

## Planning for Wellbeing and Connectedness: Where Do I Start?

August 2020

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*This resource draws on resources created by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO).*

As fall approaches, school systems are still facing much uncertainty. Many systems spent this spring and summer preparing for a return to school buildings, focused on solving the myriad health, safety, and logistical challenges required. But due to the continued spread of COVID-19, more and more systems have decided to keep buildings closed to start the year—leaving them scrambling to prepare for more distance learning.

This challenge underscores one of the most important components of a school system's reopening plan: staff and student wellbeing and connectedness. Given both the unprecedented global pandemic and social upheaval that the United States has experienced as the nation reckons with its legacy of systemic racism, systems must prioritize attending to and caring for the wellbeing and connectedness so that students thrive in their educational experiences.

But, especially given the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, it can be hard to figure out where to start. That's why we created this resource. It contains a series of questions that school systems can ask themselves to determine how to make the most of [CCSSO's Restart & Recovery: Considerations for Teaching and Learning: Wellbeing and Connection](#), developed in partnership with TNTP and other organizations.

We encourage system leaders to review the questions in the first section below, check off the ones you have completed, and then use the second part of the document to identify critical next steps. This will position systems to make the most of the instructional opportunities they have and deepen relationships and feedback loops with students, families, and the community—while helping students feel safe, connected to their peers and adults who care about them, and clear on their academic progress.

For more guidance on preparing for the school year, please read CCSSO's complete [Restart & Recovery: Considerations for Teaching and Learning](#) guidance.

## Questions to Diagnose Your Progress

**Staff Wellbeing and Connection:** How can we create a culture of care in which staff growth and wellbeing are prioritized and all feel safe, connected, supported, engaged, and valued?

- Have you collected information from your staff about their sense of wellbeing and connection?
- Have you provided a chance for educators to reconnect and feel safe and supported?
- Have you planned professional learning designed to build educator capacity to support students' wellbeing and connection?

**Student Wellbeing and Connection:** How can we create a culture of care in which student growth and wellbeing are prioritized and all feel safe, connected, supported, engaged, and valued?

- Have you collected information from your students and families about their sense of wellbeing and connection?
- Have you selected a universal screener or a Tier 2/Tier 3 screener, based on your capacity to train and support staff to screen students and your capacity to ensure that the screening process does not over-refer students—particularly students of color—to Tier 2/Tier 3 services?
- Have you developed a systemwide culture and climate plan to promote positive relationships and to ensure that each student has a meaningful interaction with a trusted adult each day?
- Have you assigned each student to a staff member who is responsible for their connectedness and wellbeing?
- Have you planned a welcoming first week back to school?
- Have you reviewed and modified your school culture and climate policies to ensure they are non-punitive and culturally responsive?

**Tailored Student Supports:** How can we identify the range of health and wellbeing needs of our students and provide them with or connect them to effective, culturally relevant supports?

- Have you created a plan for targeted and intensive (Tier 2/Tier 3) strategies so that students who need more support have the opportunity to thrive?
- Have you created a plan to collaborate with community partners to help ensure that tailored student supports are implemented effectively and equitably?

**Monitoring and Improving:** How will you know what's working well and what needs to be adjusted?

- Have you set goals related to the quality of, implementation of, and access to your wellbeing and connectedness resources and supports?
- Have you collected the information you'd need to know where you stand against your goals for quality, implementation, and access?
- Have you run a learning cycle related to your progress towards your goals for quality, implementation, and access?

**Communication:** Are you actively sharing and discussing your plans with students, families, and staff, ensuring that it is easy to understand?

- Have you communicated your wellbeing and connectedness plan to students, families, and staff?

- Have you proactively and reactively gathered feedback on your wellbeing and connectedness plan from students, families, and staff?
- Do you have an ongoing communication and engagement strategy for students, families, and staff?

## Interpreting and Using Your Results

To interpret and use your results, reflect on the next steps you should take using the guidance below. Note that while the CCSSO System Conditions guidance was written as if you were reading it well before school was starting, **you can still use these resources even if your school year has already started.**

**Staff Wellbeing and Connection: How can we create a culture of care in which staff growth and wellbeing are prioritized and all feel safe, connected, supported, engaged, and valued?**

If you didn't check off...	...consider the following next steps:
Have you collected information from your staff about their sense of wellbeing and connection?	<p>If you answered no to this question, survey teachers and leaders about their experiences this fall, including their sense of wellbeing and connection. Consider using resources found in the CCSSO System Conditions guidance <a href="#">step 1.D.p: Gather input from teachers and leaders.</a></p> <p>Even if the school year has started, knowing how your staff perceive their experiences will be valuable information as you work to support staff throughout this year. If you worry about the mental capacity it would take to administer a survey to all staff members, consider how you could lead focus groups with a representative set of staff members to learn about your staff's wellbeing and connection.</p>
Have you provided a chance for educators to reconnect and feel safe and supported?	<p>If you answered no to this question, consider planning opportunities to check in on staff and support them using the CCSSO Wellbeing and Connection guidance <a href="#">step 1.A.p: Plan opportunities for staff and educators to reconnect, heal, and feel safe and supported.</a></p> <p>Even if the school year has started, this is a vital step to take in order to create a safe and welcoming environment for your staff. Consider how you could modify the steps in the linked guidance to ensure that your educators feel safe and supported, given your context. Use what you learn from educators about their sense of connectedness in the previous step to determine the best way to proceed.</p>
Have you planned professional learning designed to build educator capacity to support students' wellbeing and connection?	<p>If you answered no to this question, plan professional learning options that will build educator capacity to support student wellbeing and connection using the guidance found in the CCSSO Wellbeing and Connection guidance <a href="#">step 1.B.p: Plan professional learning to build educator and staff capacity.</a></p> <p>Even if the school year has started, this is an absolutely vital step to take, given the fact that our students have experienced the dual trauma of the COVID-19 pandemic and a national reckoning with systemic racism. Your educators will need support to ensure that they can build relationships with students and support their connection needs, whether in-person or remote.</p>

**Student Wellbeing and Connection: How can we create a culture of care in which student growth and wellbeing are prioritized and all feel safe, connected, supported, engaged, and valued?**

If you didn't check off...	...consider the following next steps:
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<p>Have you collected information from your students and families about their sense of wellbeing and connection?</p>	<p>If you answered no to this question, review <a href="#">our Engagement guidance</a> to consider how you might learn more about how your students and families' sense of wellbeing and connection to your system. Even if your school year has started, having this information and feedback on how the school year is going from a wellbeing and connection perspective will help you to better support student learning.</p>
<p>Have you selected a universal screener or a Tier 2/Tier 3 screener, based on your capacity to train and support staff to screen students and your capacity to ensure that the screening process does not over-refer students—particularly students of color—to Tier 2/Tier 3 services?</p>	<p>If you answered no to this question, consider reviewing CCSSO Wellbeing and Connection <a href="#">step 2.A.p.2: Consider using a universal screener</a> and <a href="#">step 3.A.p.2: Identify and select Tier 2/3 screening or assessment tools</a> to determine whether you want to use a universal screener or a more targeted screener. Consider your staff capacity as you make a decision about which approach to take.</p> <p>Even if school has started, having an approach to identify students who need additional social, emotional, or academic support is vital.</p>
<p>Have you developed a systemwide culture and climate plan to promote positive relationships and to ensure that each student has a meaningful interaction with a trusted adult each day?</p>	<p>If you answered no to this question, review CCSSO Wellbeing and Connection <a href="#">step 2.A.p.4: Develop a plan for universal/Tier 1 supports</a>.</p> <p>Even if school has started, ensuring that you have a systemwide plan (and that your schools have aligned school-level plans) to promote positive relationships and to ensure that each student has a meaningful relationship with a trusted adult is vital work.</p>
<p>Have you assigned each student to a staff member who is responsible for their connectedness and wellbeing?</p>	<p>If you answered no to this question, consider the steps outlined in CCSSO Wellbeing and Connection <a href="#">step 2.B.p.1: Pair students with staff and share expectations for staff</a>.</p> <p>Whether or not the school year has started, ensuring that every single student has a trusting relationship with their main point of contact with the school is necessary work to ensure a successful school year. If you haven't yet taken this step and school has started, think through when and how you might assign students to their staff members and roll this structure out to students, families, and staff.</p>
<p>Have you planned a welcoming first week back to school?</p>	<p>If you answered no to this question and school has not yet started, consider reviewing the guidance found in CCSSO Wellbeing and Connection <a href="#">step 2.C.p: Plan a welcoming first week back</a>.</p> <p>If school has already started, consider the feedback you've heard from your students around their wellbeing and connection, then review the guidance in the step linked above to see if any of it will help you address your students' core challenges with wellbeing and connection.</p>
<p>Have you reviewed and modified your school culture and climate policies to ensure they are non-punitive and culturally responsive?</p>	<p>If you answered no to this question, take the steps outlined in CCSSO <a href="#">step 2.D.p: Review and modify existing school culture and climate policies</a>. Given the racial disparities that most schools see in discipline rates, this is a vital step to take, regardless of whether school has started or not.</p>

**Tailored Student Supports: How can we identify the range of health and wellbeing needs of our students, and provide them with or connect them to effective, culturally relevant supports?**

<b>If you didn't check off...</b>	<b>...consider the following next steps:</b>
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<p>Have you created a plan for targeted and intensive (Tier 2/Tier 3) strategies so that students who need more support have the opportunity to thrive?</p>	<p>If you answered no to this question, consider CCSSO Wellbeing and Connection <a href="#">step 3.A.p: Create a plan for targeted and intensive (Tier 2/Tier 3) strategies</a>.</p> <p>Because providing both additional academic and mental health support to students who need it is vital work, take this step whether or not the school year has started.</p>
<p>Have you created a plan to collaborate with community partners to help ensure that tailored student supports are implemented effectively and equitably?</p>	<p>If you answered no to this question, consider CCSSO Wellbeing and Connection <a href="#">step 3.B.p: Create a plan to collaborate with community partners</a>, as well as <a href="#">TNTP's Engagement guidance</a>.</p> <p>This year, it's likely you'll need support from your community to provide all the necessary targeted student supports, so ensure that you've created a plan to coordinate with community partners regardless of whether the school year has started or not.</p>

### Monitoring and Improving: How do you know what's working well and what needs to be adjusted?

<p><b>If you didn't check off...</b></p>	<p><b>...consider the following next steps:</b></p>
<p>Have you set goals related to the quality of, implementation of, and access to your wellbeing and connectedness resources and supports?</p>	<p>Before you can monitor and improve your results, you'll want to set goals for the quality of experiences you want staff and students to have, as well as goals related to the implementation steps you need to take and equitable access to the resources and supports you are offering. Prioritize among possible goals so that you have only a few that you're monitoring and focused on improving—consider using the CCSSO System Conditions guidance around <a href="#">step 6.A.p (set goals)</a>. Set quality goals (the outcomes you aim to achieve) about your students' and staff's wellbeing and connectedness first, since they will help you think through the implementation and access goals you need to set. Consider looking at the sample quality goals around wellbeing and connection found <a href="#">here</a>.</p> <p>Whether or not your school year has started, having a set of goals you'll drive towards and use to improve your work is a vital step.</p>
<p>Have you collected the information you'd need to know where you stand against your goals for quality, implementation, and access?</p>	<p>Once you've set your goals, make a plan to collect information to know where you stand against them. Consider using the CCSSO System Conditions guidance around <a href="#">step 6.A.p (set goals)</a>, focusing on 6.A.p.2 through 6.A.p.4 related to data collection.</p> <p>Whether or not your school year has started, collecting data to measure your progress toward your goals is a vital step to running improvement cycles that increase the quality of your students' experiences.</p>
<p>Have you run a learning cycle related to your progress towards your goals for quality, implementation, and access?</p>	<p>If you have not yet used the data you have collected to reflect on how you could improve, consider running an improvement cycle following the guidance found in CCSSO System Conditions guidance <a href="#">step 6.B.p (run an improvement cycle focused on access)</a>.</p> <p>Whether or not your school year has started, using data to identify gaps in your outcomes and address the root causes of those gaps is vital work.</p>

Communication: Are you actively sharing and discussing your plans with students, families, and staff, ensuring that it is easy to understand?

If you didn't check off...	Consider selecting one or more of the following next steps.
Have you communicated your wellbeing and connectedness plan to students, families, and staff?	<p>If you haven't yet communicated your wellbeing and connectedness plan to staff, students, and families, consider using our <a href="#">Engagement resource</a>, especially those around "Plan," to clearly communicate your plan to your stakeholders.</p> <p>If the school year has already started and you haven't yet communicated to one or more of these groups, use the links above to reflect on what you should share clearly now so that students, families, and staff understand your wellbeing and connectedness plan.</p>
Have you proactively and reactively gathered feedback on your wellbeing and connectedness plan from students, families, and staff?	<p>If you haven't yet engaged your students, families, and staff in sharing feedback to help improve your wellbeing and connectedness plan, consider following the steps outlined in our <a href="#">Engagement resource</a>.</p> <p>If the school year has already started and you haven't yet gathered feedback on your wellbeing and connectedness plan, doing so should be a part of your plan to monitor and improve the quality of your work.</p>
Do you have an ongoing communication and engagement strategy for students, families, and staff?	<p>If you haven't established an ongoing communication strategy to keep students, staff, and family informed about your wellbeing and connectedness work, consider following the steps outlined in our <a href="#">Engagement resource</a>.</p> <p>If the school year has already started and you haven't yet developed an ongoing communication and engagement strategy, work with your system's leadership team to ensure that you develop a plan for student, family, and staff communication and engagement this year. Given the unique challenges of the 2020-21 school year, communicating with these stakeholders and hearing their feedback about their experiences will be vital to ensuring you can improve the quality of students' experiences.</p>