



New York State Mental Health Education Readiness Guide

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School Mental Health Resource and Training Center at
www.mentalhealthEDnys.org or call **518.434.0439**



Education professionals understand the importance of student mental health, as is often reflected in teaching strategies, curriculum and district-wide initiatives. However, a recent New York State law requiring schools to include mental health education in the K-12 health curriculum is providing an even greater opportunity for schools to critically evaluate the effectiveness of their current practices and to create an improvement plan, when necessary.

The *School Mental Health Resource and Training Center* has developed assessment tools for educators, administrators and student support services staff to evaluate existing curriculum content in health and other subject areas, as well as school and/or district-wide awareness initiatives that promote a better understanding of student mental health and wellness.

The *New York State Mental Health Education Assessment Guide* includes:

- 1) Suggestions for a Mental Health Education Task Force
- 2) Creating a vision for mental health education in your school/district
- 3) Using the NYS Framework for Mental Health Education Instruction
- 4) Assessing mental health education across disciplines
 - crosswalk of mental health education w/SEL, Health, PE and FACS standards
 - exploring mental health education in MS/HS classrooms (other than Health)
- 5) Exploring Mental Health Education and Initiatives in Schools
- 6) Aligning vision and plan

IMPORTANT NOTES:

- This guide was created for schools to use in its entirety or by selecting individual sections to best meet the needs of the school/district. While the guidance was developed for schools to use independently, the *School Mental Health Resource and Training Center* can provide technical assistance upon request. Please email schools@mhanys.org or call 518-434-0439 for more information.
- The guide is best viewed online as it contains hyperlinks to “working” documents. The documents can be downloaded and printed, or downloaded and shared via a collaborative workspace to support multiple users.
- The focus of this guide is to help schools evaluate Tier 1 mental health education curriculum and initiatives – we regard this as the foundation to promote mental health and wellness of ALL students, families and staff. It is part of a larger endeavor towards supporting mental health of students that may need additional support (Tier 2 and 3). This guide was not intended to assess the strength or breadth of school-based mental health supports and services.

Suggestions for Building a Mental Health Education Task Force

Many schools/districts have implemented mental health initiatives, including student instruction and professional development to increase mental health literacy among students, staff and families. In our experience working with schools since the mental health education law took effect, schools and districts sometimes lack a system to evaluate the many positive strategies they have employed. We suggest schools consider identifying a workgroup to systematically assess, plan and evaluate strategies for improving mental health and wellness. Schools may choose to “assign” this task to an existing group, such as Child Study Team or the District Health Advisory Committee, or may create a sub-committee of an existing group that focuses on student mental health. The frequency and duration of meetings will depend on how much work was previously done in this area, the size of the district and countless other variables. Consideration should also be given to developing teams in each building to facilitate implementation of mental health education, strategies and initiatives identified by the larger task force.

For the purposes of this guide, we will name this workgroup the *Mental Health Education Task Force*. Ideally, task force members will volunteer to participate, as this will likely ensure greater engagement and will help schools/districts identify “champions” who can educate their peers about the importance of mental health promotion initiatives.

- Administrators (i.e. Director of Student Support Services, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction, Dean or Headmaster, Principal)*
- Student Support Staff*
- Special Education Teachers*
- Teaching Assistants/Aides*
- Health Educators (including 1-2 elementary classroom teachers with interest in health)
- representatives from various department/content areas (consider Art, Family and Consumer Science, Music and others outside of the core subjects)
- Athletics or PE representative*
- School Nurse*
- Library Media Specialist*
- representative(s) from parent group/Shared Decision Making team/BOE

*above positions combined should represent all grades levels

Creating a Shared Vision for Mental Health Education

"Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being
and not merely the absence of disease."

~ World Health Organization

Before beginning the assessment process, the *Mental Health Education Task Force* may want to build consensus around a vision for mental health education in your school/district. Begin by reflecting on the World Health Organization quote above. How does your school/district define mental health? What outcomes do you hope to achieve by educating your school community about mental health? Having these discussions early will help guide your work. Use your response to the above questions to create a vision statement for mental health education in your school/district. A good vision statement is future-focused, values-driven, specific and inspiring.

Building consensus can be done informally through the discussion above or through one or more of the structured activities below:

- 1) Who, What, Where, When, Why and How? – title six large sticky pages with one word each. Break into groups of 4-6 people and brainstorm the question at the top of each page – as it relates to mental health instruction (i.e. who are we teaching, what do we want to teach, etc.). Groups can spend 1-2 minutes on each page and then rotate to the next sheet a few times or until each group has had a chance to discuss each question. Come back together as a group to debrief and create a vision statement for mental health education.
- 2) Reflect on [general facts about youth mental health](#) and then review your school's data to get a better understanding of the mental health concerns and needs of your students. Consider the following:
 - a. Crisis referrals
 - b. Student-initiated visits to the Counseling Office
 - c. Attendance and drop-out rate
 - d. Discipline referrals and suspensions
 - e. MTSS data (i.e. PBIS, RTI) or SEL assessments, if available
 - f. Test scores, reading assessments
 - g. DASA reports
 - h. Visits to the Health Office
 - i. Referrals for testing/evaluation for CSE committee
 - j. Referrals to student learning team
 - k. 504 data
- 3) Consider using existing surveys/assessments to collect further information
 - a. [Mental Health Education Literacy in Schools: Linking to a Continuum of Well-Being](#) includes a school self-assessment to identify mental health and well-being benchmarks for a positive climate/culture beginning on page 48.
 - b. [Panorama](#) offers a variety of free surveys or you can develop your own based on your needs

Using the NYS Framework for Mental Health Education Instruction

NYSED's [Mental Health Education Literacy in Schools: Linking to a Continuum of Well-Being](#) provides health educators with a framework for mental health education instruction beginning on page 13, aligned with current NYS Health education standards. The following documents provide a tool for educators to assess their existing curriculum for compliance with the framework, and involve three steps:

- 1) rate existing curriculum content for compliance with the framework
- 2) identify gaps in content between curriculum and framework
- 3) identify a plan for revising curriculum to better align with framework

[NYS Mental Health Education Framework Assessment Tool – Elementary](#)

[NYS Mental Health Education Framework Assessment Tool – Secondary](#)

Exploring Mental Health Education Across Disciplines

The School Mental Health Resource and Training Center recommends an integrated approach to mental health education. As districts assess their existing mental health curriculum, they are encouraged to explore current initiatives and other areas of instruction that promote student mental health literacy.

To support schools/districts, this guide includes two tools:

- 1) [Summary Crosswalk of Mental Health Education w/SEL, Health, PE and FACS standards](#)
[Mental Health Education K-5 Crosswalk](#)
[Mental Health Education 6-12 Crosswalk](#)

The crosswalk is a visual aid to help educators identify overlaps in mental health instruction and NYS Social-Emotional Learning benchmarks, as well as Health, Physical Education, and Family and Consumer Science Standards. Educators should pay close attention to the areas marked “NA”, as this indicates where there are no corresponding standards to the mental health framework. NOTE: this is one interpretation of overlapping areas; educators may identify variations based on how they interpret/implement the standards.

The SEL benchmarks (vs. core competencies) were selected to illustrate alignment with mental health education framework. Educators are encouraged to become familiar with both social-emotional learning core competencies and sequential instruction; visit <https://casel.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Competencies.pdf> for more information.

For crosswalk examples from NYS schools, visit:
<http://www.p12.nysed.gov/sss/SELCrosswalks.html>

- 2) [Worksheet to Identify Mental Health Instruction/Awareness in MS/HS Classroom](#)
This tool is designed specifically for middle and high school classroom teachers (other than Health) to reflect and report on how they are currently providing mental health instruction and awareness to their students. Teachers in all disciplines are encouraged to complete the worksheet to identify mental health-related lessons, as well as activities or approaches they use in the classroom to foster positive mental well-being (i.e. wellness exercises for body and mind, designated classroom spaces for wellness, classroom management approaches). A planning section is included so leaders/teams can assist teachers with resources and implementation of new ideas.

See examples on the following page.

Suggestions for Mental Health Education Across Disciplines

The following are just a few examples of how teachers in some core subject areas can incorporate mental health education into their lesson plans:

English Language Arts

- Mental health challenges, substance abuse, grief, loss and trauma are common themes in literature. Invite student support services to lead a discussion on how these issues impacted characters, highlighting coping strategies, hope and support.
- Mental health-related articles can be used for writing prompts.
- Students can conduct research to create brochures on local mental health treatment resources, content for morning announcements, newspaper editorials, bookmarks and informational brochures.

Foreign Language Studies

- Identify mental health-related infographics, fact sheets or children's books and assign them to students for translation. Once reviewed for accuracy, share them with the Counseling Department so they can be given to ESL families. You can also contact the *School Mental Health Resource and Training Center* at schools@mhanys.org. We are always interested in translating our materials into other languages.

Social Studies

- The MS/HS US History curriculum provides opportunities to highlight mental health reforms during the 1800s led by Dorothea Dix, during the Progressive Era in the early 1900s, and more recently beginning with the 1980s through present day.
- The HS Global studies curriculum offers opportunities to look at this topic in reference to how ancient civilizations viewed mental health, as well as the use of mindfulness/meditation in Eastern religions, such as Buddhism.**
- Participation in Government allows students to use mental health as a focal point in a unit on public policy. Each year, the Mental Health Association invites students to participate in our Mental Health Matters Day – our legislative advocacy day held on the second Wednesday in March. Lessons have been created to help prepare students.**

** Visit <https://www.mentalhealthdny.org/education-professional/mh-lesson-plans/>.

Science

- A Living Environment (Biology) lesson on brain development can talk about stress hormones, the effects of trauma, adolescent brain development, the relationship between physical and mental health and the genetics as a risk factor.

Exploring Mental Health Education and Initiatives in Schools and Districts

The *School Mental Health Resource and Training Center* recommends an integrated, public health approach to mental health education in schools – one that raises the mental health literacy of the entire school community, including students, families and staff. Such an approach will also promote a positive culture and climate of wellness.

A Mental Health Education Task Force or other team can help lead the way by identifying and evaluating current practices and developing an improvement plan, if needed. [Exploring Mental Health Education and Initiatives in Schools and Districts](#) includes several areas for discussion so teams can collaborate and plan, such as:

- review of practices and policies related to mental health and wellness
- reflection of general approach to mental health instruction
- review of any programs currently in use (i.e. RULER, Second Step)
- identification of specific strategies at the district, building or classroom level

This worksheet was developed as a tool to begin a conversation about current practices, their effectiveness and what more can be done to support mental health and wellness of students, families and staff. It was intentionally created to facilitate open dialogue among school/district personnel.

Aligning Vision and Plan

For schools that have chosen to complete this assessment guide in its entirety, our recommendation is to plan a final meeting to look at the completed tools/worksheets and reflect on how well it aligns with the Vision identified by the *Mental Health Education Task Force* during the initial meeting. This is also a great opportunity to ensure that any planning that has commenced is also reflective of the group's Vision.

An evaluation process should also be a part of planning. Teams are encouraged to consider data that may not currently be collected – such as student self-referrals to the Counseling Office for social-emotional concerns – and to develop a plan for tracking and reviewing such data.

Once again, we invite you to contact us for technical assistance or to answer questions you may have about the guide at schools@mhanys.org. In addition, your comments and feedback would also be greatly appreciated.

The *School Mental Health Resource and Training Center* team is grateful to the Mental Health Advisory Council, our network of Mental Health Association affiliates and NYS educators whose work informed this assessment guide.