



**Support Services Department**  
**Return to School Plan - Social-Emotional Wellness**

**Purpose**

This section relating to maintaining and developing mental health and social emotional awareness and supports is intended to provide a functional framework that is broad enough to encompass the diverse instructional and support entities across all Pittsylvania County Schools while providing specific recommendations to choose from and build upon. These efforts are certainly meant to be a work in progress as we meet new challenges, but we hope to provide a flexible platform to address social emotional and mental health development.

**Introduction/Overview**

Pittsylvania County Schools (PCS) has been strongly committed to the Virginia Tiered System of Supports (VTSS) model including tiered levels of support, positive behavioral supports, and promotion of inclusive environments. The level of implementation across the division ranges from moderate (good) to advanced (excellent). There are VTSS coaches and support personnel serving every school as well as multidisciplinary leadership in each school as they address social-emotional learning (SEL) and mental health (MH) needs and interventions.

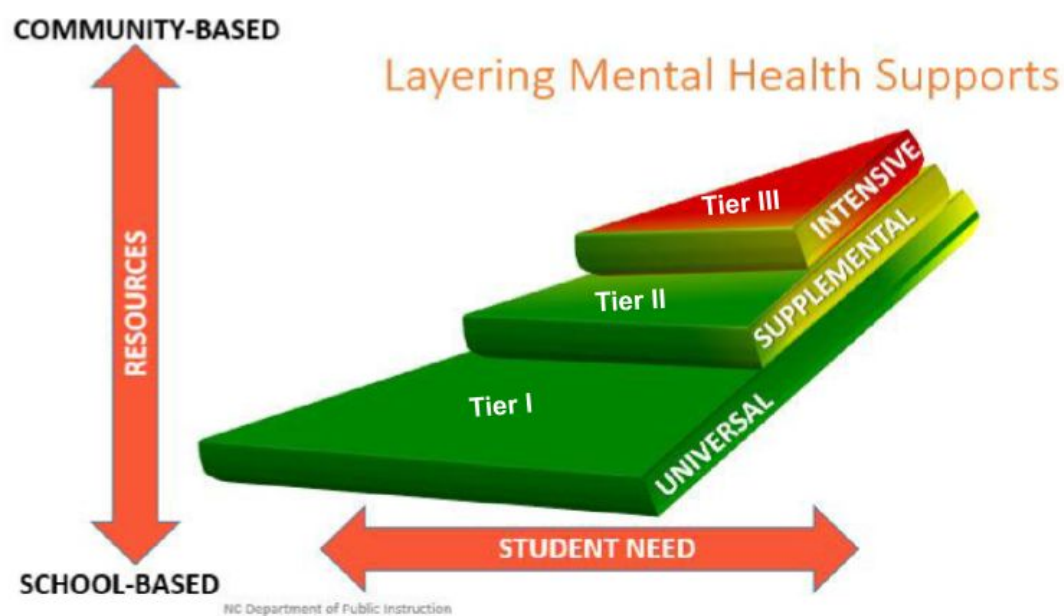
Community involvement has also been addressed in VTSS implementation and strong relations with many churches, local businesses and organizations, and programs for youth will be valuable resources for meeting recovery and return needs. Other ongoing community relationships include YMCA, community sports, and agricultural activities which provide outlets for many developmental and mental health issues as well as providing a variety of resources for our intervention teams.

PCS has a solid history of interagency and community collaboration. These established and ongoing relationships will be a tremendous resource as we move toward addressing SEL and MH issues in this shifting milieu. A working relationship with the Service Board has been well established and has been a referral source for addressing many of our student and family needs including threat assessment and clinical mental health assessments as well as collaboration for the on-going patient services they provide. Day treatment has been in place and a continued memorandum of agreement (MOA) will be pursued and refined in order to refer and to meet mild to moderate family and student needs as well as adjustments in school. Family Assessment and Planning (FAPT) team involvement is also well established and will

continue to be a source of wraparound support for families and students from DSS and local service Providers

PCS is in a favorable position to adapt to our current challenges. With established programs and relationships as a background to address specific and changing needs, PCS will address the specific points of concern below.

Social emotional and mental health needs are addressed in a tiered fashion as illustrated below and as consistent with VTSS models.



### **Tier 1 Supports:**

PCS is continually partnering with families and community service providers to effectively address the mental health and socio-emotional needs of students. As children have a variety of physical, mental, social, emotional, educational and developmental needs particularly during and after the COVID-19 events, providing effective help to students, staff and families requires sharing information across the many agencies and multiple systems that serve them.

Universally across PCS, positive behavioral matrices with school-wide expectations for overall conduct have been established. These guides for interpersonal relationships and supporting one another will continue to be modified as needs and instructional environments change. A behavioral matrix is posted throughout each school building. Expectations are taught explicitly

at the beginning of the year, refreshed formally after mid-year break, and refreshed and reinforced throughout the school year.

Behavior lesson plans which address SEL and character development topics have been developed at each school and may be modified as appropriate for specific classes or grade levels. Lessons may include school-specific videos (produced by staff and students), verbal presentations, or a variety of activities designed to actively engage and motivate students and to reinforce the concepts in the behavior matrix. School wide systems of positive behavior feedback go hand in hand with the lessons by producing a positive school environment through posters, wall and hall decorations, displays of student work (particularly when produced around positive themes), and other prosocial environmental features. Expected behaviors are reinforced through reward systems such as positive behavioral referrals to the office (in which family is contacted to report good behavior to encourage family participation), school dollars or points that may be traded in for tangible rewards, and celebrations that recognize the positive behaviors that have been exhibited by students.

Teachers have been trained and will continue to receive training in awareness of student mental health symptoms. As teachers interact with their students, this awareness will allow teachers to detect student mental health needs and get the attention that individual students might need as a result.

In developing new behavior lesson plans, PCS will explore what happens during the time out of school and during the transitions back to school. New lesson content will ensure students' developmental needs are met, influence their social and emotional competencies and long-term success. Also depending on teacher competencies, teachers will hold class meetings consistent with Restorative Justice techniques. Class meetings or other methods are used to monitor student adjustment on an ongoing basis. Examples include simply greeting each student individually as they enter the class or virtual classroom, to holding class meetings with goals around behavior expectations, personal challenges, and accomplishments, character traits etc. These activities are designed to reinforce constructive actions and alert teachers to any emerging difficulties requiring more intensive interventions.

Additional universal supports that have been implemented and will continue to be supported during transition include Second Step and classroom guidance activities, the Mandt System, and the Incredible Years program. Depending on school needs, the Second Step program may be delivered by school counselors as a universal (whole class) or a supplemental (selected small group) service. Specific concerns and feedback about the status of individuals is monitored and can be used as a screening tool. Counselors are trained to address SEL and MH needs in the lessons and discussions involved for students with an eye for emerging social emotional or MH needs that might require more intensive interventions.

The Mandt System is a relationally based program that uses a continuous learning and development approach to prevent, de-escalate, and if necessary, intervene in behavioral interactions that could become aggressive. The context of all behavior is relational. When service recipients can say that “In this place, and with these people, I feel safe” they will hopefully be able to heal from the traumatic experiences many children and adolescents in service settings have experienced. The staff-to-staff and the staff-to-service-recipient relationships form the basis upon which children and adolescents will learn how to build and maintain healthy relationships.

The Incredible Years evidence-based programs for parents, teachers, and children reduce challenging behaviors in children and increase their social emotional learning and self-control skills. The programs have been found to be effective in strengthening teacher and parent management skills, improving children’s social emotional competence, emotion regulation, and school readiness, and reducing behavior problems. Evidence shows the programs have improved behaviors of up to 80 percent of the children of participating parents and teachers. If left unchecked these behaviors would mean those children are at greater risk in adulthood of unemployment, mental health problems, substance abuse, early pregnancy/early fatherhood, criminal offending, multiple arrests and imprisonment, higher rates of domestic violence and shortened life expectancy.

The School Wide Information System (SWIS) allows student behavior data to be collected and analyzed for progress monitoring of identified school behavioral goals and for detecting any rising trends that need to be addressed school wide. One of the most critical tasks during the transition to the new school year will be supporting every student, particularly those whose needs were not fully met before COVID-19. For students who have not regularly attended classes, it is imperative to develop a plan that addresses the root causes of their absences and leverages family and community partners to double-down on individual outreach and relationship-building. This may include revising existing policies and practices that may have inequitable or detrimental impact on students, such as punitive or exclusionary discipline practices that can contribute to student disengagement or retraumatize students.

## **Tier 2 Supports**

If, in the delivery of Tier 1 or universal supports, staff develop concerns for a student’s well-being, referral systems are in place in each school to further assess and/or deliver interventions. Referral systems vary from school to school. The referral process generally starts with a school-developed referral form delineating suspected needs and processes. Referral forms may be reviewed by a dedicated administrator and school counselor or by a team of staff that may include general education teacher, administrator, school counselors, school psychologist and upon invitation school social workers. Referrals for Tier 2 supports may be

made by community service providers, Child Study Intervention Team (CSIT), and family members as well as school staff.

Supplemental SEL and MH interventions currently provided by PCS will be continued and further developed as our environment evolves. The referral team in each school may follow-up with supplemental interventions (Tier 2) such as Check-In Check-Out (CICO), small group Second Step sessions and lessons, small group counseling and Incredible Years Dina curriculum.

The CICO process is a research based intervention program designed to connect an individual student with an individual staff member. This staff member works with the student to develop personalized behavioral/emotional goals aligned with the behavior matrix as well as specific academic goals for the individual. The goals are confirmed at the beginning of the day with the student's facilitator, accomplishment of these goals is evaluated throughout the day by teachers and then reviewed at the end of the day with the facilitator. This system provides feedback to the student about progress made, provides data to monitor progress of the student and monitor effectiveness of the program as well as involving many members of the school community. The program is based on positive behavioral support practices and provides rewards and reinforcement for students participating as well as providing open family communication and feedback. For students with concerns around topics that can be addressed in a small group (i.e. fears and anxieties, adjustment issues around return to school, anger, etc.) school counselors (and other support staff as needed) design and implement small group counseling sessions to address specific need areas.

Incredible Years Dina Dinosaur curriculum is a small group treatment curriculum for counselors, therapists, or special education teachers to treat children with conduct problems, ADHD, and internalizing problems. It is delivered in 2-hour weekly small group sessions (6 children per group) for 18-22 weeks. Ideally it is offered in conjunction with the 2-hour weekly parenting program group sessions so parents have an opportunity to foster their children's learning in Dinosaur School in their interactions with them at home.

### **Tier 3 Supports**

Each school has a trained team available to conduct Functional Behavioral Assessments (FBA) and formulate a Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP) for students demonstrating behavioral needs within their educational setting.

Every school has a school counselor available to provide group and individual counseling services. Many counselors have utilized virtual means of maintaining contact with students throughout the school closure, such as grade level "hangouts" in Google Meets and Facebook Messenger. PCS hopes to continue to utilize and expand our use of virtual meetings for student

outreach and to maintain contact with all our students and families. This platform could be used for group or individual counseling with school counselors.

Every school also has available a shared School Psychologist to assist in crisis response, Tier 3 service coordination, consultation for FBA/BIP processes as well as other behavioral emotional issues, bridge school and mental health provider communications and recommendations.

Therapeutic Day Treatment (TDT) with the National Counseling Group (NCG) is a program available to provide crisis support to eligible students. A process is in place in every school to make a referral to NCG for TDT services. <https://www.ncgcommunity.com/>

PCS has a long standing relationship with the Danville-Pittsylvania Community Services Board to collaborate and coordinate services for our students and families. A pilot program utilizing CSB staff working within the school building to coordinate and link families with services was planned for the 2020-21 school year, with hopes to expand this program to all PCS schools. <https://www.dpcs.org/>

The Family Assessment and Planning Team (FAPT) is a multi agency team including DSS and local MH providers that processes intensive mental health and social services related cases. PCS's continual involvement through staff social workers who are seated members of FAPT and participation by other invited staff will continue to provide residential and other intensive support recommendations as well as wraparound support for families and students from DSS and local service providers. [FAPT Parent Guide](#)

Additional information on outside services providers in the Pittsylvania County and Lynchburg area can be found at this link: [Outside Service Providers List](#)

### **Enhanced Practices in Response to COVID-19**

#### **Staff SEL**

Uncertainties around school opening and instructional unknowns as well as the potential to shift to distance learning has impacted educators' identity and role in unexpected and anxiety-provoking ways. In addressing the need for support for the staff's emotional well-being, CASEL's (2020) large survey indicated teachers described their most frequent emotions during COVID -19 as anxious, fearful, worried, overwhelmed, and sad. All staff should be reminded of the airplane flight procedures of applying your oxygen mask before you assist others with applying theirs. District and building leaders and prominently school counselors in each building can support all staff's social emotional well being. Examples might include organizing/regular check in meetings for job-alike staff, and giving teachers specific support and

guidance in developing techniques so they can address SEL needs and detect Early Warning Signs for mental health needs. Part of this support may be helping staff look through trauma informed lenses, both in regard to themselves and their students. Opportunities for adults to connect, heal, and cultivate their own SEL competencies and capacities can also be provided through grade level and cohort teacher meetings as well as designed opportunities for teachers to process their experiences and will accomplish the following goals:

- Space for connection, listening, and healing among all leaders and staff in the school building. This may include carving out time during existing virtual or in-person meetings for staff to process and share their feelings, engage in community-building activities, reflect on how they can use their own social and emotional competencies to support one another and their students, and create individual plans for ongoing self-care.
- Capture this moment to identify new opportunities. Engage staff in reflecting on what they've learned from the past few months and how this experience will shape the coming years. Provide time for staff to discuss with one another: How have disruptions to class and school revealed strengths in ourselves and students? This allows developing some new ways to facilitate learning? Discussing where may there be disengagement and inequity?
- Continuing Class DoJo and other platforms to better partner with families. This offers ongoing opportunities for staff to collaborate on ideas for how to use this learning to inform a collective path forward.
- Provide professional learning to build educators' capacity to support students' SEL. Ongoing VTSS and staff development activities includes professional learning that helps staff build relationships and integrate SEL into in-person and distance learning, create equitable learning environments, identify signs of trauma and mental health concerns, and support grieving students. Free online offerings may provide a starting point over the summer that connects to a longer-term professional learning plan during the school year.
- Through virtual meetings, staff members' abilities to connect with students, families, and community partners can be developed and maintained. For example, staff or community partners can coordinate to check in regularly with a small groups of students and families; counselors, social workers, school psychologists, and nurses can connect with students and families before schools reopen and during blended or distance learning; and school staff can better align with community partners in supporting adults and students.

- Assistance programs ensure access to mental health and trauma supports for adults. Some adults in the building may be struggling with mental health issues, trauma, secondary traumatic stress, or “compassion fatigue.” Look for signs that adults might need more support and identify available resources. The SAMHSA mental health services locator can be used to search for resources in the community.

### **Daily School Entry Recommendations**

The experience of the COVID-19 closure has added a new layer of urgency to incorporate SEL skills into the daily routine; children cannot access the academic curriculum until they have their emotional needs met first. The recommended protocol for daily monitoring of student’s well-being, consistent with PCS current VTSS systems and consistent with information regarding best practices for supporting staff, student, and family social emotional needs, is based on the Collaboration for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) model for social emotional development.

Schools are encouraged to provide daily check-ins at the beginning of class or 1st period as part of defined core instruction. This creates an opportunity for teachers to have an understanding of where students are emotionally each day.

- Universal check-in methods support school connectedness and check for students who need extra support. Examples of check ins can be electronic, a chart in the classroom, a morning meeting, mood meter, or welcome inclusion activity. New opportunities for this activity may be through temperature checks and re-entry survey questions required for safety. Check in prompts are things like “What was your favorite thing you did yesterday?”, “If you could be an animal what would it be and why?”, “What song inspires you?”, etc.
- Available resources for daily check ins:
  - SEL Signature Practices Playbook - CASEL School Guide
  - Daily check-ins from Jennifer Findley
  - Using Circles
  - Circle Prompts
  - 6 Minute SEL also has structures for circles
  - Capturing Kids Hearts Good News Structure
- Supplemental check-ins give a little extra attention to the students who are struggling a bit that day or have been known to struggle in the past. This is just a little private



conversation saying “Are you okay?” “Can I help?” or “What do you need?” The following are warning signs that let you know the student needs a little extra care:

- ☐ Students who do not respond or respond in ways that cause concern
  - ☐ Behavior that is out of the ordinary for the student
  - ☐ Increased irritability, mood swings
  - ☐ Change in appetite
  - ☐ Change in sleeping patterns
  - ☐ Negative response to recent change in structure/routine
  - ☐ Change in physical activity level
  - ☐ Change in communication with family members
  - ☐ Change in work/study habits
  - ☐ General sense of hopelessness or helplessness
  - ☐ Friendship issues
  - ☐ Family relationships are more strained
- Intensive check-ins are referred by the teacher to the school counselor who may refer the intensive student to the school intervention team. The team may follow up at least weekly depending on the severity of the student. If a student mentions suicide or self harm, the counselor needs to be notified immediately to follow up with the suicide assessment protocol. Signs that a student needs an immediate referral to the counselor are:
    - ☐ Talking about or making plans for suicide
    - ☐ Expressing hopelessness about the future
    - ☐ Displaying severe/overwhelming emotional pain or distress
    - ☐ Showing worrisome behavioral cues or marked changes in behavior, including
    - ☐ Withdrawal from or change in social connections/situations
    - ☐ Changes in sleep (increased or decreased)
    - ☐ Anger or hostility that seems out of character or out of context
    - ☐ Recent increased agitation or irritability

### **Crisis Response**

In addition to the tiered system approach described above, crisis response protocols are developed system wide and/or school based for threat and suicide prevention, intervention and postvention. Prevention is largely addressed in the tiered model described above. Intervention

procedures are well described and supported by board policy and interview and data collection may need to be conducted in virtual formats as necessary. In this COVID time, postvention responses to the loss of students and or staff may be required. Virtual chats, Google Classroom and secure Facebook group discussions (e.g. Facebook Messenger) may need to be implemented in order to address the grieving process for students (and staff). Particularly for those who do not have email access, establishing a hotline may be helpful as it would allow parents and students to leave phone messages even if the school is closed and resources are limited. Virtual memorials may also be established as individual cases require. Specific responses will be determined by school counselors, psychologists and social workers in conjunction with administrators and selected teaching staff. Additional resources are brought into the school as needed.

### **PBIS Lessons**

In developing new behavior lesson plans, PCS will explore what happens during the time out of school and during the transitions back to school. New lesson content can be developed through a trauma informed perspective and will ensure students' developmental needs are met, influence their social and emotional competencies and long-term success. To help students with the important transition into this coming school year examples of lesson plans might include the following:

- **In early childhood programs:** Provide young children with simple strategies for exploring, discussing, and regulating their emotions. Read alouds offer an easy way to prompt conversations about how big changes make them feel.
- **In elementary school:** Support students in developing relationship-building and conflict-resolution skills by helping them co-create shared agreements for their new class or distance learning environment.
- **In middle school:** Offer adolescents an opportunity to reconnect and create a sense of closure from the previous school year, such as by writing letters to their former classmates or teachers, or discussing with peers how the last few months will impact their perspectives as they enter a new grade.
- **In high school:** Provide older students with a way to reflect on and document their experience and what they've learned about themselves during the pandemic, either through journal writing, artwork, music, or other creative outlets.
- For more practices, review the SEL Providers Council website.