

# HEALTHY YOUNG MINDS

A publication of MHANYS' School Mental Health Resource & Training Center

NOVEMBER 2020, ISSUE 14

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## Message from Amy Molloy, Project Director School Mental Health Resource and Training Center

**H**ard to believe the first quarter of the 2020-2021 school year is coming to a close. Schools, families, students and community partners should all be commended for their collaborative efforts to promote health and safety during the first few months of school - whether in person, remote or hybrid.

This issue of Healthy Young Minds includes perspectives from school leadership, including business officials, school boards, superintendents and building administrators. We appreciate their insight and the exceptional examples of innovative strategies and promising practices included in their articles. While this is a great time to reflect on lessons learned and celebrate the many creative ideas that have emerged from these challenging times, the reality is that many concerns continue to need our attention - the mental health of staff and students, racial and systemic injustices, the resurgence of Covid cases and financial constraints. MHANYS and the School Mental Health Resource and Training Center is committed to helping schools through professional development, resources and information, education for families, caregivers and students, and supporting the creation of school-community partnerships.

Over the next few weeks and with financial support from the Mother Cabrini Health Foundation, the Resource Center is coordinating a family-focused, virtual Learning Community. The goal is to support and inform parents and caregivers about youth mental health and wellness. Events include webinars, a film screening and panel discussion, a book study, informal conversations with experts and family advocates, and a series of mindfulness videos to better understand and practice these strategies in our homes (to be released in December). If you are a parent or caregiver - we invite you to join us! If you are also an educator or community provider - please share this opportunity with the families you serve!

**MHANYS LEARNING COMMUNITY:  
FAMILIES & CAREGIVERS**



**Empowering Families of Children and Youth  
through Knowledge, Skills and Resources**  
**FALL 2020 LEARNING COMMUNITIES**

Together we can support healthy minds, healthy schools, and healthy communities!

Visit [mentalhealthEDnys.org/learningcommunities](https://mentalhealthEDnys.org/learningcommunities) for more information and registration:

- 11/6 - LIKE documentary and panel discussion
- 11/10 - Breathing Room: Creating Capacity to Cope with Stress and Adversity with Amy Scheel-Jones, CCSI
- 11/12 - Fostering Resilience in Kids and Families During Challenging Times with Melissa Heatly, University of Rochester
- 11/17-11/20 - Family Lunch & Learn: conversations about youth mental health with Randi Silverman, The Youth Mental Health Project
- 12/1 - 12/10 - Paws to Comfort book study with Inspiring Comfort

## Hear from School Representatives

“Concern about the mental well-being of students has been surging among superintendents throughout the state in recent years. The effects of COVID-19 pandemic have intensified those concerns and districts are doing the best they can to anticipate needs and to respond.”

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- Robert Lowry, Deputy Director for advocacy, Research, and Communications  
New York State Council of School Superintendents

“At this point in the school year, it is becoming evident how each stage of the pandemic affected schools and the mental health and safety needs of students and staff. Building administrators have been out in front in identifying the rising mental health needs of students and staff as a critical issue.”

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- Cynthia Gallagher, Director of Government Relations  
School Administrators Association of New York State

“This year marked an unprecedented time for K-12 school reopening across the nation. The global COVID-19 pandemic ushered in novel ways of teaching and learning for school leaders, teachers, school personnel, students and families. In tandem, George Floyd’s recent killing in May 2020 sparked a renewed commitment to eradicating racial injustice in this country.”

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- Gayle Simidian, Ed.D., New York State School Boards Association

“In March, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic presented public education with multiple interconnected crises. School districts were faced with addressing student learning, health, safety, and social-emotional well-being in a virtual environment, while tackling the logistical, technological, and financial dimensions of remote operations. This article will focus on the fiscal dimensions of COVID-19, from its March emergence in New York through the summer of 2020 to the fall re-opening and current concerns.”

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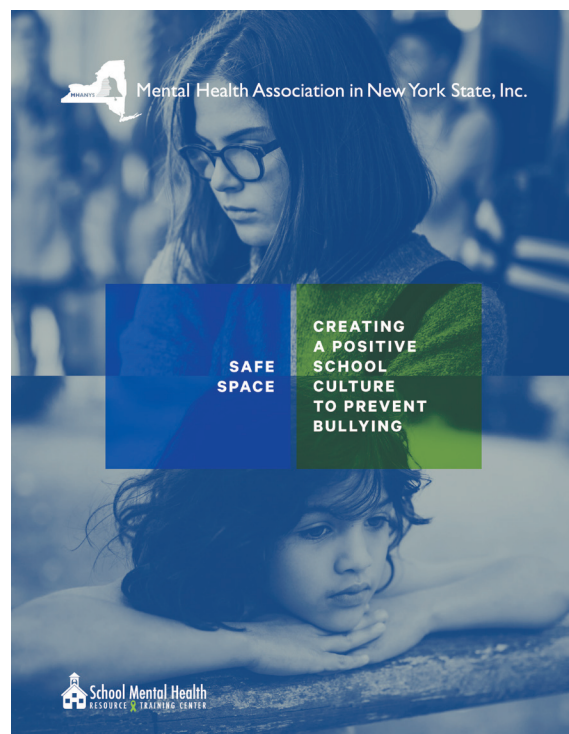
- Andrew Van Alstyne, PhD, Director of Education and Research  
The Association of School Business Officials of New York


# MHANYS Recognizes October as Bullying Prevention Month

Across all ages and communities, the prevalence of bullying among students continues to be a major concern for schools and families. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, 1 in 5 students ages twelve to eighteen reported being bullied at school. In New York State, the problems mirror those in schools throughout the U.S. The impact of bullying on the school culture and climate, as well as the mental health of both the target and those who bully, is significant and the need for further understanding of how we can prevent bullying is essential. School administrators and staff, teachers, students, families, and caregivers all have a role in the prevention of bullying, but need the tools and tips to be effective. In recognition of Bullying Prevention month and with support from the New York State Office of Mental Health, the School Mental Health Resource and Training Center has released a multitude of resources throughout the month of October.

A new [Bullying Prevention webpage](#) was created to host all of our new and exciting tools, including our newest publication called [Safe Space: Creating a Positive School Culture to Prevent Bullying](#). The purpose of this e-book is to help schools, families, and communities identify strategies and resources to create a safe learning environment for all children, one where bullying is not given the opportunity to flourish. Instead, kindness and respect become the mainstays of the school-community culture, replacing the divisiveness that can become all too common in our society. Our approach is guided by the belief that, in order to reduce harmful interactions between children, we need to empower the entire school community with mindful strategies to create a culture unaccommodating to these encounters. This is achieved with a multifaceted approach of mental health and bullying prevention education, social-emotional learning, restorative and non punitive policies, and the creation of a caring community.

Visitors to our webpage will find a new online training that addresses bullying and cyber-bullying, eligible for one hour CTLE, as well as a lesson plan that introduces the idea of safe spaces to students. We also hosted a Friday night movie screening of The Upstanders, followed by an informative panel discussion; the recording was made available for anyone who missed it to view for a period of 48 hours the following week. We would like to thank Pat Breux from the Suicide Prevention Center of NY, Amanda Nickerson from the Alberti Center for Bullying Abuse Prevention, and Barbara Bernstein from MHA of Westchester County for being on our panel and sharing their expertise.



<p>October is Bullying Prevention Month</p>  <p>We have online resources!</p> <p>MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION IN NEW YORK STATE, INC.</p>	 <p>mentalhealthEDnys.org/bullyingprevention</p> <p>Including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>E-Book</li><li>Cyberbullying Recorded Session</li><li>Educational Resources for Youth</li><li>and more!</li></ul>
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# Schools Responding to Meet Mental Health Needs as Pandemic Continues

*By Robert Lowry, Deputy Director for advocacy, Research, and Communications at New York State Council of School Superintendents*

A common sentiment among superintendents is that the year is off to a reasonably good start in most schools, given all that has been thrust upon them. But there is caution too. All the careful planning for reopening that district leaders and stakeholders took on and their diligence in carrying out those plans are among the reasons the year has begun as well as it has.

Most districts are employing a hybrid model of instruction, with only some students in-school on any day. Through mid-October, all New York City schools were following a hybrid approach. According to the State Education Department, 50% of schools in the remainder of the state were using the hybrid model, 27% had all students in school every day, and 23% were doing remote-only instruction.

Concern about the mental well-being of students has been surging among superintendents throughout the state in recent years. The effects of COVID-19 pandemic have intensified those concerns and districts are doing the best they can to anticipate needs and to respond.

In surveys of our members done each year, expanding student mental health services emerged as the most widely cited priority for new funding each year for the last three years. Sixty-seven percent of superintendents named improving those services as a leading priority in the 2019 survey, up from 52% three years before. Over half of superintendents responding expected their district budget for 2019-20 to improve those services.

In a survey last May focused on experiences with remote instruction, we asked superintendents how concerned they were about the impact of the pandemic's disruption upon teaching and learning, both on the academic readiness of students and on their emotional well-being.

Concerns about the academic effects were greatest in earlier grades and rose as the percentage of students in poverty climbed. But concerns about effects on student well-being were high across the board—at all school levels, in all regions. For example, 71% of all superintendents statewide said they were “very concerned” about the impact on the mental and emotional well-being of high school students.

Dr. Augustine E. Tornatore, superintendent of Liberty Central in Sullivan County said “My administrative team and my custodial team worked so hard this summer in order to follow guidelines to reopen schools in a hybrid model. I held more forum meetings than were required by the governor in order to answer any staff, student or community questions.” His leadership team has strived to be models of transparency. The district phased-in in-person instruction at each school level, to build confidence in the process.

Liberty added an extra social worker so that each district school would have one. Superintendent Tornatore added, “Our psychologists have been available to staff, family, students regarding the PTSD from the lockdown and my door is always open. We are working as a unified team and everyone sees and understands the importance of students returning to school, engaging in routines and feeling safe and secure in the buildings.” He observed, “Of course not all staff felt comfortable in the beginning, but they have felt better once they saw how the buildings physically changed, how everyone is pitching in to clean desks, and so on.”

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Eastern Suffolk BOCES Chief Operating Officer Julie Lutz agreed with the perception that the school year has begun smoothly, given circumstances. She explained that her BOCES developed a brief assessment to screen students for impactful events that may have happened in their lives since March to know what additional resources to share with students and families. The BOCES also put together a list of community resources to share with its mental health staff and students' families. Those were shared with its member districts as well.

Dr. Lutz added, "I have been messaging leadership since March to practice self-care, get themselves help if they are struggling from a social-emotional place. Usage of our employee assistance program has gone up as you would expect. We have also put together webinars and recorded links to webinars to support mental health for our employees. My message has been that we need to take care of ourselves so that we can take care of our staff and in turn they can take care of the students." She concluded, "All that being said, people are struggling with the ongoing unknowns. As leaders they struggle to admit they need help and then, in turn, get help."

Under Superintendent Patrick Brady, the Massena Central School District has put an emphasis on mindfulness, with counselors making an expanded effort to connect with at-risk students and more teachers using mindfulness activities in the classrooms. A grant is allowing the district to set up mindfulness rooms where students and staff in several schools can go for tools to handle their emotions. The rooms will be staffed by trained practitioners from the Akwasasne Mohawk Territory.



Massena is engaging in partnerships with other local agencies to give students the mental health support they need. The district is working this year with the state Office of Mental Health and Saint Lawrence County Psychiatric Center to enable students take part in teletherapy appointments at school. It is also expanding in-school counseling with the Massena Wellness Center and Citizen Advocates. It has also started monthly meetings with the same groups collaborate on helping students who are struggling with mental health issues.

Relying on partnerships with other community agencies is a key strategy. Planning for reopening this

year, the White Plains City School District had the benefit of an established relationship with Andrus Mental Health Clinics for children in Westchester County. Speaking with *School Library Journal*, Superintendent Joseph Ricca said that his school community had endured months of "sustained trauma."

Working with Andrus, White Plains set up workshops for school staff beginning before school started and now running four sessions per week through Thanksgiving. Dr. Ricca said, "If you want to achieve your optimal level, you have to make sure you're tending to all of the social and emotional aspects of the total human being... If you're experiencing some type of sustained trauma, or you've been impacted and are carrying that weight around, that gets in the way of reaching your maximum potential."

Caution is justified in thinking about the months ahead for schools. Temperatures will drop. Students, staff, and families will spend more time indoors. The cold and flu season will start. Without help from Washington, the threat of drastic reductions in state funding persists. But school district leaders and their colleagues have mastered one challenge after another since the pandemic began. That is one reason to be optimistic about whatever the future may bring.

# Schools During the First Few Months of the 2020-21 School Year

*By Cynthia Gallagher, Director of Government Relations at School Administrators Association of New York State*

October has been designated as Principal Recognition Month and the School Administrators Association of New York State (SAANYS) is honored to have been asked by Mental Health Association of New York State (MHANYS) to discuss mental health issues facing schools since they have reopened, from the perspective of building administrators and program directors. We are so pleased to have MHANYS as a strong partner and collaborator for the last several years. The work and advocacy of MHANYS is exceptional and their work in schools invaluable.

Over the past few years the role of the building administrator has shifted and expanded dramatically. As the COVID-19 crisis came onto the landscape, the concerns and activities of building administrators changed immediately. One role that has not changed however, is the role of being a trusted source of support. In 2019, the Pew Foundation released a report on America's trust in and confidence in institutions/groups (legislators, schools, journalists, technology companies, etc.). The results, from over 10,000 respondents, indicated that 84% of respondents felt that principals provided "fair and accurate information and handled resources responsibly." Principals ranked higher than religious and military leaders and police officers. This trust is well earned. The full weight of being a trusted advisor, a protector of the health and safety of students and staff, instructional leader, and financial steward is not lost on building administrators each and every day. It is their nature to be supportive, empathetic, resourceful and responsible.

At this point in the school year, it is becoming evident how each stage of the pandemic affected schools and the mental health and safety needs of students and staff. Building administrators have been out in front in identifying the rising mental health needs of students and staff as a critical issue. Over the past few years, MHANYS and SAANYS have advocated strongly for increased funding to address these student needs. This advocacy has been successful in gaining additional funding for community school models, technical assistance centers, and focused attention from policy makers.

## **The Shutdown/Outreach**

The period of time between March and September can be framed as the shutdown period. The focus was on the complete shutting of doors and finding our way through the initial phase of the pandemic. Building administrators quickly shifted to ensuring that students and families received meals, that childcare was available to essential workers, and staying connected to students and staff in any way possible. Schools and staff provided remote learning on the fly. This was a monumental undertaking and one that was distressing on so many levels. Priorities for building level administrators focused on finding students, understanding the health and mental health needs of students and families, and linking resources to needs. This required countless hours of outreach and empathy. Families were under tremendous stress and building administrators were often the first point of contact. Mental health needs were understood to be great, however the identification of specific needs and available resources during this time was uneven and piecemealed. Further, although we were all under statewide shutdowns, not all regions of the state were experiencing the COVID-19 crisis in the same way. By the middle of the summer, educators were faced with an understanding of the dramatic impact of the pandemic. What started as a health crisis became an economic, educational and social justice crises.

## **The Reopening of Schools /Reconnecting**

By the end of the summer, schools were charged to develop a plan for reopening schools, with the required...

...involvement of staff and parents. The hope and anticipation of “normal” reopening was quickly dispensed, with only a few regions in the state being able to open in-person. As SAANYs worked with building administrators across the state it became obvious how complex the planning for the reopening of schools was.

## Triage

Building administrators clearly understood that the mental wellness of students and staff needed to be the primary priority for reopening schools. It was understood that very little instruction could occur unless we first attended to the mental health needs of all students. Every student was impacted. One of the most powerful consequences of the pandemic was how it leveled the playing field for all of us-albeit not in a positive way. No one escaped the pandemic’s reach. The re-opening phase was primarily an activity of triaging needs. Triage was a new term in the lexicon of building administrators.

Many school districts initially used surveys to help understand student needs (see the SAANYs Connect Series # 7). This was used to help locate students and determine student needs. In the period between March and September students moved, went to live with grandparents, or switched districts. It was critical to first find students and then identify needs. Even into October many larger districts are still struggling to know where the students are and even more importantly how to reach and connect. Some school districts redeployed staff differently. An all hands- on deck approach was utilized to communicate and contact students. Support staff, teaching assistants, program directors, central staff health providers, transportation and lunch personnel were all brought in to ensure that students and families were located and contacted.

Alongside the complexities of daily public health protocols, schools were trying to meet educational requirements. According to the NYS Education Department, 67% of schools are using a remote instructional model. This is complex and the educational system has not fully acclimated to the intricacies of remote instruction. A high-quality remote program is far different than putting lessons on a web-based platform. Most critically, digital inequality is a reality for many students. Access to high speed internet, access to devices, use of software programs and availability of technological support at home are problematic and further contribute to educational losses.



Schools are finding their way through this phase, but it is stressful for all involved. School districts are finding innovative strategies to support students. One example is the Rochester City School District who extended its peer-to-peer support groups to small online conversations and have worked with the community to bring resources to families. New partnerships between school districts and community services are continually being forged across the state.

## What’s Next

Perhaps the second part of the year could be labeled as “enduring”. The next months will need to build connections, expand ways to provide support services and provide instruction while ensuring that the physical and mental needs of students and staff are met. However, during the second part of the school year COVID-19 may spread further, the flu may present additional challenges, and the fatigue of daily challenges may slow our energy. Sufficient staffing will be critical. Already there is a serious shortage of teachers, substitute teachers, administrators, and program directors. There will likely be staffing cuts as state and local decisions require...



...fiscal reductions. Our challenges may very well increase and our steps forward may be followed by two temporary steps back. However, the nine months have shown that we can do hard things and persevere.

Whatever the next months hold, flexibility, empathy, insight, fortitude, and leadership will be needed. The pandemic has underscored the key role schools play for families and communities. We fully understand that schools have become much more than educational settings. When it is time to reflect on what we have gone through, it will be imperative to examine how to strengthen and rebuild the multi-faceted dimensions of education.

## SEL and Equity Frame K-12 School Reopening Transition

By Gayle Simidian, Ed.D., New York State School Boards Association

This year marked an unprecedented time for K-12 school reopening across the nation. The global COVID-19 pandemic ushered in novel ways of teaching and learning for school leaders, teachers, school personnel, students and families. In tandem, George Floyd's recent killing in May 2020 sparked a renewed commitment to eradicating racial injustice in this country. These two profound traumatic events provided the narrative backdrop for this year's school reopening. School leaders are now responsible for helping their school communities write the remainder of the K-12 narrative in a way that fosters resiliency, relationships and equity for students. How? CASEL can help.

CASEL, the national organization dedicated to promoting SEL in education, recently released the report, *Reunite, Renew, Thrive: Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Roadmap for Reopening School*, which is a guidance roadmap



for K-12 educators focused on fostering socio-emotional learning and equity. Forty organizations collaborated on this guidance which details how school leaders can promote the use of four "SEL critical practices" to strengthen relationships and foster educational resiliency. These four practices broadly include strengthening relationships including school partnerships, supporting and caring for adults in the school community, promoting "safe, supportive and equitable learning environments" that value diverse identities, promoting antiracism, fostering belonging and cultivating student agency to ensure students

and school educators develop social and emotional competencies and using data for continuous improvement. Together, these four practices can play a major role in helping school communities move forward in a positive and mindful way.

Dr. Oliver Robinson (Shenendehowa Central School District), Dr. Luvelle Brown (Ithaca City School District) and Dr. Ray Sanchez (Ossining Union Free School District) are three New York State K-12 public school superintendents who understand the positive impact SEL and equity work can have on their school district communities especially given the current COVID-19 global pandemic and public outcry over racial injustice. Below are major ways these four "SEL critical practices" relate to the day-to-day work in their school districts.

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## Shenendehowa Central School District

### Relationship-building

Relationship-building has been at the forefront of Shenendehowa's transition to reopening this fall. Maintaining communication with the school district's stakeholders as reopening occurred took many forms including surveys, live stream events, socially distanced dialogues, Google Meets, school district website communication, social media and written communication, according to Robinson.

### Care

Fostering care for the Shenendehowa school community during the pandemic involves a strategy consisting of prevention, mitigation and reinforcement, says Robinson. Prevention involves the basics of employee health checks, hygienic behavior, masks and social distancing. Mitigation involves communication with the Department of Health and school community members when contact tracing is needed, cleaning and communicating with affected school members. Reinforcement consists of continuous training and highlighting of prevention strategies.

### Safe and Equitable Environment

An advisory council of school district stakeholders including community-based service providers has created a wellness plan for socio-emotional health. This plan includes a clearinghouse of mental health resources and providers, an understanding of mental health literacy, mental health curriculum, restorative practices, a trauma-informed approach to student wellness, a focus on culturally-responsive instruction, and professional development in self-care and wellness as well as antiracism for adults in the school community.



### Data for Continuous Improvement

Shenendehowa continually uses data to inform policy and practice. Protocols that address the pandemic and student learning outcomes include a grading rubric for hybrid coursework and K-5 remediation guidance.

## Ithaca City School District

### Relationship-building

Professional development at Ithaca City School District over the past few months has centered on fostering relationships through social and emotional learning, hybrid learning and culturally responsive instruction, according to Brown. Administrators have led these sessions since school closure.

### Care

Cultivating a climate of care is important at Ithaca City School District. Dr. Brown regularly leads an affinity group of African American teachers, provides yoga and mindfulness classes for school staff, is strengthening community partnerships and has put in place a SEL initiative called RULER, which was developed at the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence, for adult well-being in the school district. RULER is an acronym for SEL skills including recognizing, understanding, labeling, expressing and regulating emotions, according to the school district's reopening plan.

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## Safe and Equitable Environment

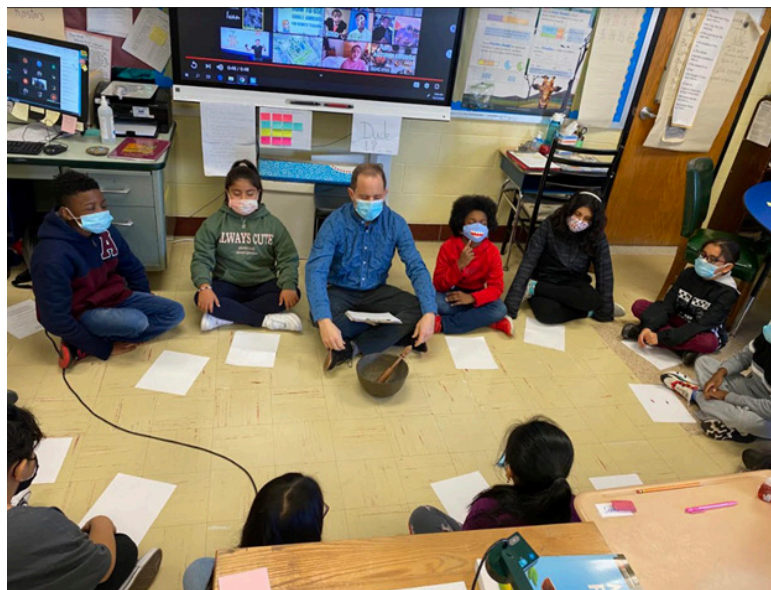
RULER is also being implemented with the student population this fall. This implementation for every learning hub includes a social emotional charter, notes Brown.

## Data for Continuous Improvement

The school district continually uses data to improve practice. For example, this fall school leaders will review attendance and special education data as well as feedback on adult support. In addition, a number of listening conferences within the school community are being held to gain feedback about protocols and practices within the school district. The district also uses an equity report card to assess policies and procedures.

## Ossining Union Free School District

School leaders at Ossining Union Free School District have built the school district's 2020 SEL plan predominantly around CASEL's roadmap and are using an integrated approach to implementation. The school district's SEL committee has reviewed protocols to ensure equity for every student. A district review of stakeholder



feedback helped inform current strategies to promote transformative social emotional learning. According to the district's plan, "we have a renewed responsibility and obligation to be intentional about dismantling systems of oppression within our own sphere of influence while taking into account the intersectionality of identities of our students, as well as our faculty, staff, parents and community."

Ossining's data review showed inequities exist for marginalized students including "faculty and staff discomfort making connections with students of a different ethnic identity from their own." The district is using restorative practices and a commitment to relationships to support student identities, integrating social and emotional

learning into all facets of the curriculum, encouraging dialogue about race and privilege, supporting self-care for adults in the school community, and forging community partnerships to ensure school families get their basic needs met via Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and additional needs not limited to, but including, racial trauma.

To see how CASEL's roadmap can help inform your school district's policies and practices, go to <https://casel.org/reopening-with-sel/>.

# Fiscal and Logistical Dimensions of the COVID-19 Pandemic

*By Andrew Van Alstyne, PhD, Director of Education and Research at The Association of School Business Officials of New York*

## Introduction

In March, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic presented public education with multiple interconnected crises. School districts were faced with addressing student learning, health, safety, and social-emotional well-being in a virtual environment, while tackling the logistical, technological, and financial dimensions of remote operations. This article will focus on the fiscal dimensions of COVID-19, from its March emergence in New York through the summer of 2020 to the fall re-opening and current concerns. While many schools are currently operating in-person, the potential for large mid-year aid cuts threatens tremendous disruption for public education.

## The close of the 2019-20 school year

In mid-March, Gov. Cuomo announced he was closing New York schools for two weeks; eventually, they would remain closed for the rest of the 2019-20 school year. Thus began an incredibly challenging time for public education. School districts scrambled to transition to remote operations, which brought forth a number of pedagogical and technological issues. School districts acquired and distributed devices to their students, while also working to expand access to high-speed internet. Internet access has proved to be an incredible challenge for districts in cities and rural areas. Beyond virtual instruction, school districts were tasked with providing childcare for the children of essential workers and distributing meals to students in need.

When schools closed, the state was only a few weeks away from its April 1 deadline for passing a budget. From the beginning it was clear that the pandemic would have an enormously negative impact on state finances, but also that it was hard to know the depth and length of the downturn. In January, the governor's budget proposal included a \$504 million increase in Foundation Aid. With the support of \$1.1 billion in federal support from the CARES Act, the enacted budget held Foundation Aid flat, while making clear that the lack of cuts should be seen as written in pencil. Gov. Cuomo made it clear that additional federal stimulus money would be needed to avoid enormous reductions to the state's budget.

## Summer 2020

School budgets would typically go before voters in May. This year, the vote was moved to June. In an even more significant change, the vote was conducted entirely by mail. By mid-June, when all ballots had been counted, the number of votes increased by more than a million, from around 525,000 to nearly 1.6 million. Voters approved 99 percent of budget proposals that complied with the tax cap; nine of 13 overrides were successful. Sending postage paid ballots to all eligible voters raised the cost of the school budget vote. A survey of ASBO members found that the 2020-21 school budget vote cost 3.7 times more than the 2019-20 school budget vote. Like many of the expenses school districts have incurred during the pandemic, there was no additional state aid supporting the increased cost of the mail vote.

As school districts planned for re-opening in September, the governor instructed them to develop plans covering three scenarios: all in-person learning, fully remote learning, and a hybrid of the two. School district plans were developed with significant input from stakeholders including teachers, staff, parents, and community members. In developing these plans, Gov. Cuomo issued an order requiring districts to hold at least three meetings with parents and one teachers-only meeting. Many districts went well beyond these requirements in involving...



...stakeholder voices. The impact of this process can be seen in the wide range of plans districts ultimately adopted, which range from in-person to beginning with remote.

Regardless of the model a district developed, operating during COVID-19 involves a host of new expenses. School districts are required to purchase sufficient PPE to provide for students or staff who need face masks, for example. Then there are additional cleaning supplies, training in how to administer them, as well as potentially expanded custodial staffs. In-person and remote teaching can each require new technology purchases. Social distancing on school bus routes might involve additional routes, which could mean hiring more drivers and buying new buses. Smaller class cohorts place pressure on physical spaces, which can be addressed with additional



spending. In order to get a better sense of the fiscal impact of reopening, the Association of School Business Officials of New York (ASBO) partnered with the New York State School Boards Association (NYSSBA) on a survey of school business officials. Among the 181 districts that responded to the survey, re-opening expenses were \$219 per student.

### **The 2020-21 School Year**

As the summer progressed, it became clear that the federal government wasn't making progress on an additional round of stimulus that would include aid for states. Because of the state's economic challenges, it began withholding 20% from many state aid payments, though the September and October general aid payments were made in full. Compared with its earlier forecast, the state currently projects a \$14.5 billion decline in general revenue in its current fiscal year, which is part of a potential \$62 billion shortfall over the next four years. The governor has made clear that if there is no additional support from Washington, that painful cuts will be made to expenses, including education. For Foundation Aid alone, statewide a 20% reduction would amount to \$2,093 per pupil. The ASBO-NYSSBA survey asked districts how they would respond to reductions on this scale. We found that 64% of districts would cut non-instructional staff, 60% would cut instructional staff, and 58% would reduce extracurricular offerings including athletics. If the state implemented multi-year aid cuts, nearly 40% of districts said they would be educationally or fiscally insolvent.

### **Conclusion**

The pandemic has hit all segments of society. For public education, it challenges the state's constitutional obligation to provide all students with a sound, basic education. Instructional disruptions, unprecedented challenges to mental and physical health, a rapid and deep recession, and large increases in operating costs have resulted in a severe crisis. Large-scale mid-year cuts to state aid would profoundly threaten educational equity. Additional federal stimulus that supports state operations and public education would provide school districts with the resources they need to help our students succeed in truly challenging circumstances.

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<sup>1</sup>An analysis of the survey results is available at <https://www.asbonewyork.org/page/reports>

## Building Pandemic-Centered Resiliency: A Marathon not a Sprint

As the public response to the COVID 19 pandemic now enters its eighth month the emphasis on how to respond to its impact on children's mental health is shifting from a sprint to a marathon. The initial destabilizing effect of lockdowns, virtual learning, social distancing norms, and uncertainty is giving way to a longer-range public health crisis with no end in sight. In response, child mental health researchers are turning their attention from the impact of a short term pandemic disruption to longer term adaptation and resiliency. The title of a recent published paper in the journal *Psychol Trauma* sums up this prescription: "Shifting from survival to supporting resilience in children and families in the COVID-19 pandemic:...". From this perspective a longer term strategy is needed to build resiliency in children and adolescents.

But first, we err if we assume that children are innately resilient, thus requiring little or no intervention from the adults in their lives. Child and adolescent psychiatrist Victor Carrion, MD, director of the Stanford Early Life Stress and Resilience Program, makes this simple but foundational observation: "Children are not resilient just by nature of being children," the comment was intended to dispel the common misconception that children automatically bounce back from bad experiences. Instead, Carrion suggests, adults should encourage and facilitate resiliency building skills by modeling them and by engaging with the children in their lives. He specifically suggests perseverance, the ability to think about multiple things at once and consciously regulating emotional responses. As a practical matter, adults can 1) give age-appropriate answers to questions about the COVID-19 crisis, 2) listen to and help quiet fears, 3) help young people maintain virtual connections to friends, and 4) give youth a sense of agency — even if it's just letting them make simple choices and decisions.

Researchers who recently (July, 2020) published in the *European Society for Child and Adolescent Psychiatry* point out that over a half century of research on resilience in children and adolescents points to a wide range of promotive and protective factors linked to adaptation in conditions of mass adversity. They suggest the following core elements of ordinary adaptive systems from which resiliency emerges:

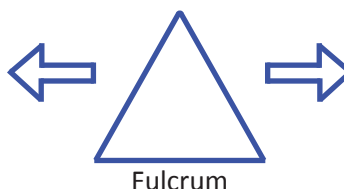
- close relationships with competent and caring adults and peers,
- effective schools and communities,
- opportunities to succeed, and
- belief in the self.

Fostering these core elements is the rightful domain of families, peers, schools, and communities. This perspective embodies a systems approach to understanding and building resiliency, within which schools are uniquely and advantageously positioned to play a crucial role.

Another approach to encouraging resiliency in children and adolescents can be found in recommendations from the *Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University*. This approach uses a construct of negative outcomes (sometimes referred to as risk factors), positive outcomes (or, protective factors) and the existence of a fulcrum. In the context of the COVID pandemic this can be visualized as follows:

(CONTINUED ONTO NEXT PAGE)

Negative outcomes	Positive outcomes
• Job loss in the family	• Responsive relationships
• A loved one with COVID	• Stable housing
• Physical distancing	• Unemployment benefits
• Closed schools	• Exercise/physical activities
• Disconnection from services	• Spiritual connectedness/Faith
• Lockdowns/quarantines	• Healthy nutrition and sleeping habits



Negative and positive experiences in a person's life offset one another on a theoretical see saw where the individual's relative resiliency level is portrayed as a fulcrum. Proactive, resiliency building actions involve "unloading the negatives", "loading up the positives" and "moving the fulcrum" by focusing on individual resiliency building activities. Again, schools can influence the condition of any and all of these factors.

Each of our circumstances are unique combinations of these three factors and youth are no exception. Yet where our personal fulcrums are located is not always apparent until we're faced with challenges, like for example, a global pandemic. Authors Luthar, Cicchetti, and Becker define resilience as a "dynamic process encompassing positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity". These researchers acknowledge that when applying this definition, "resiliency can only be identified *after* [emphasis added] adversity has occurred, although it may be possible to predict resilience or to identify possible protective factors." There is no doubt that parents and educators alike are bearing witness to the resilience of youth now revealed in the midst of this pandemic. It may be discouraging when it's discovered that some students are struggling more than others in ways that are now visible because of the pandemic. And it can be tempting to concede defeat on behalf of some students with compromised resiliency.

The problem here is that this pandemic is not finished with us and moreover, many other challenges and adversity await young people through the course of their lives. Helping children and adolescents to build resiliency in this regard is best viewed as a long game – a marathon if you will. For all of its devastating effects, COVID-19 and the ways we're responding to it as individuals, families, schools and communities is a learning experience. It's reminding us all of the important role that resiliency plays in our lives and highlights in particular the work that remains in fostering greater resilience in our youth.

For further guidance on ways to build resilience in children and adolescents consider these resources:

Ways to Promote Children's Resilience to the COVID-19 Pandemic

[https://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/COVIDProtectiveFactors\\_ChildTrends\\_April2020.pdf](https://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/COVIDProtectiveFactors_ChildTrends_April2020.pdf)

Building Resilience in Children and Families during the Pandemic

<https://www.stonybrookmedicine.edu/KeluskarResilienceKidsFamiliesCovid19>

COVID-19: Resilient Educator Toolkit

<https://resilienteducator.com/collections/covid19/>

# Supporting a Trauma-Sensitive School Environment through Training, Tools and Technical Assistance

Sources of trauma are ubiquitous, especially in today's society. The current pandemic, racial discrimination, violence in homes and communities, poverty, homelessness and the loss of loved ones are impacting our school communities more than ever before. The School Mental Health Resource and Training Center (Resource Center) is committed to helping schools be a part of the healing process. We believe that a trauma-sensitive school environment is necessary to help mitigate the impact of these traumatic experiences on students, families, educators and communities. That is why we offer *Introduction to Trauma Sensitive Schools* training.

*Introduction to Trauma Sensitive Schools* (TSS) is not a program – it is an ongoing process that is unique to the strengths and needs of individual schools and communities. It is a “way of being”. TSS training is divided into 3 learning objectives: *The Evidence of Impact, Understanding Why* and *What can we do?* Our Resource Center staff work with schools to train all staff in a basic understanding of trauma and its impact on learning. Following that, we provide more detailed training to support staff and leadership teams to identify tools to create a trauma-sensitive environment and provide technical support, coaching and resources as schools move through the process of implementing a plan unique to their school.

We would like to thank Spencer Van Etten CSD and Liverpool CSD for having us be a part of your professional development at the beginning of this school year. Resource Center staff trained over 1000 school personnel between the two districts. A few weeks later, we followed up with additional training for school leaders with a “toolbox” of strategies and resources for every level of the school system to put that knowledge into actionable steps toward the creation of a more trauma-sensitive approach.

## Why is a trauma sensitive approach so important?

A [seminal study](#) conducted at Kaiser Permanente in the 1990's studied over 17,000 adults and found a correlation between childhood trauma and negative outcomes, including the risk for chronic disease and mental health disorders. Further studies indicate that trauma alters brain development, function and structure including nervous system regulation, physiology, the stress response and gene function. Students who have experienced trauma are significantly more likely to be unable to perform at grade level, be suspended or expelled or drop out of school. Higher numbers of adverse childhood experiences are related to poorer well-being. For example, students with 3 or more ACEs were almost half as likely to have low engagement in school and difficulty in finishing tasks as students with one or zero ACEs. For more information, visit: <https://www.mentalhealthEDnys.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/ACES-Handout-Resource-Guide.pdf>.

The good news is ALL students will benefit when schools and districts implement trauma sensitive approaches and develop an understanding of trauma's impact on student success. Acquiring a deeper understanding of trauma helps all involved in the school system recognize that learning requires safety, trusting relationships, equity and belonging, and working together as a school community. Imagine a world where we all recognize that youth are experiencing adversity, trauma and toxic stress and need our support, empathy and compassion.

If you would like more information on how the Resource Center can bring *Introduction to Trauma Sensitive Schools* training to your school or district, contact us at [schools@mhanys.org](mailto:schools@mhanys.org).



## Did You Know?

### Hope for Recovery in Traumatized Youth

#### The Facts...

- 82% of children, youth, and young adults in systems of care<sup>1</sup> have experienced at least one traumatic event before entering services;
- 41% of those with a trauma history have had suicidal thoughts, compared to 24 percent without a trauma history; and
- 23% of those with a trauma history have had a suicide attempt, compared to 13 percent of those without.

#### The Good News...

Children who experience trauma and receive treatment through systems of care show the following after 1 year of treatment:

- 68% reduction in suicidal thoughts;
- 78% reduction in suicide attempts;
- 17 % reduction in the display of externalizing behaviors (not following rules, exhibiting aggressive behavior, or expressing behaviors that are difficult to manage);
- 22% reduction in internalizing symptoms (withdrawing from others; being anxious or depressed);
- 48 % had reduced school absences;
- 41 % improved their school performance; and
- 15 % improved their competence in school and classroom tasks.

<sup>1</sup>Systems of Care is a coordinated network of services and supports that are organized to meet the physical, mental, social, emotional, education, and developmental needs of children and their families.

\* Source: SAMHSA's Children's Mental Health Initiative (CMHI)

# RESOURCES

Alberti Center for Bullying Abuse Prevention  
[ed.buffalo.edu/alberti.html](http://ed.buffalo.edu/alberti.html)

Disability Rights New York  
[drny.org](http://drny.org)

JED Foundation  
[jedfoundation.org](http://jedfoundation.org)

NAMI  
[nami.org](http://nami.org)

National Institute of Mental Health  
[nimh.nih.gov](http://nimh.nih.gov)

NY State Coalition for Children's Behavioral Health  
[cbhny.org](http://cbhny.org)

NYS Health Foundation  
[nyshealthfoundation.org/resources/](http://nyshealthfoundation.org/resources/)

NYS PTA  
[nyspta.org](http://nyspta.org)

NYS School Counselors Association  
[nyssca.org](http://nyssca.org)

NYS School Psychologist Association  
[nyasp.org](http://nyasp.org)

NYS School Social Work Association  
[nyssswa.org](http://nyssswa.org)

Parent to Parent  
[parenttoparentnys.org](http://parenttoparentnys.org)

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network  
[nctsn.org](http://nctsn.org)

The Trevor Project (LGBTQ Suicide Prevention)  
[thetrevorproject.org](http://thetrevorproject.org)

Understood  
[understood.org](http://understood.org)

Youth Communication  
[youthcomm.org](http://youthcomm.org)

Youth Decide NY (Problem Gambling Prevention)  
[youthdecideny.org](http://youthdecideny.org)

Youth Mental Health Project  
[ymhproject.org](http://ymhproject.org)

Youth.gov  
[youth.gov/youth-topics/youth-mental-health](http://youth.gov/youth-topics/youth-mental-health)

YOUTHPOWER!  
[youthpowerny.org](http://youthpowerny.org)



Office of  
Mental Health

CRISIS TEXT LINE |

TEXT "Got5" TO 741741  
TO START A CONVERSATION

Free, 24/7, Confidential Crisis Support

## WE ARE HERE TO HELP



MHANYS School Mental Health Resource and Training Center is available to provide information and resources to schools and families, including:

- mental health instruction and training
- guidance on community resources
- technical assistance

Contact us directly at [schools@mhany.org](mailto:schools@mhany.org)  
or 1-800-766-6177 / 518-434-0439  
[mentalhealthEDnys.org](http://mentalhealthEDnys.org)



MHANYS.org



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@MHAacrossNYS

Print and post page as a resource reference.