. ■



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Published August 15, 2024

## Online Sexual Exploitation Is a Growing Threat to Kids. What Schools Can Do

By Arianna Prothero

**O**nline sexual exploitation of children is a serious and growing problem—fueled in part by the rise of social media—and one which educators are well positioned to help combat, say experts.

One in 5 children receive an unwanted sexual solicitation online every year, according to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. To aid schools in countering this troubling trend in the new school year, the federal agency has released free resources for educators to learn both how to spot potential victims and how to talk to students about staying safe online.

The program is in response to educators asking federal officials for more resources, said Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas in an interview with Education Week.

Because kids spend so much time in school, DHS sees educators as playing an important role in keeping kids safe from online exploitation, Mayorkas said.

Teachers and school staff have the “ability to observe over time and see patterns of [kids’] behavior and anomalies in those patterns,” he said. “They are in a position of trust. And they are in a position to do something about it.”

DHS defines online child sexual exploitation and abuse as criminal acts by perpetrators—strangers or people the victim knows—

that exploit minors for sexual gratification or personal or financial gain.

It’s vital that educators are aware of the problem as it continues to grow, Mayorkas said.

“We have the omnipresence of the social [media] tools, we have the growth in the number of exploiters, and we have increasing vulnerability of the children to it,” he said. “In my view, the growth in the use of social media has not been accompanied by an advancement in digital literacy, and that chasm leads to vulnerability.”

DHS’s Know2Protect program launched in April, but it’s now getting updated with materials specifically for educators. The resources include training videos for educators on how to identify if a student is the victim of online sexual exploitation, printable posters to display in classrooms and hallways, activities for all ages of students to do in class to learn how to stay safe online, and educational handouts to send home to families.

Schools can also book free virtual or in-person trainings for students with agents from Homeland Security Investigations and the U.S. Secret Service.

### Are schools prepared to tackle this growing problem?

Research shows school-based prevention education programs teaching students about health and safety—whether it’s bullying or drug prevention—are very effective, said

David Finkelhor, a sociologist who directs the Crimes Against Children Research Center at the University of New Hampshire.

Finkelhor recommends that schools connect online exploitation education to other prevention programs.

“Safety and health all rely on certain core skills and capacities that kids need,” he said. “They include how to make decisions and have good judgment, how to empathize with people, how to manage your own emotions, how to seek help, how to extricate yourself from situations where you think something is going wrong.”

But unlike bullying or drug use, many of the fundamental concepts students need to learn about online sexual exploitation may be off limits in their school.

“We don’t know how successful these programs can be without comprehensive sex education,” Finkelhor said.

When sex- and gender-related topics aren’t taught in schools, kids turn to the internet to learn more, Finkelhor said, and that can lead them to unsafe spaces online. That’s especially true for kids who are questioning their sexual orientation or gender.

“These are kids who are particularly vulnerable to being victimized because they oftentimes don’t have an opportunity to talk about those things with people that they know, and they go online and that’s where they run into people who will exploit them,” he said.

The other roadblock to implementing any program meant to educate and identify victims of online sexual exploitation is bandwidth, said Noelle Ellerson Ng, the associate executive director for AASA, the School Superintendents Association.

It is true that educators are perfectly situated to help identify potential victims as adults who spend their days with kids and are mandated reporters—people who are required by law to report suspected abuse.

But any effort to incorporate prevention education in school schedules or educate teachers and other school staff on how to identify online exploitation victims runs into a larger debate over what schools’ roles are, said Ng.

“Any single day or single school year is a finite amount of time,” she said. “How much of that child’s K-12 experience should be direct instruction? How much of that child’s K-12 experience should teachers be out of classroom to get training? These are real time opportunity costs that we have to discuss. At the same time, relying on schools to do instruction only misses so much that needs to be done. You have inherent societal shortfalls that districts are well positioned to help support.” ■

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## A Child Took Her Own Life After Being Bullied. Schools Must Take Notice

The 11-year-old was mocked by her peers for her parents' immigration status

By Marc Brackett, Diana Divecha & Robin Stern

**O**n Feb. 8, an 11-year-old girl took her own life after being bullied by her peers over her immigration status, instilling fear that her parents could be deported and she would be left alone—even as the story that has been unfolding references an allegedly complex homelife. The heart-breaking death of Jocelynn Rojo Carranza in Gainesville, Texas, should shock us all into action. Her family describes her as having been a vibrant and loving child, yet she endured relentless bullying about her legal status that ultimately led to her taking her own life. Her tragic death is a reminder that bullying is damaging and can cost young lives. Schools must do more to protect children, especially those who are most vulnerable.

Bullying comes in many forms, both in person and online, and it remains alarmingly common in the United States. Studies show that at least 1 in 5 students reports being bullied each year. But behind every statistic is a child—someone's son, daughter, or sibling—whose life may be forever altered. The impact of bullying extends far beyond hurt feelings. Children who are targeted face increased risks of anxiety and depression that can persist into adulthood, along with academic struggles, and, in extreme cases, suicide. Every time a tragedy like Jocelynn's happens, the same conversations emerge. But the fundamental question remains: Why are we still failing to keep children safe?

Schools are more than places of learning; they are communities where children should feel safe, respected, and supported. That should be a belief we all share, regardless of politics or ideology. Every child—no matter who they are or where they were born—deserves to be protected. Yet, many schools continue to rely on outdated bullying-prevention programs that do little to address the root causes of the harmful behavior. These approaches often focus on punishment rather than teaching children how to manage emotions and resolve conflicts in healthier ways.



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Immigrant children, regardless of their actual legal status, face unique challenges that make them especially vulnerable to bullying—challenges that are often compounded by shifts in political rhetoric, which research shows can fuel aggression. Many navigate unfamiliar cultural environments, speak English as a second language, or deal with economic hardship. Some face bullying rooted in xenophobia or cultural misunderstandings. But here's the truth: These children are not "others." They are not statistics. They are young people who dream, laugh, and want to contribute and belong—just like every other child.

Ensuring that all children feel safe in school should not be a political issue; it is a matter of basic humanity. The ability to learn, make friends, and grow should never be contingent on a child's place of birth or the language they speak at home. The right to be safe in school is protected in every state for all students, at the federal level by the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Titles IV and VI), and enshrined in the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child.

We know what works. Research shows that when schools prioritize a positive school climate and emotional intelligence and relationship-building, bullying rates decline, academic achievement improves, and

students form stronger, more compassionate connections. This is not about "soft skills." It's about equipping kids with the ability to navigate life—whether that means standing up for themselves, resolving conflicts without violence, or simply treating others with dignity.

In fact, a recent large meta-analysis shows that social and emotional learning programs lead to reductions in aggressive behavior, improvements in mental health, and higher academic achievement. Schools that invest in SEL don't just prevent harm—they build environments where all children can flourish.

The safety of our children cannot be left to chance. Schools must adopt evidence-based approaches to bullying prevention that prioritize emotional intelligence, inclusion, and proactive skill-building.

To achieve this, we must:

- Shift from punitive discipline to supportive discipline that emphasizes teaching, guidance, and skill-building. Zero-tolerance policies often fail to address the underlying causes of bullying. Integrate SEL programs into school curricula to equip students with the skills to manage emotions, resolve conflicts, and build healthy relationships.

- Train educators and school staff in SEL principles and skills, including emotion regulation, so they recognize and intervene effectively in bullying situations.
- Foster a school climate where all students feel safe, respected, and valued. This can include the use of diverse materials and examples that reflect different students' backgrounds, abilities, and perspectives.
- Engage families and communities in efforts to create a supportive environment beyond the classroom. For example, parent discussion groups can foster connection and shared learning of skills like healthy emotion regulation.

Jocelynn Rojo Carranza's death is not just a tragedy—it is an alarm bell. A child—someone's daughter, someone's friend—was made to feel so unsafe, so unwanted, that she believed she had no future. Have we lost sight of our common humanity?

Too often, we get caught up in debates about what kids should or shouldn't be taught in schools. But at the end of the day, don't we all want the same thing: for children to grow up feeling secure, knowing they have a future, and believing their lives matter? In fact, our collective existence as a society depends on this.

When a child dies by suicide, it should shake us to our core. It should make us question what kind of world we're creating and whether we're doing enough to ensure every child knows they belong. If we continue to allow bullying to persist, we fail in our fundamental duty to protect children. Schools must take bold action to ensure that every child, regardless of background, can learn without fear.

The responsibility is ours, and the time to act is now. ■

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# Netflix's 'Adolescence' Asks How Cruelty Can Go Unnoticed in Schools

Peer bullying can be more complicated than many adults realize

By Marc Brackett, Diana Divecha & Robin Stern

As psychologists, we can assure you that Netflix's hit miniseries "Adolescence" isn't really about adolescence. Despite its title, the show is not a guide to raising or educating teenagers. It's a gripping crime drama set in a middle school, where peer bullying contributes to a tragic murder.

While crime dramas typically center on identifying a murderer, "Adolescence" poses a deeper question: Who is responsible for raising and protecting our children? The answers are complex. But what becomes painfully clear is how easily young people can fall through the cracks of adult awareness and intervention.

One key institution is conspicuously absent in the series' narrative: the school. As details of the bullying emerge, viewers are left wondering: Where were the adult role models in the school? How could such sustained cruelty go unnoticed? Where was the explicit curriculum to prevent bullying?

This omission may serve the show's dramatic arc, but it also reflects a troubling truth: Even caring adults often struggle to detect and interrupt the harm happening around them. "Adolescence" is not just a drama, it's a mirror reflecting our collective challenges. From the opening scenes, it refuses the simplistic binary of villain and victim. There are no caricatures, no cartoonish bullies or perfect targets. Instead, it reveals how even "good kids"—those raised with love, boundaries, and bedtime stories—can participate in cruelty that spirals out of control.

The show doesn't point fingers. It asks us, calmly and insistently, to look more closely.

Research shows that bullying is linked to academic struggles, increased dropout rates, and lower educational attainment. The consequences aren't abstract—they show up in the tears shed behind bedroom doors, the isolation of lunchrooms, and the quiet gaps between parents, teachers, and students who don't know how to talk about what's really going on.

And bullied students aren't the only ones affected. Roles in bullying are fluid: A student might be an aggressor one day, a victim the



E+/Getty

next, a bystander the day after. That bystander role—so often ignored—carries its own weight in moral distress, the psychological toll of witnessing harm and not knowing how, or whether, to step in.

Being bullied significantly increases the risk of long-term emotional harm—and, in some cases, violence. According to a 2019 U.S. Secret Service study of school violence, most school shooters were themselves victims of bullying. While every state has laws requiring schools to address bullying, legislation alone isn't enough.

Bullying isn't always loud or visible. Sometimes, it's subtle and strategic—the whisper of exclusion, the isolating glance, the screenshot shared without consent.

It can be physical—shoves in a hallway. Verbal—taunts, slurs, or jokes designed to wound. Relational—manipulation, exclusion, or gaslighting that undermines a child's sense of reality. And it can be digital. Online cruelty introduces permanence and panic: It follows kids home, glowing from screens long after dark.

Bullying doesn't emerge in a vacuum. It mirrors the broader culture. Racism, homophobia, ableism, and sexism all find new expression in group chats and hallways. If we fail to confront these underlying forces, we risk treating symptoms rather than root causes.

If "Adolescence" leaves us with one clear truth, it's this: Emotional health isn't automatic. It doesn't grow from good intentions alone. It flourishes when children are raised and learn in environments that actively support their emotional development.

Social and emotional skills must be taught with the same care and consistency as math or literacy. Yet, many schools still prioritize compliance over connection. Decades of research, however, have overturned the myth that social and emotional learning (SEL) and academic achievement are at odds. In fact, the opposite is true: SEL is foundational to learning, strong relationships, and student well-being.

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, or CASEL, defines SEL as the process by which people develop skills to manage emotions, show empathy, build relationships, and make responsible decisions. It's neither an "extra" nor an indoctrination tool. It's the infrastructure of healthy human development.

What school leaders can do now:

- **Practice emotionally intelligent leadership.** This work begins with adults, and the school leaders set the tone for emotionally intelligent culture and

decisionmaking. Emotional intelligence can't be handed off to students—it must be modeled by the adults in their lives. Every stakeholder must practice the very skills we want children to learn: self- and social-awareness, emotion regulation, compassion, and responsible decisionmaking.

- **Implement SEL communitywide.** Adopt the evidence-based programs supported by research and organizations like CASEL to build skills for all members of the school community. In a culture that favors fast solutions, we're tempted by one-off training sessions, slick apps, or zero-tolerance policies. But bullying can't be resolved in an assembly or with a policy. Skill-building is a developmental process. Healing takes time. It depends on trust, on relationships, and on consistent care.
- **Respond to bullying behavior with inquiry, not just punishment.** When harm occurs, ask: What emotions drove this behavior? How can they be addressed constructively? What does genuine accountability and repair look like?
- **Make kindness visible.** Celebrate compassion not just as a value but as a daily practice.

Research finds that students in schools with strong SEL programs experience less bullying, fewer behavior problems, and improved academic outcomes. When we invest in students' emotional well-being, we don't just help them feel better, we make learning environments safer and better suited to learning.

To truly prevent bullying, SEL must be embedded into the fabric of school life. That means rethinking how we lead, teach, and connect. It means cultivating a school culture where every child and adult feels seen, safe, and valued every day.

“Adolescence” doesn't offer tidy answers, and, in that way, it's more honest than most dramas. It leaves us with urgent questions: What if every child were taught how to manage emotions and navigate relationships? What if they felt empowered to stay rooted in their kindness and speak up against cruelty? ■

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*Permission to Feel and Dealing with Feeling, which is also a podcast. Diana Divecha is a developmental psychologist and assistant clinical professor at the Yale Child Study Center and Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence. She writes about research on children and families on her blog, [developmentalscience.com](http://developmentalscience.com). Robin Stern is a co-founder and senior adviser to the director of the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence, a psychoanalyst in private practice, the author of *The Gaslight Effect Recovery Guide*, and the host of *The Gaslight Effect Podcast*. Opinions are their own and do not reflect those of Yale School of Medicine.*



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1) Based on 2025 internal data

2) From March 2020 to July 2024, Beacon alerts notified schools and districts of 18,623 students at risk of harm.

3) Respondents from pilot schools in 2023 third-party efficacy survey. Agreed refers to a combination of agreed and strongly agreed.



Somia Pulido for Education Week

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## 9 Ways to Support Student Mental Health

By Larry Ferlazzo

**A**ny of us in the classroom—or connected to it in some way—clearly see the need to support our students’ mental health.

Here are nine strategies to do just that.

### ‘An Acute Concern’

*Ron Berger has nearly 50 years of experience in education, 28 of them as a public school teacher. He is the author of a collection of books on education and has been instrumental in developing EL Education’s foundational practices, deeply embedding his belief in the transformative power of high-quality student work into the organization’s vision for teaching and learning:*

I parked my truck in a school parking lot recently and had to walk around a large ambulance to get up the steps to the front door. I greeted the principal and asked if everything was OK. “Another mental health crisis,” she said sadly. “Our third this year. I don’t know what’s going on.”

In my 48 years working in public education, I have never seen conditions as challenging for students’ mental health as these. This issue is an acute concern for all the schools and districts I am privileged to collaborate with.

There are alarming data that support my concerns. Last year, the American Psychological Association described the situation in this way in their Trends Report:

“In the 10 years leading up to the pandemic, feelings of persistent sadness and hopelessness—as well as suicidal thoughts and

behaviors—increased by about 40% among young people, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System. ‘We’re seeing really high rates of suicide and depression, and this has been going on for a while,’ said psychologist Kimberly Hoagwood, PhD, a professor of child and adolescent psychiatry at New York University’s Grossman School of Medicine. ‘It certainly got worse during the pandemic.’”

The CDC also reports that during the pandemic, 29 percent of U.S. high school students had a parent or caregiver who lost their job, 55 percent were emotionally abused by a parent or caregiver, and 11 percent were physically abused (Adolescent Behaviors and Experiences Survey—United States, January–June 2021, CDC).

There is a wide range of reasons for this issue and no single strategy to address the problem. Every student in crisis has a different story. But to offer one piece of advice, I would say this: The schools I admire most in their care for struggling young people take the same approach: They do everything they can to address the issue upstream to prevent a crisis, cultivating relationships and a community of care and support, rather than focus only on saving students downstream who feel they are drowning.

### Supporting Students Upstream

Everything depends on relationships. Students who are well-known and cared for by the adults in the building and by their schoolmates have much less risk of emotional and mental health problems. From the APA Trends Report:

For example, school connectedness—the

degree to which young people feel that adults and peers at school care about them and are invested in their success—is a key contributor to mental health. Youth who felt connected during middle and high school have fewer problems with substance use, mental health, suicidality, and risky sexual behavior as adults (Steiner, R. J., et al., *Pediatrics*, Vol. 144, No. 1, 2019).

It is also just common sense; if students feel valued and respected for who they are, they are much more likely to thrive. However, knowing students well and supporting their belonging, purpose, and agency in school is not simply the result of kind educators with good intentions. It requires intentional, explicit school and classroom structures and practices that must be a daily priority. And that is not easy to do.

Although parents are deeply concerned with the social, emotional, and mental health of their children, family priorities are not reflected in school accountability metrics. The singular measure by which our society judges schools—test scores of basic skills in two subjects—is so narrow that schools often feel forced to focus on test preparation at the expense of a healthy learning environment based in strong relationships.

Structures and practices that cultivate positive student identities and relationships in school take time and commitment. They require explicit priority in staffing, scheduling, and instructional practices. For example, schools may prioritize nursing and counseling services in their staffing model to make sure that all students have easy access to therapeutic support before things get too difficult.

Schools may prioritize close family-school partnerships in which parents from all backgrounds are welcomed in the school, play key roles in the school, and where home visits are a regular practice, not simply conducted in crisis situations. Schools may also prioritize relationship-building structures that strengthen student identity and belonging, such as buddy programs, mentor programs, adventure programs, service programs, and advisory programs (e.g., morning and closing meetings in elementary school, small daily advisory meetings in secondary school).

The schools that I work with, through partnerships with EL Education, use a daily advisory program called Crew. Every morning, elementary and secondary students circle up with a Crew leader to check in on their social, emotional, and academic health; get support where needed; and engage in relationship-building initiatives. Students engage in courageous conversations about issues at home and in their broader lives. Students hold each other accountable for being their best selves, supporting each other, and not disrespecting, excluding, or bullying each other.

All of the structures and practices that

support a healthy school community that prioritizes student belonging and positive identity are not enough to catch every mental health problem. Crises will still occur, and schools need to be ready to act effectively and compassionately in those situations. But when we support all students carefully upstream, fewer students downstream will feel that they are drowning.

## 'A Multi-Faceted Approach'

*Craig Aarons-Martin is CEO of CCM Education Group and focuses on leadership, innovation, equity, belonging, and thriving in education:*

As a prekindergarten through 5th grade principal and later as a superintendent and executive director of a P-8 school in Boston, I've seen firsthand the incredible impact that focusing on students' mental health can have. Over nearly two decades, I've developed strategies that have proved effective in various settings. Here are some of the best ways I've found to support students' mental health, along with resources that can help implement these strategies.

### 1. Explicit Instruction of Social-Emotional Learning:

One of the most effective ways to support students' mental health is through explicit instruction in social-emotional learning skills and strategies. Schools must incorporate daily doses of SEL, making it an integral part of the curriculum. This involves setting aside dedicated time focused on student well-being. During these sessions, students can learn to manage emotions, set positive goals, show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. For resources, I recommend exploring the CASEL Guide to Schoolwide SEL.

### 2. Creating Community and Nurturing Relationships:

Building a sense of community within the school is essential. Schools should organize activities that foster strong relationships among students, teachers, and staff. This can be achieved through classroom sessions or restorative circles that provide a platform for students to voice their opinions, share their experiences, and feel heard. These circles help manage conflicts and empower students to advocate for themselves and develop self-efficacy. The Urban Assembly's Resilient Scholars Program offers great resources on building these relationships.

### 3. Representation in Curriculum and Staff:

It's crucial for students to see themselves reflected in the curriculum and their educators. A diverse teaching staff that includes BIPOC,

queer, trans, and immigrant individuals can provide students with role models they can relate to. Representation in the curriculum and staff helps students feel seen and understood, fostering a sense of belonging and acceptance. For strategies on inclusive education, check out the Learning for Justice website.

### 4. Comprehensive Support Systems:

Students benefit greatly from a continuum of care that extends beyond the classroom. Schools should employ counselors, clinicians, and in-home therapists to provide holistic support. This approach ensures that students have access to the necessary resources and guidance from the moment they wake up until they return home. Constant communication and support for students in the margins are critical to their mental well-being. The American School Counselor Association offers valuable resources and professional development opportunities for creating these support systems.

### 5. Growth Mindset Campaigns:

Promoting a growth mindset within the school environment can significantly impact students' attitudes toward learning and personal development. Celebrating growth over performance or perfection encourages students to embrace challenges, learn from mistakes, and persist in the face of setbacks. This mindset fosters resilience and a love for learning, contributing to a positive school culture. For resources, the Mindset Works website provides excellent materials on implementing growth mindset principles.

### 6. Parent and Community Engagement:

Building strong partnerships with parents and the community is vital for supporting students' mental health. Schools should engage in regular communication with parents, providing them with tools and strategies to support their children's well-being at home. Additionally, involving community organizations can enhance the support network available to students, creating a more comprehensive approach to their mental health. The National PTA has resources for fostering parent and community engagement.

### 7. Providing Voice and Agency:

Empowering students by giving them a voice in their education and well-being is crucial. Providing opportunities for students to express themselves and make decisions about their learning fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility. This agency helps students develop confidence and the skills needed to navigate their relationships and challenges effectively. The Student Voice organization provides resources and support for amplifying student voices.

In conclusion, supporting students' mental health requires a multifaceted approach that includes offering explicit SEL instruction, creating a sense of community, ensuring representation, providing comprehensive support systems, promoting a growth mindset, engaging parents and the community, and empowering students with voice and agency. By implementing these strategies and utilizing the resources available, schools can create an environment where students thrive emotionally, socially, and academically.

## Taking Care of Teachers

*Renee Jones was the 2023 Nebraska Teacher of the Year. She teaches AVID and 9th grade English at Lincoln High School. Follow her on Twitter @ReneeJonesTeach:*

Before every flight you take, we hear we need to put on our own oxygen tanks before we can put the masks on our loved ones.

The same goes for our classrooms. We have to figure out how to take better care of our educators.

If we know that relationships are the single most impactful strategy in the classroom, why are we not holding the same standard to support and take care of our educators? How can we expect our teachers to establish, maintain, and hold meaningful relationships with our students if we are not doing the same to establish, maintain, and hold relationships with them?

Thanks to Ron, Craig, and Renee for contributing their thoughts! ■

*Larry Ferlazzo is a former award-winning high school English and social studies teacher of more than two decades.*

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