

How Are School Districts Addressing Student Social-Emotional Needs during the Pandemic?

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Since March 2020, CRPE has tracked [remote learning trends in school districts across the country](#). In this brief, we look at how our nationally representative sample of 477 school districts attended to students' social-emotional learning and well-being in fall 2020.

Students' social-emotional learning and well-being was a concern [before the COVID-19 pandemic](#). But it is an even [bigger issue now](#), as students and teachers cope with the pressures of not only the pandemic and social isolation, but also the nation's reckoning with law enforcement violence against Black people, the ongoing economic crisis, and threats to American democracy.

What do we mean by social-emotional learning and well-being? How might districts support it?

As scholars often [note](#), the field lacks a consensus definition of social-emotional learning and well-being. But the big ideas are intuitive: success in school and beyond depends not only on academics: it depends on a healthy identity, self-management skills, self awareness, empathy, and supportive relationships. Recent events highlight how these issues are connected to deeper concerns about [equity and racism](#). Questions about identity, agency, and responsible decision-making necessarily raise questions about [fairness and inclusion](#).

In practice, school districts can frame and support social-emotional learning and well-being in several [different ways](#). In this brief, we distinguish between two broad approaches: those that focus on creating safe and supportive learning environments and those that focus on teaching students social-emotional skills (either in stand-alone lessons or as part of regular instruction). These approaches are not mutually exclusive. Districts can support social-emotional learning and well-being by focusing on *context*, *competencies*, or both.

In light of these challenges, we wanted to see whether districts' remote learning and school reopening plans mentioned social-emotional learning and, if so, in what ways. After reviewing public information available online in our representative sample of school districts, we found:

- Most district plans (66 percent) mentioned students' social-emotional learning and well-being.
- When it comes to supporting students, district plans were more likely to focus on creating safe environments (47 percent) than teaching social-emotional skills (31 percent). Of the approaches we reviewed, advisories and morning meetings were the most common ways districts supported students.
- Despite the clear interest in students' social-emotional learning and well-being, we also found very few districts (7 percent) taking a systemwide approach to collecting data on how their students were doing.

Keep in mind that these findings reflect official, and sometimes superficial, pronouncements from districts. They do not capture everything that is going on in districts or schools. Even so, they suggest that most districts in the nation—nearly 7 in 10—feel they should place students' social-emotional learning and well-being high on their agendas.

At the same time, despite the issue's salience, most districts nationwide don't appear to be collecting systematic data on their students' well-being. That's a problem. Without more systematic information about student well-being and opportunities to regularly hear student perspectives, conversations about student well-being can be disjointed and abstract. Equally as important, without better information, districts will likely struggle to figure out how to best support schools and teachers to meet the needs of all students.

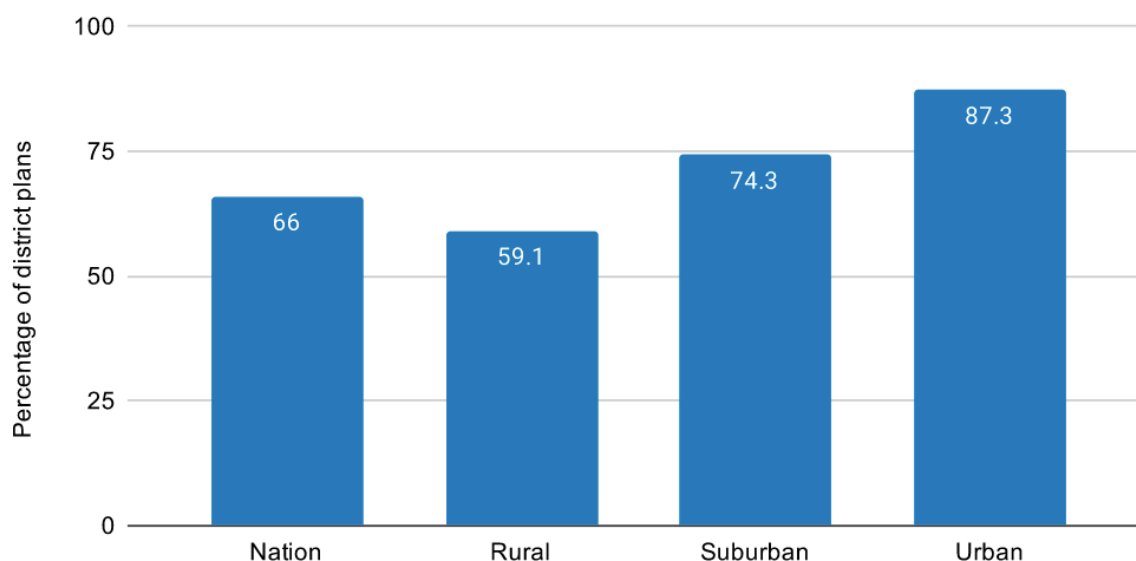
Most of the nation's school districts say they are addressing students' social-emotional learning and well-being

Most districts included information about social-emotional learning and well-being as part of their pandemic response (figure 1). This widespread emphasis on social-emotional learning and well-being isn't surprising given what happened last spring. [Student survey data](#) from May and June, for example, suggested that one in two students identified depression, stress, and anxiety as obstacles to virtual learning.

When districts returned to school in the fall, our data suggest that urban and suburban school districts were more likely than rural districts to mention social-emotional learning and well-being. In addition, we found that hybrid and remote learning models were more likely than in-person models to mention social-emotional learning, especially in urban and suburban districts. This difference across learning models might suggest that hybrid or remote systems took a more intentional approach than in-person systems to social-emotional learning and well-being. But the difference doesn't appear as strong in rural districts, where in-person models dominate and differences across model type were less striking.

Figure 1. Most School Districts Say They Are Addressing Students' Social-Emotional Learning and Well-Being

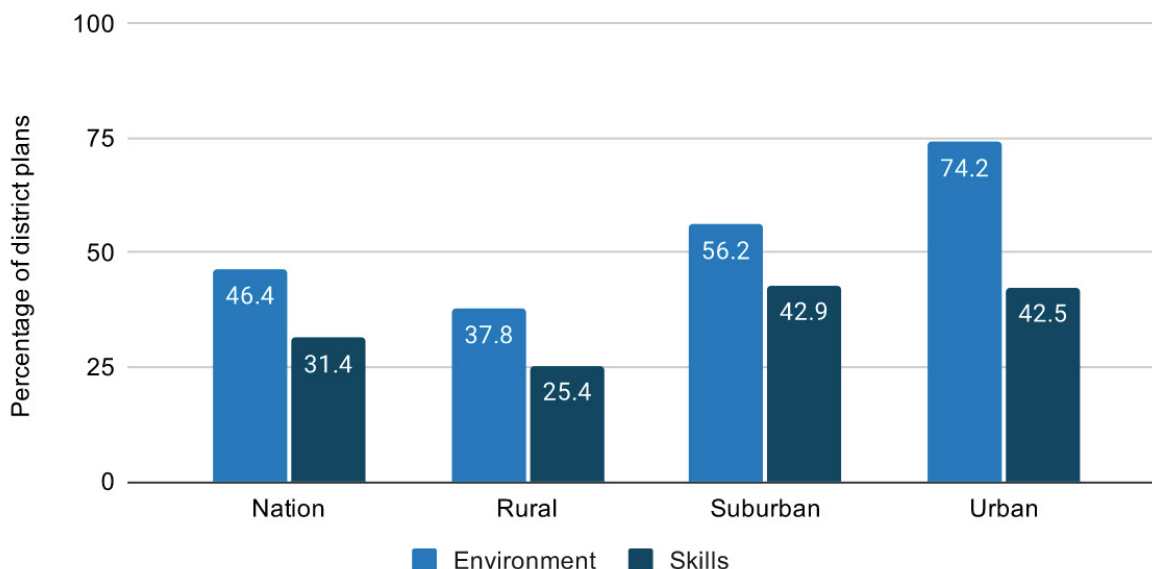
Share of District Plans That Mentioned Student Social-Emotional Learning and Well-Being



When it comes to supporting social-emotional learning and well-being, districts appear to focus more often on ensuring safe learning environments than on explicitly teaching social-emotional skills (figure 2). These results suggest that the first order of concern during the pandemic may have been ensuring students were doing okay, feeling supported, and learning in a reassuring context, rather than [helping them build](#) the individual skills and competencies associated with social-emotional learning.

Figure 2. Districts Were More Likely to Focus on Safe and Supportive Environments Than on Building Social-Emotional Learning Skills

Share of District Plans That Mentioned Safe and Supportive Environments, Building SEL Skills



Among the approaches we reviewed, advisories and morning meetings were the most common

School districts can take many approaches to creating safe and supportive environments. In our review of districts, we considered four approaches:

- [Advisory](#) programs or morning meetings that offer students opportunities to check in with adults and peers.
- [Restorative justice initiatives](#) that focus on inclusion and healing over punishment.
- Culturally responsive or [anti-racist](#) initiatives that support a more inclusive school community.
- Practices that sensitize educators about the need for safe, stable, and supporting learning environments, and how [traumatic experiences](#) (e.g., exposure to violence) can affect student development and behavior.

We picked these approaches because they focus on relationships and inclusion—[pressing issues during the pandemic](#). We also limited ourselves to four approaches to make coding more tractable, at the cost of capturing a wider array of approaches. Our coding focused on whether districts used terms associated with these practices in their official communications about student learning during the pandemic (see Appendix C, Methodology). As we noted earlier, these results reflect espoused, high-level priorities; accordingly, they can't tell us how (or whether) districts translated these priorities into practice.

Caveats aside, it's clear that, across all districts, advisories or morning meetings were the most popular approach (figure 3). These structures provide students with a chance to check in with their peers and an adult outside of regular class time and coursework. The least common approaches were restorative justice and culturally responsive/anti-racist initiatives. These justice-minded approaches were, however, more common in urban districts than suburban or rural ones.¹

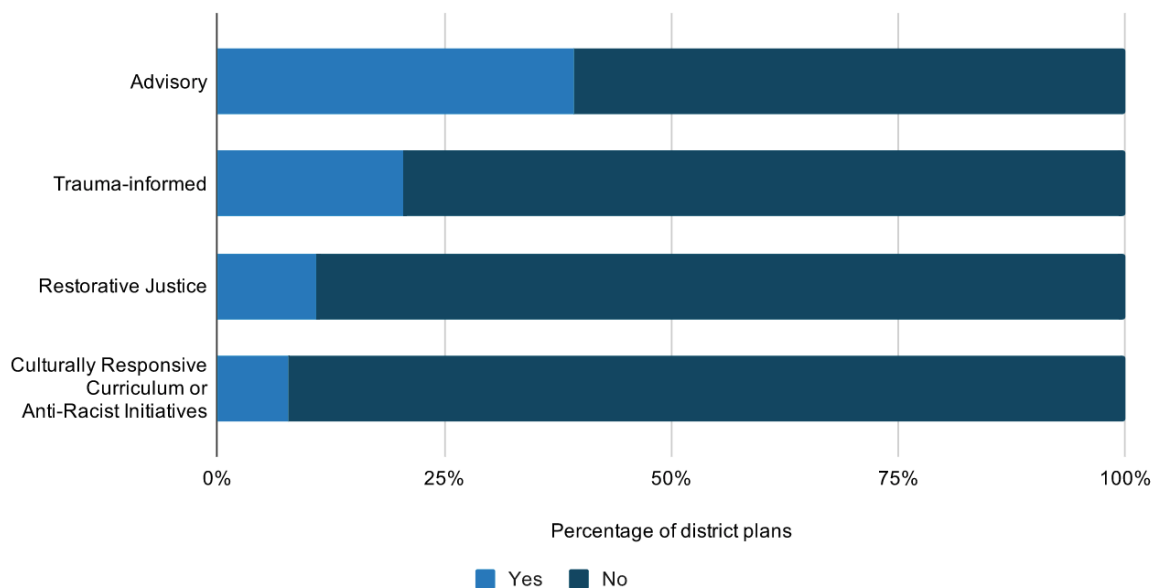
We also found examples of more innovative approaches. For example, rather than relying on advisory or morning meetings to connect with students, [Metro Nashville Public Schools](#) assigned each student to a social-emotional learning “navigator” to conduct daily check-ins via phone or video. Similarly, in [Portland Public Schools](#) (ME), every student has a designated Portland Promise “point person” who checks in with specific students’ families twice a week. In addition to daily advisory/morning meetings, these navigators and point people provide accountability and structure to make sure students don’t slip through the cracks. Portland does two other things that are rare: it systematically collects data by surveying students and families at the beginning, middle, and close of the school year regarding their learning experiences, self-care, and compassion. And it emphasizes social-emotional learning and self-care practices to address the needs of adults.

Some districts have created new accommodations specifically adapted to the realities of remote learning. In Pittsburgh, for example, the district hosts [virtual calming rooms](#) for different grade spans during remote learning. Students can visit these rooms—which feature break activities, videos, games, and sounds—whenever they need a pause from virtual school.

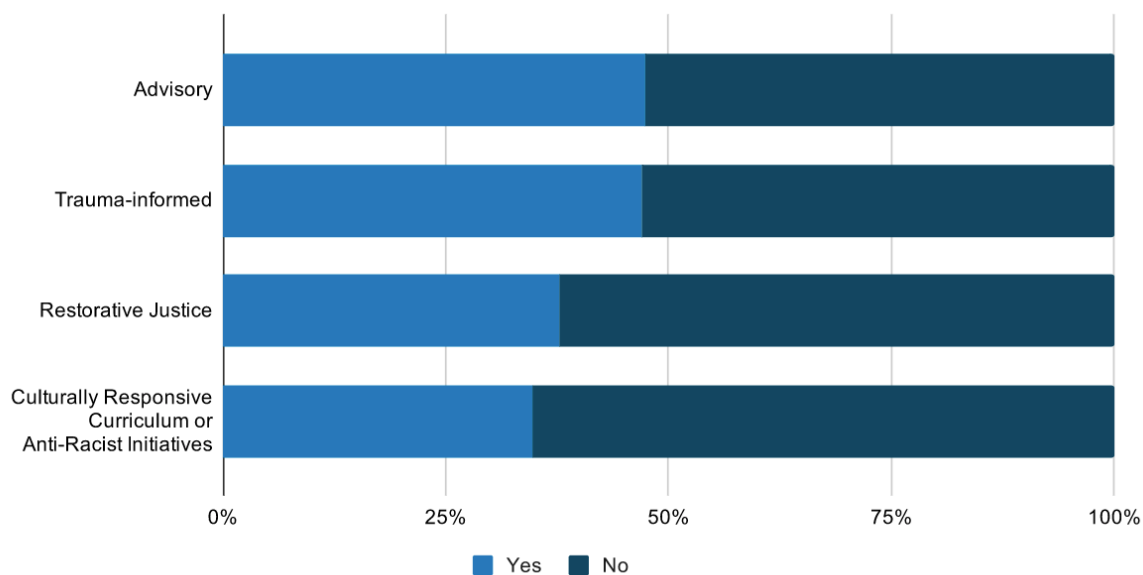
¹ Across all of the findings we should interpret differences between rural and urban and suburban districts with caution. These differences may stem from actual differences in district priorities. But they may also stem from systematic differences in the ways school districts post information on the internet and social media. To the extent that rural districts do not have the resources to post extensive information online or prefer other ways of communicating with their community, the results may reflect those differences rather than different priorities.

Figure 3. Advisory and Morning Meetings Were the Most Common Approach

Share of District Plans Nationwide That Mention Different Approaches to Creating Safe and Supportive Environments



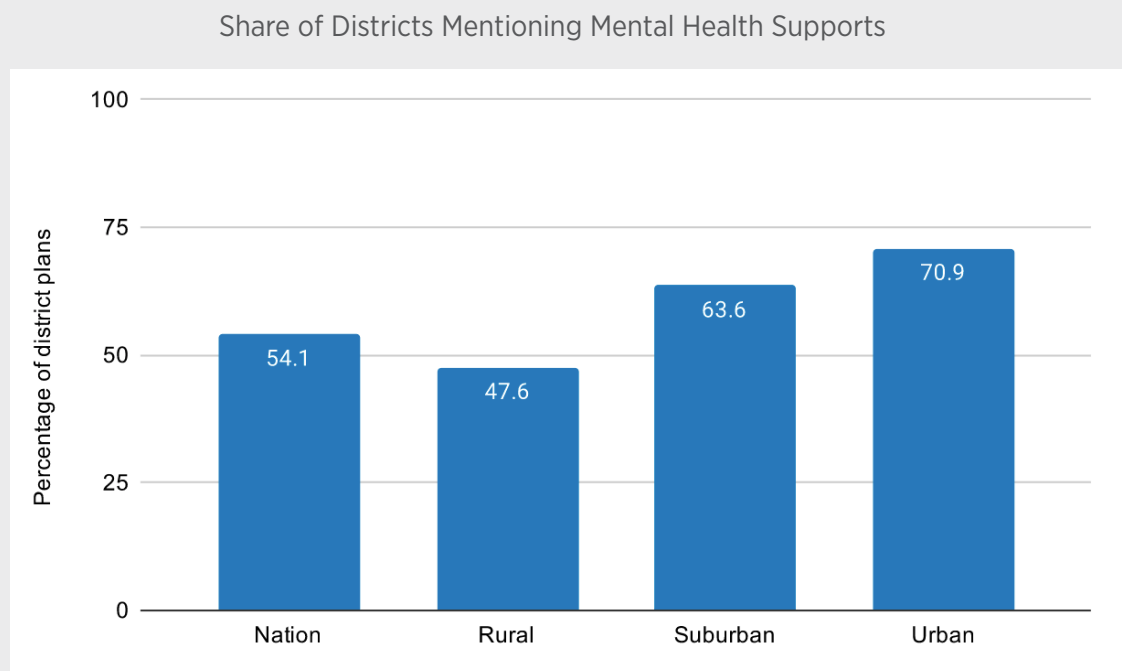
Share of Urban District Plans That Mention Different Approaches to Creating Safe and Supportive Environments



What about mental health support?

Concerns about social-emotional learning and well-being overlap with concerns about mental health. In this brief, we distinguish the two. Conceptually, we associate mental health support with more acute conditions, such as depression, anxiety disorders, or bipolar disorder. In practice we coded whether or not districts mentioned “mental health support” as part of their COVID-19 plan. As a result, we have inevitably captured a range of services, from counseling students facing temporary challenges to more clinical support for persistent mental health issues. With that ambiguity in mind, we found that a majority of districts (54 percent) mentioned providing mental health supports.

Figure 4. Just Over Half of Districts Say They Provide Mental Health Supports

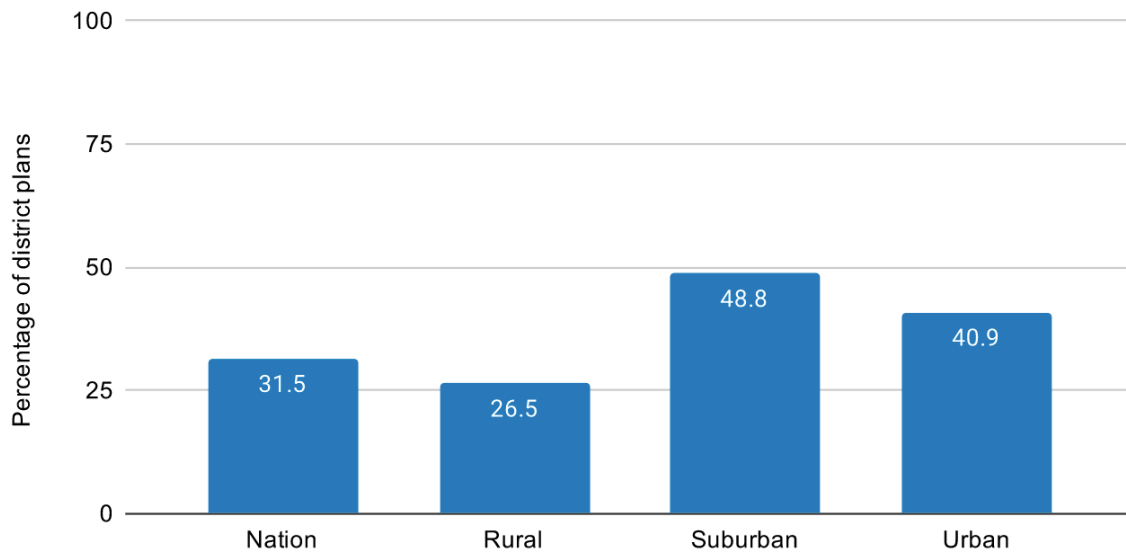


Compared to the attention given to students, districts were less likely to mention the social-emotional well-being of adults

As the support provided in Portland (ME) suggests, students are not the only ones who have struggled this year. The pandemic has also placed additional stress [on teachers](#). But only one in three districts mentioned adult well-being in their plans, with rural districts mentioning it least often (figure 5). These results are worrisome not only because of the stress of the current moment but because [prior research](#) suggests teachers' social-emotional competence affects their ability to support students.

Figure 5. Fewer Districts Mention Adult Social-Emotional Well-Being

Share of District Plans That Mention Adult Social-Emotional Learning and Well-Being

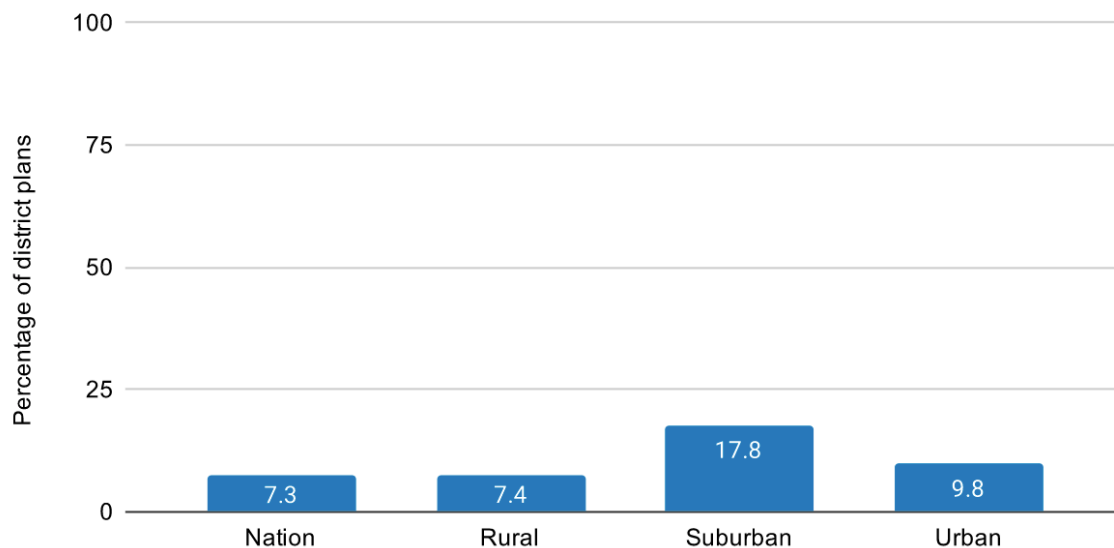


Few districts are collecting data on students' well-being districtwide, even though it is on the agenda

Finally, our review found fewer than one in ten districts mentioned any effort to measure student social-emotional learning districtwide (figure 6). Suburban districts were more likely than urban and rural districts to collect data. Notwithstanding the fact that schools within districts may collect their own data, districtwide efforts appear uncommon.

Figure 6. Few Districts Mention Efforts to Measure Students' Well-Being Districtwide

Share of District Plans That Mention Collecting Data on Students' Social-Emotional Learning and Well-Being



Conclusion

Our review of districts nationwide finds that most recognize the importance of supporting students' social-emotional well-being; nearly two-thirds say they have plans to do so. More than half describe plans to care for students' mental health.

All of this attention is well placed. [Youth Truth's survey](#) last spring of more than 20,000 students in grades 5 through 12 highlighted the stakes. We noted earlier that half of the students said depression, stress, and anxiety were obstacles to virtual learning. Unsurprisingly, only 41 percent said they were able to motivate themselves to do academic work while their school buildings were closed. The same survey suggested that Black and Hispanic students faced more obstacles to remote learning than white and Asian students. [Other survey research suggests](#) parents of color are especially concerned about their childrens' social, emotional, and physical well-being. These results underscore the need to find mutually reinforcing connections between social-emotional well-being and work on equity and racial justice.

But making smart choices about supporting social-emotional learning and well-being is difficult without data. Our results suggest that many districts lack data on student well-being to inform how they support schools and teachers in this work. The good news is that districts do not have to solve this problem alone. Although still developing, the field includes a [growing list of resources](#) for measuring social-emotional skills; measures of students' perceptions of their learning environments are also available (e.g., [YouthTruth](#), Copilot Elevate from the [Project for Education Research that Scales](#) (PERTS), and surveys from [Panorama Education](#)).

Even if districts collect more data, it will not be enough. A [panel of experts recently convened](#) by CRPE reminded us that school systems too often struggle to make use of the limited data they already have. Doing better isn't just a data problem. It's a human and organizational problem.

Above all, this means that district leaders interested in supporting students' social-emotional learning need a broad strategy, one that includes a clear vision for social-emotional learning, strong communication and data, and supports for teachers. Indeed, teachers need support not just to differentiate how they help and develop students. Our results also suggest districts must do more to help teachers take care of themselves. After all, as prior [research](#) intuitively suggests, teachers are better at helping students with social-emotional skills when they have those skills themselves.

For many system leaders and advocates, creating learning environments that promote student belonging and engagement was a priority before the COVID-19 pandemic. In light of the stress and disruption of this school year, these issues are all the more pressing today. Some districts are responding in ways that could prove helpful even after the pandemic: new roles focused on individual relationships, flexible structures that create space for self care, or new commitments to and support for adult well-being. Even as our results suggest many districts recognize the need, many may be shooting in the dark because of a lack of data. In upcoming work, CRPE will dive deeper into how districts are tackling these issues on the ground and the challenges and opportunities they face.

Appendix A. Data Tables

Learning Model		All	Quartile 1 (0 - 9.7% poverty)	Quartile 2 (9.7 - 15.8% poverty)	Quartile 3 (15.8 - 22.7% poverty)	Quartile 4 (22.7+ % poverty)	City 12.6%	Rural 65.2%	Suburb 22.2%
		Weighted Percentage					Weighted Percentage		
Overall learning model	All in-person	44.3	31.7	46.0	44.6	51.1	8.7	58.9	21.7
	All hybrid	12.3	15.3	14.6	7.9	10.6	5.2	8.2	28.2
	All remote	31.7	29.4	29.9	35.2	34.4	74.2	23.0	33.4
	Varies by grade band/school	11.3	23.5	9.5	12.4	3.9	11.9	9.3	16.7
	No information	0.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.6	0.0
Change in overall learning model from November to December	More in-person	3.6	3.1	3.3	3.4	1.7	4.7	2.2	7.1
	More remote	15.0	14.2	11.4	23.6	12.6	26.2	13.1	14.4
	No change	81.4	82.7	85.3	73.1	85.6	69.1	84.7	78.5
Current model for elementary school students	In-person	52.2	52.1	51.1	54.3	54.5	17.0	66.5	30.3
	Hybrid	13.1	16.0	17.3	10.0	9.8	6.8	8.6	30.0
	Remote	31.3	26.3	31.1	34.1	34.4	73.8	23.5	29.8
	Varies by school	0.5	0.6	0.5	0.6	0.5	2.1	0.3	0.4
	No information	0.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.6	0.0
	N/A (district doesn't have this grade band)	2.5	5.0	0.0	1.0	0.7	0.4	0.5	9.5
Current model for middle school students	In-person	45.4	32.8	47.5	49.1	51.7	13.1	59.9	21.1
	Hybrid	17.9	31.9	21.8	9.9	12.6	6.5	13.2	38.4
	Remote	33.1	30.7	29.6	39.4	35.0	79.3	25.3	30.1
	Varies by school	0.4	0.6	0.5	0.6	0.0	1.1	0.3	0.3
	No information	0.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.6	0.0
	N/A (district doesn't have this grade band)	2.8	4.1	0.7	1.0	0.7	0.0	0.8	10.1
Current model for high school students	In-person	43.6	30.4	47.3	43.2	50.2	8.1	58.2	21.0
	Hybrid	19.3	33.3	19.7	13.3	13.8	13.0	13.7	39.1
	Remote	34.7	34.1	31.5	41.0	34.9	76.6	25.9	36.8
	Varies by school	0.3	0.0	0.5	0.6	0.0	1.1	0.1	0.3
	No information	0.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.6	0.0
	N/A (district doesn't have this grade band)	1.7	2.3	1.0	1.8	1.1	1.1	1.4	2.7
Learning Pods	District provides access to childcare or learning support during remote learning.								
	Yes, while in hybrid model	6.3	9.5	7.0	4.2	5.4	7.9	4.5	10.7
	Yes, while in remote model	8.7	4.5	5.6	12.1	11.7	33.2	4.0	8.8
	Yes, while in varied model	1.6	6.1	0.0	1.2	0.9	2.4	0.9	3.3
	No	38.9	48.2	41.4	39.1	31.0	47.8	31.5	55.6
	N/A (district is 100% in-person or no information)	44.4	31.7	46.0	43.4	51.1	8.7	59.0	21.7
Diagnostic Testing	District makes mention of diagnostic or formative assessments to get a baseline as part of their COVID-19 response plans.								
	Yes	37.3	45.0	35.8	28.3	43.9	55.3	28.5	52.7
	No	62.7	55.0	64.2	71.7	56.1	44.7	71.5	47.3
	If using diagnostic or formative assessments, district is using them on an ongoing basis.								
	Yes	20.1	19.4	24.2	16.8	21.1	24.3	17.6	25.1
	No	17.2	25.6	11.6	11.6	22.8	31.2	11.0	27.6
	N/A (district is not using diagnostic or formative assessments)	62.7	55.0	64.2	71.6	56.1	44.5	71.5	47.3
	If the district is using diagnostic or formative assessments, which tool(s) are they using?								
	iReady	1.5	2.3	0.4	0.6	2.5	4.1	0.9	1.7
	MAP	1.7	1.1	0.7	1.2	4.0	2.3	1.9	0.6
	Other	24.6	32.0	26.8	19.3	22.3	25.9	20.3	36.2
	Multiple	9.5	9.6	7.8	7.2	15.2	23.0	5.4	14.1
	N/A (district is not using diagnostic or formative assessments)	62.7	55.0	64.2	71.7	56.1	44.7	71.5	47.3

Appendix A. Data Tables (cont.)

Learning Time		Weighted Percentage					Weighted Percentage				
		More than 1 minute	33.7	42.8	31.9	35.1	29.9	51.1	29.6	36.4	
Synchronous minutes for elementary school students	0 minutes	2.8	0.9	1.0	4.7	4.9	1.6	3.2	2.1	2.1	
	No information	63.5	56.3	67.1	60.2	65.2	47.3	67.2	61.5	61.5	
Unweighted average synchronous minutes for elementary school students		244.0									
Weighted average synchronous minutes for elementary school students											
Range of synchronous minutes for elementary school students (for districts providing 1 or more minute of synchronous learning)		50 - 490									
Synchronous minutes for middle school students	More than 1 minute	37.4	45.3	32.5	43.7	35.1	54.4	31.8	44.1	44.1	
	0 minutes	3.0	1.0	1.0	5.6	4.9	1.8	3.6	2.1	2.1	
	No information	59.6	53.7	66.5	50.7	60.0	43.8	64.6	53.8	53.8	
Unweighted average synchronous minutes for middle school students		277.1									
Weighted average synchronous minutes for middle school students											
Range of synchronous minutes for middle school students		70 - 490									
Synchronous minutes for high school students	More than 1 minute	39.8	47.6	36.9	43.1	33.2	54.9	32.2	53.3	53.3	
	0 minutes	3.0	1.0	1.0	5.6	4.9	1.8	3.6	2.1	2.1	
	No information	57.2	51.4	62.1	51.3	61.9	43.3	64.2	44.6	44.6	
Unweighted average synchronous minutes for high school students		287.6									
Weighted average synchronous minutes for high school students											
Range of synchronous minutes for high school students		75 - 525									
Social-Emotional Learning	District reopening/fall plan mentions social emotional learning and/or wellbeing for students	Yes	66.0	76.5	69.4	66.6	57.5	87.3	59.1	74.3	74.3
		No	34.0	23.5	30.6	33.4	42.5	12.7	40.9	25.7	25.7
	District's reopening/fall plan mentions social emotional learning and/or wellbeing for adults (e.g. teachers and staff)	Yes	33.3	48.0	31.5	29.1	28.4	40.9	26.5	48.8	48.8
		No	66.7	52.0	68.5	70.9	71.6	59.1	73.5	51.2	51.2
	District's reopening/fall plan mentions the provision of mental health services or mental health counseling for students.	Yes	54.1	59.2	52.6	56.7	49.8	70.9	47.6	63.6	63.6
		No	45.9	40.8	47.4	43.3	50.2	29.1	52.4	36.4	36.4
	District's reopening/fall plan includes initiatives designed to support safe and supportive learning environments.	Yes	46.4	54.9	47.5	46.9	41.3	74.2	37.8	56.2	56.2
		No	53.6	45.1	52.5	53.1	58.7	25.8	62.2	43.8	43.8
	District's reopening/fall plan mentions district-wide anti-racist initiatives or use of culturally-responsive curriculum.	Yes	7.8	9.5	6.7	6.2	9.3	34.8	2.5	8.2	8.2
		No	92.2	90.5	93.3	93.8	90.7	65.2	97.5	91.8	91.8
	District's reopening/fall plan mentions use of advisories, morning meetings, or designated days, or other regular check-in for students with an adult.	Yes	39.3	45.9	43.1	37.6	33.3	47.3	34.5	48.7	48.7
		No	60.7	54.1	56.9	62.4	66.7	52.7	65.5	51.3	51.3
	District's reopening/fall plan mentions use of trauma-informed practice.	Yes	19.7	23.0	20.9	17.6	19.0	46.9	11.2	29.4	29.4
		No	76.3	77.0	79.1	82.4	81.0	53.1	88.8	70.6	70.6
	District's reopening/fall plan mentions restorative discipline/justice.	Yes	10.8	5.9	8.9	14.2	13.8	37.8	7.1	6.2	6.2
		No	89.2	94.1	91.1	85.8	86.2	62.2	92.9	93.8	93.8

Appendix A. Data Tables (cont.)

		Weighted Percentage					Weighted Percentage		
District's SEL plan/response to COVID-19 mentions explicitly teaching SEL skills. This might involve the use of a formal curriculum or might emphasize character education or non-cognitive skills. The program does not have to be district-wide.	Yes	31.4	40.2	37.7	24.0	26.1	42.5	25.4	42.9
	No	68.6	59.8	62.3	76.0	73.9	57.5	74.6	57.1
District's SEL plan/response to COVID-19 mentions data collection around SEL (intake or ongoing) for students during the pandemic.	Yes	10.0	11.3	13.3	7.3	8.7	9.8	7.4	17.8
	No	90.0	88.7	86.7	92.7	91.3	90.2	92.6	82.2

Appendix B. Code Definitions

Variable label	Variable values	Definitions	Examples	Procedure
District's fall plan/response to COVID mentions SEL for students	Yes	District fall plan mentions social emotional learning (SEL) for students	Reopening/fall plan mentions that the district is focused on the social emotional well being of students. The plan might use phrases such as "social emotional health and safety," "social emotional well-being," "social emotional learning," or "social emotional support." We're basically looking for some indication that the district has social emotional issues on its agenda as part of its response to COVID.	Search terms: "social emotional" "SEL" "wellness" "well-being"
	No	District fall plan does not mention social emotional learning (SEL) for students		
District's fall plan/response to COVID mentions SEL for adults	Yes	District fall plan mentions social emotional learning (SEL) for adults (e.g. teachers and staff)	Reopening/fall plan mentions that the district is focused on the social emotional well being of adults (teachers and staff). The plan might use phrases such as "social emotional health and safety," "social emotional well-being," "social emotional learning," or "social emotional support." We're basically looking for some indication that the district has social emotional issues on its agenda as part of its response to COVID.	Search terms: "social emotional" "SEL" "wellness" "well-being"
	No	District fall plan does not mention social emotional learning (SEL) (e.g. teachers and staff)		
District's fall plan/response to COVID mentions mental health services in response to COVID	Yes	District mentions mental health services in response to COVID	Reopening/fall plan mentions mental health or mental wellbeing as a priority. This might include language about mental health counseling or services; may be paired with language about social emotional well being (e.g., "mental health and social emotional safety and health."). Note: If district refers to third-party mental health provider, the would still get a Yes.	Search terms: "mental health" "mental wellbeing" "mental well-being"
	No	District does not mention mental health services in response to COVID		
District's fall SEL plan/response to COVID mentions safe and supportive environments	Yes	District implements initiatives or programs to create safe and supportive environments in response to COVID	District adopts an anti-racist initiative or culturally responsive curriculum, advisory or regular check-ins, trauma-informed practices, restorative justice, morning meetings etc.	Search terms: "anti-racist" "culturally responsive" "advisory" (examine sample schedules) "check-in" "restorative" (associated with justice or discipline) "morning meeting" "community circles" "morning meeting" "equitable learning environment" "trauma-informed"
	No	District does not mention initiatives or programs to create safe and supportive environments in response to COVID		
District's fall SEL plan/response to COVID mentions anti-racist initiatives and/or culturally responsive curriculum	Yes	District implements anti-racist initiatives and/or adopts culturally responsive curriculum	District adopts curriculum resources, such as the 1619 Project, Moments in Time Video History resources, and the Black Lives Matter in Schools curriculum.	Search terms: "anti-racist" "culturally responsive" "equitable learning environment"
	No	District does not implement anti-racist initiatives and/or adopts culturally responsive curriculum		
District's fall SEL plan/response to COVID mentions use of advisories, morning meetings, or other regular check-in for students with an adult	Yes	District schedules advisory periods, morning meetings, or other regular check-ins for students with an adult	Yes = District pairs each student with an adult staff member (e.g., homeroom teacher, counselor) for weekly check-ins to discuss how they are feeling throughout the semester. Students meet in advisory periods each morning and are assigned an adult staff member as their advisor.	Search terms: "advisory" "morning meeting" "community circles" "relationship building"
	No	District's fall SEL plan does not mention advisory periods, morning meetings, or other regular check-ins for students with an adult		
District's fall SEL plan/response to COVID mentions use of trauma-informed practice.	Yes	District's fall SEL plan mentions implementation of trauma-informed practices		Search "trauma-informed"
	No	District's fall SEL plan does not mention implementation of trauma-informed practices		
District's fall SEL plan/response to COVID mentions implementation of restorative discipline/justice initiatives	Yes	District adopted restorative discipline/justice initiatives in its fall SEL plan/response to COVID		Search "restorative justice" or "restorative discipline" on district's website and/or in its fall plan
	No	District did not adopt restorative discipline/justice initiatives in its fall SEL plan/ response to COVID		
District's SEL plan/response to COVID mentions other approaches to creating safe/supportive environments or contexts for students	Yes	Enter the name of other approaches not previously mentioned that the district takes to create safe/supportive environments or contexts for students	District dedicated the first three weeks of school to peer relationship building District modifies academic lessons to incorporate SEL competencies (e.g., allow room for reflection after lessons)	
	No	District's SEL plan does not mention a use of formal curriculum and/or does not emphasize character education		
District's SEL plan/response to COVID mentions explicitly teaching SEL skills	Yes	District SEL plan mentions use of formal curriculum (e.g., Second Step) and/or emphasizes character education or non-cognitive skills (e.g., conflict resolution)	District dedicates time during the school day to use curriculum from Second Step	Search terms: "SEL competencies" "SEL skills"
	No	District's SEL plan does not mention a use of formal curriculum and/or does not emphasize character education		
Formal SEL curriculum and/or program(s) the district uses	Program name	Enter SEL program name if district mentions a specific SEL program in the previous indicator	Second Step, Calm Classroom, MindUP, School-Connect	Typically housed under a district's SEL, mental health services, or behavioral pages. Can also search specific program names
District's SEL plan/response to COVID mentions data collection around SEL	Yes	District collected student SEL and/or wellness data in response to COVID	The district screened and collected data about students' well-being at the beginning of the school year through a formal survey (e.g., Panorama Well-Being Survey; PERTS; Compass), assessment (e.g., Dassa and Dassa Mini), etc.	Search terms: "screening" "Panorama" or "wellness survey" or "well-being survey" "SEL data" "SEL assessment" or "wellness assessment" or "well-being assessment"
	No	District did not collect student SEL and/or wellness data in response to COVID		
Interesting/innovative SEL plan	Yes	Flag if the district's SEL plan is interesting/innovative		

Appendix C. Methodology

1. Description of the Project

The COVID-19 response database tracks how a nationally representative group of school districts are responding to the pandemic on an ongoing basis. The goal of this effort is to capture a national portrait of school district practices. Our sample includes 477 school districts, sampled and weighed to reflect a representative cross-section of school districts across the United States.

Prior analyses have tracked how these school districts provided remote instruction during the spring 2020 school closures, and how school districts planned for fall 2020 reopening. For this iteration of the project, we collected and coded publicly available information on whether and how the districts paid attention to social-emotional learning and well-being, along with additional indicators about each school district's current operating model.

We merged the coded data with descriptive information on each district—such as percent of poverty in the school district, racial demographics, and locale description—from the National Center on Education Statistics Common Core of Data.

This project is a collaboration with the RAND Corporation, and stems from the ongoing American School District Panel project, a project intended to build a nationally representative panel of American school districts.

2. Sources Accessed for Information

For each school district, we coded the indicators based on publicly available information. Primary sources were the school district website, local news reports, and social media (district Facebook pages or Twitter, YouTube). In this analysis, we found only one school district with no publicly available information on their current operating model. We coded this district as “no information.” For all other school districts in the sample, school reopening information was typically centered on the district website, or referenced on local news.

3. Coder Training

The team of analysts collecting and coding information participated in several training and norming activities, including: (1) all coders reviewed a codebook outlining definitions for codes in the various fields of interest and coding sample districts as a group, (2) all coders reviewed information from districts, then coded a common sample of four districts, then met to discuss alignment and misalignment, (3) coders participated in sessions in which they discussed coding questions and further aligned on code definitions.

4. Data Collection Timeline

We collected all data on the 477 districts between November 24 and December 28, 2020. We coded for the current operation of school districts during that time period, rather than any planned changes to come.

5. Code Definitions

Appendix B is the codebook used for this round of coding. For all indicators, codes were based only on publicly available information, and when there was no information available, were coded “no information.”

We coded districts as prioritizing social-emotional learning for students and/or adults if they listed addressing social-emotional issues as part of their response to COVID-19. If districts

indicated social-emotional learning for students and/or adults, we then considered if their reopening plans included mental health services, safe and supportive environments, and social-emotional skills and competencies. We also coded districts based on if they collected student data around social-emotional learning through a formal survey in fall 2020 (e.g., YouthTruth, Panorama, PERTS).

For the mental health services code, we considered whether districts mentioned mental health or mental well-being as a priority in their reopening plans. For example, districts that increased mental health counseling and services in response to COVID-19 were coded as “yes.”

For the safe and supportive environments code, we considered whether districts mentioned anti-racist initiatives and/or culturally responsive curriculum, advisory periods and/or morning meetings, restorative justice/discipline practices, and/or trauma-informed care. Districts that mentioned any of these items were coded as a “yes” for mentioning safe and supportive environments.

For the social-emotional skills and competencies code, we considered whether districts mentioned use of formal curriculum (e.g., Second Step) and/or emphasized character education or non-cognitive skills in their reopening plans. For example, districts that indicated teaching conflict resolution skills were coded as “yes.”

6. Explanation of the Sample and Sample Calibration

The Sample

The national sample includes two groups of districts.

Group 1 includes 399 districts and is a stratified random sample from a sample of 1,200 school districts. The 1,200 school districts represent the recruitment sample for the RAND-led American School District Panel project, a project intended to build a nationally representative panel of American school districts. The sample of 399 districts is stratified by school location and includes 200 small-town and rural districts and 199 suburban and urban districts.

Group 2 includes the 82 urban districts CRPE began collecting district response data for in March 2020. CRPE updated data on these districts weekly from March 28 through July 31, 2020. Data from this group was taken from the last update of this set on July 29, 2020.

Because 3 of the 82 large urban districts also appear among the 399 districts, and one is in Canada, the total national sample includes 477 U.S. school districts.

Calibration and Sample Weights

Excluding the duplicates, we combined the Group 1 and Group 2 districts and then calibrated to reflect the national population of school districts along 10 factors:

- Total enrollment in the district split into three groups: Small [0-800], medium [800-3000] and Large [3000+]
- Total number of schools in the district split into three groups: 1, [2-5], and [6+]
- Per-pupil expenditure on instructional materials
- Current expenditure dollar range code represents per-student current expenditures within ranges and are maintained on district (except Supervisory Union) and public school records

- Percentage of minority students in the district split into four groups [0-15 percent], [15-25 percent], [25-50 percent], and [50 percent+]
- Percentage of poverty-level students in the district split into four groups [0-10 percent], [10-15 percent], [15-25 percent], and [25 percent+]
- Percentage of students in the district eligible for free or reduced-price lunch split into four groups [0-25 percent], [25-50 percent], [50-75 percent], and [75 percent+]
- The specific level of instruction in the school district, Elementary, Secondary or Unified
- The percentage of special education students in the district split into [0-12 percent], [12-17 percent], and [17 percent+]
- Bilingual Education Indicator that indicates if Bilingual Education is offered [Yes/No]

About the Center on Reinventing Public Education

CRPE is a nonpartisan research and policy analysis center at the University of Washington Bothell. We develop, test, and support bold, evidence-based, systemwide solutions to address the most urgent problems in K-12 public education across the country. Our mission is to reinvent the education delivery model, in partnership with education leaders, to prepare all American students to solve tomorrow's challenges. Since 1993 CRPE's research, analysis, and insights have informed public debates and innovative policies that enable schools to thrive. Our work is supported by multiple foundations, contracts, and the U.S Department of Education.