

Connecting the Dots: School Reopening Considerations for School Counselors

"It is possible to prepare for the future without knowing what it will be. The primary way to prepare for the unknown is to attend to the quality of our relationships, to how well we know and trust one another." Margaret Wheatley

While much uncertainty surrounds how and when school will reopen, we know that social and emotional learning (SEL) will be critical to re-engaging students, supporting adults, rebuilding relationships, and creating a foundation for academic learning. This unprecedented shift to a new type of learning experience may have a lasting and profound impact on young people's academic, social, emotional, and life outcomes. School leaders will need to bring together administrators, teachers, school staff, families, youth, and community partners to co-create supportive learning environments where all students and adults can enhance their social and emotional competencies, feel a sense of belonging, heal, and thrive (CASEL, 2020, p.3).



How can School Counselors Support the School Re-entry Process

School counselors are specifically trained to support students in the areas of academic, social-emotional and career development. More than ever, school counselors need to ensure they have a comprehensive school counseling program in place ready to serve students at the universal, supplemental and intensified levels of support. [The ASCA National Model: A Framework for School Counseling Programs](#) outlines the components of a school counseling program necessary to actively and comprehensively serve every student. The role of the [school counselor](#), as described by the ASCA National Model, integrates naturally with the [CA MTSS Framework](#) ensuring all students have access to inclusive instruction and comprehensive levels of support in the areas of academic achievement, career planning and social-emotional development. In addition, through their leadership and advocacy, school counselors support the development and implementation of an integrated educational framework and family and community engagement program. School counselors provide universal support for all students, provide and coordinate supplemental interventions for students with additional needs, and recommend referrals to additional school and community support services as appropriate for intensified levels of support.

The following are some considerations for school counselors when planning their reopening of schools. This is not an exhaustive list. It is recommended school counselors consult and collaborate with other school leaders and community stakeholders to develop a social-emotional learning module plan and a comprehensive and successful school opening program.

Coordinating Support Services Across the District to Best Support All Schools

When coordinating a reopening program, consider the following programs to support the social-emotional well-being of students and staff.

- [Restorative Practices](#)
- [Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports](#)
- [Social-Emotional Learning](#)
- [Trauma-Informed Practices](#)

TIER 1: Universal Support (for a ALL students)

The universal school counseling program includes the delivery of Tier 1 activities and services that all students receive from the school counselor.

- Prioritize social and emotional learning
 - Focus on [relationship building](#) at every interaction and offer proactive activities to meet the needs of students
 - Focus on student [resiliency](#)- implement the [ASCA Mindsets and Behavior Standards for Student Success](#) and [CASEL Social-Emotional Learning](#) standards to develop a core curriculum program
- Provide professional development to all staff about [trauma-informed practices](#)
 - Train school staff to [recognize signs](#) and symptoms of mental health needs
- Foster a social, emotional and physically safe and supportive school environment
 - Inform parents of safety procedures and re-engage families with the school through a [core curriculum program](#)
 - Support the healing process of students by offering a universal [core curriculum action plan](#) and [school-wide programs and activities](#) that foster opportunities for positive experiences and support the social emotional development of all students
- Provide [universal screening](#) to learn which students need supplemental and intensified supports

TIER 2: Supplemental Support (for SOME students)

Targeted, data-driven school counseling interventions are designed for students who: 1) exhibit barriers to learning; 2) are struggling to achieve academic success; and/or 3) are identified as deserving of additional supports.

- Check-in immediately with students who were not engaged during school closures and those with previous mental health concerns
 - Be alert of students who exhibit problems with executive functioning, processing speed and working memory, learning and developmental delays, emotional regulation, impulse control, hypervigilance, and problematic relationships with peers and adults and provide supplemental supports as appropriate
 - Be alert and report suspected [child abuse](#)
- Provide re-entry activities such as lunches and mentorship programs to help students connect, heal and cultivate their own social-emotional learning competence
- Run [psychoeducational group](#) and individual counseling for students who exhibit emotional and behavioral concerns
- Consult and collaborate with key stakeholders such as parents/families, teachers, nurses, and school psychologists when concerns arise
 - Advocate for inclusive instructional practices and culturally responsive classroom climate (i.e. trauma-informed and culturally and linguistically relevant instruction).

TIER 3: Intensified Support (for FEW students)

Intensified school counseling interventions are designed to address emergency/crisis response events, or student needs that have not been met through Tier 1 and Tier 2 supports.

- Create a safe environment (physically and emotionally) by offering predictable routines and expectations, minimize trauma reminders, and maintaining a strong student relationship
- Attend to the basic needs of families and link them to resources that will help strengthen their household security
- Create a calming space (on campus and in the classrooms) and teach students about emotional regulation strategies (i.e. breathing practices and sensory experiences)
- Support student metacognitive and organizational skills and refer students with intensified needs to appropriate intensified supports (i.e. 504 Accommodations Plan, IEP, mental health specialist, etc.)
- Support administrators with accountable discipline and consult with the PBIS team for how to respond to problem behaviors

Resources:

- [The School Counselors and Trauma-Informed Practice](#)
- [The School Counselor and Safe Schools and Crisis Response](#)
- [The School Counselor and Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention](#)
- [ACES Study](#)
- [Department of Education Tips for Helping Children Recover from Traumatic Events](#)
- [Transforming Schools With Trauma-Informed Care](#)
- [Countering Coronavirus Stigma and Racism](#)
- [OCDE School Counselor Connection Newsletter](#)

