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## Guiding Principles for Creating Safe, Inclusive, Supportive, and Fair School Climates

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*Wednesday, August 9, 2023 | 3:00 – 4:30 PM ET*  
*Transcript*

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**Greta Colombi:**

Good afternoon and welcome to today's webinar, Guiding Principles for Creating Safe, Inclusive, Supportive and Fair School Climates. This is the first webinar in our miniseries on supporting students' social, emotional, behavioral and academic wellbeing and success. And on behalf of the U.S. Department of Education, we are pleased to have you with us. In fact, almost 1,200 folks have registered for this webinar and we are just so pleased to have you with us. This webinar is a part of our lessons from the Field webinar series. This series highlights effective tools, techniques and strategies employed by everyday practitioners to address hot topics that are on the top of educator's minds. You can access recorded webinars from the series on the webpage now being shared in the chat, and we will tell you more about the miniseries in a moment. As always, as you participate, if you have additional strategies that you're finding are working for you for this topic and working for you in your community, please reach out to [Bestpracticesclearinghouse@ed.gov](mailto:Bestpracticesclearinghouse@ed.gov) to share. Our work is stronger together and we all benefit from sharing effective strategies, so we totally welcome them.

Please note that the content of this presentation does not necessarily represent the policy or views of the U.S. Department of Education, nor does it imply an endorsement by the U.S. Department of Education. So my name is Greta Colombi, I'm the Director of the National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments or NCSSE, and I will be the moderator for today's event. NCSSE is funded by the Office of Safe and Supportive Schools within the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education. And together we work to build the capacity of state education agencies, districts, schools to make school climate improvements, foster school safety and maintain supportive, engaging and healthy learning environments to empower the success of all students. To learn more about NCSSE and to access a range of resources that address school climate and conditions for learning, we encourage you to visit our website.

To give you a sense of what the website looks like and what it includes, here we share some of our most popular products on the left and an image of our homepage on the right. We also have the latest resources and events coming out from the Field via social media. Please do follow us. And please note all materials that you see today, including the slides, reference resources and the archive version of the recording, it will all be available on the event webpage within this website. In fact, some items, including the slides and bios have already been posted. Please also note that you can access previous lessons from the Field webinars, as I mentioned a moment ago, on this webpage that is being posted in the chat as well.

So today, after we finish up these logistics and welcome, our first two speakers will provide an overview of the guiding principles and talk about how they can be used to transform schools. Then we will move into a practitioner panel to hear how schools and districts are creating climate change by implementing strategies based on the guiding principles. After the formal closing remarks, we will spend 15 minutes responding to questions posted by you all, either through registration or during the event itself until we close at 04:30 Eastern Standard Time. Please note bios for all speakers are included on the event webpage and we are including that link in the chat as well. It is now my pleasure to introduce Ms. Ruth Ryder, the Deputy Assistant Secretary in the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education at the U.S. Department of Education to welcome you to today's webinar.

**Ruth Ryder:**

Thank you so much, Greta. I'm really excited to welcome you to our latest lessons from the Field webinar. Today's webinar, Guiding Principles for Creating Safe, Inclusive, Supportive and Fair School Climates is the first in this miniseries, which is focused on supporting students' social, emotional, behavioral and academic wellbeing and success. The webinars in this miniseries will offer best practices and approaches to support and respond to students' social, emotional, behavioral and academic needs, including practices designed to reduce the use of exclusionary discipline in schools. As we kick off the miniseries today, you will be getting an overview of the guiding principles for proactively supporting students based on a brief that the department released earlier this spring. You will then learn how schools can leverage the guiding principles to transform their schools based on the experience of multi-tiered system of support efforts in California. Next, a group of practitioners from three school districts from across the country will talk about how they have been implementing the guiding principles to support and respond to students' social, emotional, behavioral and academic needs.

As Greta shared, our speakers will also respond to questions you submitted via registration and during the event. Following today's miniseries kickoff and building on the companion fact sheets that were released by the department in May, we'll be hosting four additional webinars tailored to specific audiences at the school or district level. That is school and district leaders, families, educators and student support teams. Each of these webinars will provide context setting information and practitioner panels. We're confident that you will learn key strategies you can implement in your school from each of these webinars. And I

strongly encourage you or a member of your team to attend each of the webinars and share what you learned broadly in your schools. After all, only together we can shift the school climate to keep students in school and address their individual social, emotional, behavioral and academic needs.

Please note the brief, the fact sheets and the webinars are just some of the many ways that the department has been actively raising the bar to transform P-12 education and unite around what truly works based on decades of experience and research to advance educational equity and excellence. Raising the bar means recognizing that our nation already has what it takes to continue leading the world if we deliver a comprehensive, rigorous education for every student, if we boldly improve learning conditions and ensure every student has a pathway to multilingualism and to college and careers. When the bar is raised in education, all of our nation's students will build the skills to succeed inside and outside of school. Our students will reach new heights in the classroom, in their careers, and in their enriched lives in communities, making a positive difference in the world for generations to come.

Via it's Raise the Bar effort, the department has been providing tools, resources and assistance to states, districts and schools like the guiding principles and the fact sheets and these webinars to advance the three focus areas you see here on the slide. Which are connected to six strategies aimed at promoting academic excellence and wellness for every learner and better preparing our nation for global competitiveness. In particular via boldly improved learning conditions, the focus area directly related to this miniseries and the resources we are supporting improved learning conditions by working to eliminate the teacher shortage and investing in every student's mental health and wellbeing.

This includes efforts such as promoting better pay for teachers, better working conditions, looking at retention strategies and professional development for teachers and specialized instructional support personnel, and increasing access to school-based mental health professionals and other staff in community schools for our students. As you start the '23, '24 school year, we hope you come away with new ideas that can support and respond to students' social, emotional, behavioral and academic needs. I want to thank you again for joining us today. With that, I'm going to hand it back to Greta who will launch the webinar. Thank you, Greta.

**Greta Colombi:**

Excellent. Thank you so much, Ruth. With all the issues that we've been contending with as a nation for the past almost four years and more, the department has been actively working to empower states, districts and schools with information and support to improve student outcomes. And now let's hear more about the guiding principles the department identified based on extensive experience and research. Please welcome Ms. Kayla Patrick, a Policy Advisor for the U.S. Department of Education. Kayla.

**Kayla Patrick:**

Good afternoon everyone. I am so excited to be here with so many of you all to talk about this really important resource that the department put out earlier this spring. We put out this resource after taking a look at the data and

research, our own data that we collect here at the Department of Education and also external data and research. And what we've found is that there are pockets of innovation and pockets of really high quality practices and policies that are helping to turn around what we've seen for the last decade where students are excluded from the classroom.

However, when we take a big picture look at some of that data, that data suggests that some schools are still using practices that push students out of school through suspensions or expulsions or even sometimes through the use of corporal punishment. And we also found from that data that underserved students are more likely to experience some of that push out. So this includes students of color, students from low income backgrounds, English learners, students with disabilities, students who identify as LGBTQ+ and more. And the data also shows that many of these exclusionary disciplinary practices unfortunately begin in preschool.

So when we take a look at our data that is collected from the Office of Civil Rights here, the Department of Education, we found that Black preschoolers are two and a half times more likely to be suspended from school than the preschool population. Similarly, Native students and students with multiracial backgrounds are one and a half times more likely to be suspended. And we know from research and from our life experience that preschool is foundational to the educational experience of students and so we really need to make sure that these students have the opportunity to learn and grow within the classroom.

These disparities persist into the K-12 setting and so often, I'm sure many of you have heard that boys are more likely to be suspended. And when we lift the hood up and look at race and gender, Black boys in particular are three times more likely to be suspended than other boys who are similarly enrolled in public schools in this country. And girls also experience some disparities. Black girls are up to five times more likely to be suspended depending on how you look at the data. And so really taking a look at how we're identifying and really supporting students by their backgrounds could be helpful.

So with all that data in mind and taking a look at the research across the department, we work together to create five guiding principles, which is what we are going to be talking about today. These five guiding principles really work together to create a positive school climate where all students feel welcome and have the environment to learn and grow and be successful citizens in this country. The first of the guiding principles is to foster a sense of belonging through a positive, safe, welcoming and inclusive school environment. The second is to support the social, emotional, physical and mental health needs of all students through evidence-based strategies. The third is to adequately support high quality teaching and learning by increasing educator capacity. The fourth is to recruit and retain a diverse educator workforce. And finally, the fifth is to ensure the fair administration of student discipline policies in ways that treat students with dignity and respect, including through system-wide policy and staff development and monitoring strategies.

So when we take a look at the first one in the resource, we provide different policy and practice recommendations that schools might consider. So under the umbrella of fostering a sense of belonging through positive, safe, welcoming and inclusive school environments, the research is very clear that belonging is critical. And so building relationships is the key to a positive school climate. That is not only relationships between students and other students, but also students and their educators and even between educators and other educators. So every relationship in the school building is important. It's also important to foster positive relationships with families and sometimes communities as well.

All of these things contribute to a positive school climate. So the recommendations in this section include increasing efforts to promote a positive school climate, which may include fostering those relationships. It also includes providing students with equitable access to those mental health services and supports that they might need. This might eliminate the need for exclusionary disciplinary practices. And the research also shows that when students are challenged and when they're engaged in school through rigorous and culturally relevant welcoming learning environments, they're less likely to misbehave and they are more likely to succeed in school, have better health outcomes and graduate. The list of positive outcomes can go on and on.

The second of the guiding principles to support the social, emotional, physical and mental health needs of all students through evidence-based strategies. This may include establishing a multi-tiered system of supports. It may also include using data to identify evidence-based supports and then building on those supports to make sure that they are working and sustainable. Some research also shows that early intervention strategies may also be helpful in terms of making sure students have what they need when they need it. And really taking a whole school approach that may include community organizations by bringing in maybe mental health or food pantries through integrated student supports or implementing high quality restorative practices, which also has its foundation in community-based restoration and investing in full service community schools. There is some research that shows that full service community schools can decrease the likelihood of exclusionary discipline.

The third of the principles is to adequately support high quality teaching and learning by increasing educator capacity. We know that educators are the heart of the building and it's really important to make sure that they have the tools that they need to really ensure that they are spending the most of their time helping and supporting students academically and through social, emotional supports. And so some of the recommendations we put forth here are requiring pre-service and ongoing professional development, learning and mentoring opportunities. Helping educators to understand child and youth development so that they can identify what is appropriate for that development stage. Adopting policies and practices that focus on developing, repairing and sustaining relationships. As I said before, relationships are critical to promoting a positive school climate. Requiring detailed documentation for all disciplinary actions, making sure that we're tracking disciplinary actions and have reporting policies

and educators understand what those policies are and what the rules of the school are is really critically important.

The fourth is to recruit and retain a diverse educator workforce. There is some research that shows that diverse educators have the ability to connect with students with similar backgrounds. Students feel comfortable coming to them and then therefore, in some cases the need for exclusionary discipline is decreased. And so expanding the diversity of the educator workforce and the use of culturally sustaining practices is also a key strategy. And in addition to the teachers, it's important to really expand the diversity of the school-based mental health professionals as well to reduce the stigma of seeking mental health supports.

And finally, this particular principle builds on all the last four. So it's ensure the fair administration of student discipline policies in ways that treat students with dignity and respect. So this can be done by co-creating policies. So making sure that we're inviting everyone to the table, educators, parents, caregivers, community members to really help create policies that work for them. A policy that works in one community might not work in the next and so making sure that it is connected to the community the school is serving is important. Considering if a discipline strategy appropriately meets the needs and developmental stage of each student. So sending a four-year-old home for a week might not teach that student that school is important. And so thinking about things like that is critically important as well. And ensuring student discipline policies and procedures are clear and accessible so parents and students should know what the rules are before school starts and so that they can abide by those rules.

Developing consistent two-way communication with parents before there is a problem is important. So making sure that parents are engaged early on so they can be good partners is important. Evaluating the impact of policies and practices on different group of students. So taking a look at that data as I showed you earlier, is important to make sure that we are not seeing disparities that we are seeing nationwide. And finally, committing to supporting students, educators and families through systemic change is how we sustain changes in the long term. And so making sure that we have systems in place to keep the good things going is really important as well. And so with that, I will turn it back over to Greta.

**Greta Colombi:**

Great. Thank you so much, Kayla. I just really love how the five principles are both comprehensive and then specific at the same time and with real evidence-based information. And I love also how it focuses on prevention and assuring appropriate response. So thank you so very much for opening this up with that nice context setting presentation. We are now going to turn to Dr. Joseph Bishop. He is the Executive Director of the UCLA Center for the Transformation of Schools in Los Angeles, California. And he's going to share how California's multi-tiered system of support initiative embodies these guiding principles and supports transformation. So Joe.

**Joseph Bishop:**

Okay. Thank you, Greta. Appreciate the introduction. My name is Joe Bishop, I'm the Executive Director for the UCLA Center for the Transformation Schools. I want to thank Deputy Assistant Secretary Ryder, Alexia Everett, Kayla Patrick from OCR, Greta and AIR for convening this conversation today. So there's the title of the presentation and let's jump in. I was speaking to a Los Angeles area principal at the height of the pandemic and I asked her, how has the pandemic impacted her school? And here's what she said. "The pandemic has highlighted what a school's role in society truly means. Bottom line, it turned into an on-the-ground relief effort for our families. It turned into the place that our families went in order to get news, in order to get resources, in order to get everything they needed to move forward. Everything. When our students started losing their housing, we were doing their housing applications for renters' relief."

"And when their parents lost their jobs, we were applying for new jobs for them. When family members passed away, we were trying to figure out how to help parents navigate through what it looked like to get a death certificate, to make arrangements and to try to figure out those things and to get them started on a GoFundMe page." So what strikes me today about this quote from several years ago now is that not much has changed. The On-the-Ground Relief Center that was used to describe this principal's school is still just that. Except that one time COVID monies have gone away from the federal government in many states and the expectations are still there. The need has not gone away. I want to commend the U.S. Department of Education for releasing these guiding principles, which Kayla just articulated so well, and AIR for hosting this conversation. But I also want to challenge us today to think about the how.

They also want to challenge us today, to think about the how. How are we going to implement these big ideas? You'll hear more examples of the how from other speakers today. Second, what can we learn about new research to guide practice and policy? And last but not least, the question I think we all have. Do we have the stamina? Do we have the stamina to do what's right for our kids? Even if the political and moral gravity might be shifting?

We need to have a serious conversation in our country around systems of support and what are the universal supports in today's school settings for all kids. So as you look at the pyramid from the guiding principles document, this tier one area, where mental health needs are exceedingly high across racial and income lines, income groups, racial inequality is actually growing, and more families and even staff are struggling to have their basic needs met.

The structure for my conversation today is threefold. One, I'm going to elevate the role of the policy ecosystem, which Kayla just got into that, that fifth guiding principle. Two, I'm going to highlight findings from California's Multi-Tiered System of Support implementation over the last five years. I'm going to try to make some applications to safe, equitable, and fair and inclusive schools. Last but not least, excuse the typo there, I'm going to explore policy and practice recommendations for large scale efforts to promote safe, equitable, and inclusive school environments. So let's jump in and keep going.

Okay, the goalposts, the science of learning development, and the science of learning development for students and staff. So if we think about learning as a complex interrelated process, it reminds us the brain is, one, malleable. The brain is malleable. Two, we all grow at a different speed. Three, healthy relationships, with the guiding principles really centered around our essential for healthy development. And that learning is a social, emotional and academic process. We cannot break up these processes as a social emotional learning initiative or academic achievement over there. It's a symphony playing together at the same time. And the last bullet I want to focus on, adversity, trauma and poor conditions can limit our ability to learn, for students and staff.

From the goalposts to the policies. So guiding principle five, which Kayla just mentioned, really encourage us to examine the policy ecosystem in which learning takes place. Policies like policing in schools, zero tolerance policy strategies, corporal punishment, which Kayla just mentioned too, which is still allowed in some states like Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma, Tennessee, and Texas. And even policies like unequal distribution of resources sends very explicit messages to young people that often will encounter to the goals of the gutting principles. In other words, you cannot have safe, equitable inclusive schools if policies make students and staff feel discriminated against, unsafe, or even not valued because their school facilities are falling apart.

So when we think about the system, the policy ecosystem, I want to give you this framework that we created. We have to think about the design of the school. How out of out-of-school factors like housing, neighborhood conditions, and health access, impact student learning. How the practices, you can see on the bottom left here, how the practices, behaviors, and distribution of resources to the right, how they all impact equity. Equity by race, class, culture, language, and sexual orientation.

I dig into these themes a lot more in a new book called *Our Children Can't Wait: The Urgency of Reinventing Education Policy in America*. It's a book and a podcast. I want to encourage you to look at it, but I want to shift now the focus from the policy ecosystem to MTSS implementation in California.

To give you some context, MTSS over the last five years, with Orange and Butte County in California, our main components were, we supported 57 school sites implementing MTSS, school sites, not school systems, but we did work with school systems, county offices and districts. We also led a two-year professional learning network called the SEED Network, where schools will lead a problem of practice, all tied to MTSS implementation in one of the domains and features, and we dig in together. We also led a national research consortium from universities across the country to investigate promising practices and models and also to evaluate the impact of this model itself. But not just to do research for the sake of research, but again, actually to inform practice.

So here's some of the main findings. One, okay, principles will say the E word, but often are afraid to say the R word. Equity, no problem. Race and racism



rarely surfaces. An explicit focus on race for meaningful implementation has to happen. You saw the data, you saw the numbers from Kayla, how often we over suspend students of color. Principles as part of implementation credited and the pilot was providing awareness, yet most sites did not seem to engage consistently in working to address inequities present. So there's this gap between knowing, knowing and doing. As one principle articulated, we're in a community where the demographics have changed, but the dominant culture, majority culture by little bit, hasn't realized that it's changed. We're beginning those conversations, conversations about equity inclusion. This last year we've just been in survival mode, but they need to be at the center of what we're doing. It's a very harsh reality that we have to face as the demographics continue to change. So again, an explicit focus on race.

Two, supporting teacher mindsets, and I'd say more directly, buy-in. This question of knowing and doing. Do we have the stamina to do what's right for kids? So many teachers express beliefs that out of school factors such as family, social inequity and social media created these challenges. A few teachers spoke to the work educator could do and better engaging their students at the classroom level, but this work we all know starts with self-reflection and acknowledgement. Just because we know we need to change how we interact or engage with students, doesn't mean we know how to act differently. Our muscle memory has to change.

Okay, practice. So mental models, I want to get into the recommendations as we think about moving forward with the examples from the other speakers. Mental models of exclusion and racism are strong. We have to think about long-term and professional development, especially around preventative restorative approaches. And at a more fundamental level, helping teachers and administrators accept responsibility and to see their role in fueling the out of school suspensions and poor achievement patterns. And willingness as well to engage students differently, is essential. And implementation goals have to be explicit with clear metrics for success. Local control is a great idea that we keep in public education across this country, but we have to have the same shared goals.

Districts and county offices as well are often not well-equipped to dismantle existing patterns. Schools and communities can do a lot with the right support. That grow your own model we talk about in educator diversity and growing the pipeline, how to apply to MTSS and other initiatives as well. They just need different tools like the empathic mindset tool, which Shoshana is going to share with you from AIR, that we highlight in our website. The EQUIP tool, which is a classroom diagnostic for student engagement developed at the University of Washington and San Diego State. So there's a lot of tools that we can use, but we have to get them out there, and they're going to be used differently at each school site level.

Let's get into the policy recommendations. Policy conditions at the local, state and federal level should consider the volume and the direction of policy change as a major hurdle to implementation. This idea of ambiguity around prioritizing

equity by race, language culture, or sexual orientation, ability and special populations can be really, really problematic. And as we think about the large scale changes that are needed, we need to be moving with greater intentionality. I think we like the idea of systems of support, but are these large scale changes moving the needle on the historic patterns we've seen within our schools? So I think we found that MTSS can be everything under the sun if you want it to be. So everyone will call it MTSS or not understand what they're doing, or what a system of support really means at the local level. Then last but not least, this idea of coherence. Coherence is often needed more than new policies, ideas, and initiatives. Community schools and MTSS are absolutely necessary, but they have to fit together to offer more integrated, not siloed approaches.

Sorry, my mouse is doing weird things here. Okay, here we go. If you Google UCLA CTS Research Consortium, there's about eight publications that talk about MTSS implementation. We're coming out with more reports hopefully to inform the field. And in closing, I just want to say we are, as a center, here to partner with you. Please email me or reach out to me if you'd like to have a follow-up conversation. I want to thank you again, U.S. Department of Education, for your leadership in the AIR, and I just want to thank you all just for being on this call, considering all that's on your plate today. Thank you so much.

**Greta Colombi:**

Excellent. Thank you so much, Joe. I just really appreciate how you framed California's effort and learning how it's being done, and the key takeaways are just really powerful and really important guideposts for us all. So thank you, thank you, thank you.

I am super pleased for us to switch gears now with this context setting of the guiding principles and that big picture look in California and really nationally. We're going to drill down a bit with our panel discussion. So please welcome our panelists. We have Dr. Kristine Meurer, Dr. Thomas Woods-Tucker, we have Typhanie Jackson, and Monica Abbott. They are coming from Albuquerque, New Mexico, the state of Kentucky, and New Haven, Connecticut. Please know that all of our speaker bios are posted on the event webpage, and so you can learn more about them.

So now we get to have a conversation. So welcome Thomas and Kristine and Typhanie and Monica. We're going to start with our first question, and that is, what is your approach for supporting students' social, emotional, academic, and behavioral wellbeing? And how about we start with Kris?

**Kristine Meurer:**

Thank you. I'm very happy to be here and am pleased and grateful that you asked me to be part of this panel. I'm with Albuquerque Public Schools, and I wanted to just say, as I start my quick comments here, that APS is definitely looking at the guiding principles that have come out. Our school board has just recently adopted board goals and guardrails, and one of those board goals is specifically around the skills, habits, and mindsets for life's success, for students, which is a great goal, it's looking at perseverance, self-regulation, self-efficacy, those kinds of things of our students. And all of our goals are student outcome

oriented goals. With those, Albuquerque Public Schools has a strategic plan with a lot of strategic priorities. So I just wanted to mention quickly that, for example, in the guiding principle number one and fostering positive, safe, welcoming environments, we have a strategic priority around family engagement that we're working on, and we also have a strategic priority of equitable access for mental health for our students and those types of things.

But I wanted to focus my comments today really on social emotional learning strategies that we're working on. And we do have a specific strategic priority for social emotional learning. In order to try to make it realized, we've set up a core team for social and emotional learning, and that core team goes across multiple different departments within Albuquerque Public schools. There's probably about 20 people that sit on that core team. And we're looking at, this year, really looking at a few things. Like we have Scattergram, which I think a lot of school districts do, approach to SEL, different schools are doing different things around SEL. What can we support? Of those approaches, what are truly evidence-based? And providing those things. We actually did a survey of all of our principles, and I think, probably in the first time in history of our doing surveys, we got 100% response rate on the survey, and we asked every principal what they're doing, how they're implementing it, and if they have any way that they're measuring it, what are they doing? And then we did a follow-up interview with each of those principles and asked deeper questions. So we're looking at that. We're trying to figure out ways for buy-in to happen in the schools around social emotional learning.

We're also trying to figure out what can and what can't we support. We are a large school district, but most of our staff is in the schools. So what, from the district level, can we support? And then finally, we're looking at SEL not as a curriculum. There are lots of programs out there, there are different curricular kinds of things, but we're looking at all of those things as tools in a toolkit. So what are those tools that we can make available at the school level, at the individual classroom level? Is there something quick that a teacher can pick up and do? There's lots and lots of different tools that we're trying to put into the toolkit around SEL for our school so that they can implement in a better way.

Also, as part of that, there's a lot of talk about MTSS and restorative practices. Those people that lead those efforts in our district are part of the SEL team because SEL is the umbrella around all of that. And so we're moving forwards with restorative practices, but it can't be done in isolation of what we're doing. One of the things that I have announced myself, and it's not an APS official thing, but I'm calling it the year of interventions, because this year we are really focusing in on interventions that can be done looking at root causes with students that are in need of support, and what interventions can happen. And not just applying interventions, but then following up. Are those interventions actually successful? Are they working? And so we're doing a lot of training, a lot of information, and we've come up with lists and lists and lists of interventions that can be used based on the specific situations. So thank you.

**Greta Colombi:** Thank you so much, Kris. Now I'd love to turn it to Dr. Thomas Woods-Tucker to talk about the work that you're doing in the state of Kentucky.

**Thomas Woods-Tucker:** Good afternoon, Greta, and members of our esteemed panelists, and a special thank you to the U.S. Department of Education, the American Institutes for Research, for this opportunity to engage in this important conversation about SEL and the role that social emotional learning plays in equity and providing an equitable education for America's 55 million public school kids. And in particular, there's 600,000 public school kids in the Commonwealth of Kentucky. We view SEL as the bedrock to equity. So much so, three years ago, I really spent time wondering, as the deputy commissioner and chief equity officer, what could we do as a commonwealth, as a community of educators, to elevate the importance of the social emotional academic wellbeing of all students. We partnered with Engage To Learn to create an equity playbook, and I am just really thrilled about the SEL guiding principles that have been released by the U.S. Department of Education, because those guiding principles really reflect five of the most pressing things that we encounter in public education, particularly our students and staff, in terms of trying to navigate opportunity gaps.

We talked a little bit already about having high quality teachers, we talked about disproportionality of discipline, but there's also a disproportionality with the allocation of staff and resources. There's a disproportionality when it comes to academic access as well. Culture and climate. And so we created this equity playbook to give every educator, every school district, each of our 171 school districts in the Commonwealth of Kentucky, some scientifically research-based strategies, the first state in the entire country to release an equity playbook and make it available to every educator in the commonwealth, every teacher, every principal, every district level educator. Unfortunately, or fortunately, we are a locally controlled state where districts could opt in or not. We're now in year three, and we are working with almost two thirds of our districts, to give them some scientifically based strategies to address some of the most pressing issues that contribute to opportunity gaps. And again, around some of the same things that are aligned with the guiding principles.

We're also fortunate in the Commonwealth to have an equity dashboard, very similar to the dashboard that we saw earlier, I think that was Kayla who showed the dashboard, with all this disproportionality. So our educators, classroom staff, principals, educator coaches and so forth, can see these disproportionalities in real time. They can also look at any disproportionality or overrepresentation in career technical education courses, in real time for the first time, so that we don't have the excuse of saying, what can we do to close these opportunity gaps? Why are we suspending our Black boys, kids who look like me, at five times the rate of white girls or white boys? So now you have strategies, you have real time data and you have strategies to begin to address those particular issues. And I don't know, Greta, if you are able to pull the slide up to give our folks an example of what that looks like. If not, we can do a little later, and it's my fault, I should have sent you them a few minutes ago.

**Greta Colombi:** Our wonderful helper, Erin, has pulled that up. So you can just speak through that very briefly. And we also are about to post your equity playbook as an example for our audience.

**Thomas Woods-Tucker:** Thank you. So this is an example of the various opportunity gaps we look at. So we are looking at various student groups. We have examples of at risk or overrepresentation in students with disabilities in terms of being suspended. Or if you look to the right, you see chronic absenteeism, you see out-of-school suspensions, and you see in-school suspensions as well. That is the behavioral data. And each one of these dots are color coded. When you get to the red dot, you are knowing right now that something is going wrong, that we are overly suspending, whether in school or out of school, a certain ethnic group of students.

And then what I do love, let's look over to at the participation of at risk or underrepresentation of students in certain courses, in career, technical education, as I said earlier. And then you can see, then we get into actual test data. You have an alarm system that goes off to let you know whether you're seeing these proverbial gaps that we've been trying to address almost for the last 400 years since we started school and services, we've brought in high stakes assessments. And again, that's part of our equity dashboard. Every district is free to use it, it's a free resource, as well as our equity playbook that I described earlier.

**Greta Colombi:** Excellent. Thank you so much, Thomas, for describing the work that you've been doing in Kentucky and it really compliments what we were hearing from Kris. And I think what we really see is the importance of both the state education agency and districts working in tandem to make a difference. I would love to hand it over to our colleagues in New Haven, Connecticut to share how you all are approaching SEL. And we do have a link that we're going to pop in as you can go in.

**Typhanie Jackson:** So I just wanted to first say thank you for the opportunity today. My name is Typhanie Jackson. I'm the executive director of student services special education for New Haven Public Schools. I think that a lot of the things that have been said prior to me speaking are things that resonate with what we're doing in New Haven, but there's something that I will add is that one of the things that we found prior to providing strategies, providing templates, providing any kind of protocols for our folks that we have to support our people. We've been spending a lot of time and honestly spending a lot of time with educators and really being able to help both teachers and administrators understand their work, helping to listen and hear concerns because one of the things that we know is that this is inspirational work. This is hard. We have to inspire our folks enough to be able to manage and do some of the work that we're going to be talking about.

As a part of our frame outside of just the support that we are given, quite honestly on a daily basis to our educators, we're looking at how we utilize a collaborative for social emotional learning, the framework, looking at academic

integration, culture and climate and explicit academic instruction as far as how we look at our frame for implementing social emotional learning. What we would say right now, that has truly been a challenge coming back from the pandemic, we've seen an exacerbation of some of the challenging behaviors, and one of the things that we've been spending a lot more time of recent with our educators is really looking at twofold. How we're looking at systems and structures in the schools. Really looking, as you heard earlier, looking at that MTSS model, but really what does that mean in the context of school explicitly being able to share with folks.

What does that mean on a daily basis? What does that mean by providing clear expectations for folks? We are spending a lot more time on the integration. We heard a lot about mental health. We are spending a lot more time on how we're integrating mental health within the context of the classroom setting. Not that we're just having the influx or the introduction of more mental health professionals, we are doing that, but in addition to that, even as we mentioned previously in the guiding principles is really looking at how we're building capacity of all of our staff to do some of that work authentically throughout the day. As we know, we'll never have enough social workers, school counselors, guidance counselors, school psychologists, enough to be able to address the significant need that we have.

So again, it's incumbent upon us to really look at how we are addressing the needs of all of our students, of all of our staff, and really being able to build the capacity. One of the things, and I love what Mr. Tucker presented with the equity gap analysis. One thing that we need to do, and I'll be honest, that these explicit conversations about race, we've done conversations about race in our district, from the district level down to the school level and from the school level back up to the district level. One thing that we found that hasn't endured are these conversations about race. And we're fortunate not to be in a district where it's a politically charged conversation to have, but even with that, we are finding that having those conversations about race, that we have to constantly come back to them and really thinking about which administrators, which staff are ready to engage in those conversations.

We start the conversation, we stop, we start the conversation and we stop. And as I said, I wish I could tell everyone that there's a magic bullet. We have a set of strategies, and I heard people utilizing the terms guideposts. We have multi-tiered system support, but the context matters. Even in a district of ours, we're in 20,000, we have 20,000 students. Oh, I have 30 seconds. We have 20,000 students, we have 41 schools. And again, we set these guideposts and the parameters in place, but essentially when we're looking at the culture and the climate, explicit social skills instruction and the academic integration pieces and really focus on equity lens, again, the amount of work and support that you have to provide for your staff to engage in this work can't go unnoticed, it has to be a part of the conversation. Thank you, Greta.

**Greta Colombi:**

Excellent. Thank you. Just hearing about all of your approaches, I'm hearing a lot about integration, really speaking explicitly about race and racism and equity,

really being supportive of both students and staff. So I'm hearing a lot of that. I'd love to shift gears. So as we think about these approaches and what you have been doing, what has been the impact? What are you hearing from students? What are you hearing from staff? All right, we'll start with Thomas if you don't mind.

**Thomas Woods-Tucker:** And I promise you I'll be mercifully brief. As I warned you all the other day, I'm the grandson of a Baptist minister and an attorney, so I'll be mercifully brief. We're really excited about the elevation of student voice and staff force and choice as well. We survey our students. We have several state level student councils that we hear from the chief equity officer. I sit on the meetings that we have with our statewide student council that represents all of our judicial districts across the commonwealth. And we're hearing that this is the first time where school districts in the state is really valuing student voice, that we're putting the priorities of their mental health over their academic health. They really are feeling as if we care about them and we care more about them than a test. And I think 99% of the kids in America in our public schools would say, first and foremost, we want you to care about us, to really care about the effect over the academics and so again, I'll be mercifully brief. That's one of the most important things I've heard.

**Greta Colombi:** Thank you so much, Thomas, and I would love to hear more from our friends in New Haven.

**Monica Abbott:** Thank you. Greta. Monica Abbott, social emotional learning coordinator New Haven. And as Typhanie stated earlier, the work is very exciting. It's hard work, but it's exciting because we are working with the students, adults and everyone really on looking at their own SEL skills and how to improve them, but also looking at that wellbeing. How do we live good, rich lives and thinking about work and life balance and even for our students modeling that. The impact for us I would say three things that really have been noticeable about the impact of the initiatives that we've had in our district. The first being the capacity building of our staff. We really, as Typhanie said, spent a lot of time with our staff, from administrators to central office staff, to paraprofessionals, to security officers, to all of the different stakeholders within our schools to really talk about what is SEL and to really understand it in a way that's meaningful for their own life, but also for our students.

And the impact has been we've gone from hearing, we don't have enough support staff to support the needs to, I do have the skills, I do self-efficacy where we have strategies and supports and expertise from our educators. It's just being able to access that and have the mindset to say, this is all connected, and really this is about relationship building. And then once you do that, what's next? And continuously to dive deeper and look for more things that we can do to support our students. The second what we've seen is richer conversations during the MTSS process where they're bringing to that conversation not only the academics, but really truly the SEL as Typhanie stated, we use the CASEL framework so those standards and noticing how does that impact their

academics? If a student is having trouble expressing themselves, that really is going to impact the outcomes of their academics.

And we're hearing our teachers and our administrative teams and data teams having that and connecting the pieces. And then finally, with our students, ourselves, themselves, when we're out in the schools, Typhanie and I have witnessed the students sharing like, oh, I have a strategy you can use from the young ones and the kindergarten classes to the older students in the high schools who are really beginning to use these SEL skills to really advocate and talk about their mental health wellness and what they can do to advocate and find resources and tools that they may need to again, go to the next chapter of their lives. So those are our three biggest impacts we're seeing so far.

**Greta Colombi:** Wonderful. Thank you so much for sharing, Monica. And I would love to hear from you, Kris, how about in Albuquerque, New Mexico?

**Kristine Meurer:** And I love what Monica said. Ditto. And I think that a couple things here in Albuquerque. One of the good things that we're seeing in terms of impact is language that we're all starting to talk the same language. It used to be that if you said SEL and you had five people in the room, you get five different definitions. We now have common definitions of what we're talking about when we say it. It's defined. And we also look at the CASEL strategies. We do know that by our surveying that every school is doing something. And so some schools are doing some school-wide things. Some schools have pockets of what they're doing, but every school is now doing something so there's something to build off of. But we're also making a huge shift from looking at what's happening to what does that mean in terms of student outcomes? How are we going to actually measure that? It's easy to say, oh, I trained all my staff. Okay, check.

But what's the impact on kids? What's the impact on our students? And so our board is focusing us on student outcomes. We now have a contract with a company and we're going to be doing student surveys. We're going to be utilizing those surveys not only to figure out where they're at, but also what students are in need of supports that can help us. We're doing early warning system types of things, and we're going to be measuring the impact through the student lens. How is that? Is it really impacting our kids or is it just something we can check that, yeah, the school's doing something great, but are we seeing changes? Are we seeing those kinds of things? And so this year, like I said, is the year of interventions, we're going to be looking at how many interventions happen, but then what was the result of those interventions? How was that impacting children? So that's where we're trying to figure out where we're going with that. So those are the things that we're looking at moving in terms of how do we actually measure what's happening from a student outcome.

**Greta Colombi:** I love that Kris, and everybody's in different places, and I love the idea of having the data and really focusing in on the student impact. And I would also think about the impact on staff too. I think we've been talking about the importance of staff and their perspectives and whatnot. All right, so you've been taking these approaches, you're exploring your impact, looking at your data, talking to



your youth. I really love the student voice that you were talking about, Thomas. Given where you're at now, what have been your biggest lessons learned? If you were to do it all over again, would you do something differently or, yeah, so how about we start this time with our New Haven team?

**Typhanie Jackson:** I can start and then certainly Monica can chime in. I think that quite honestly, I don't want to say I would do it all over again. I think that I wish that we had the resources for folks like Monica actually to spend more time in the buildings. So if I were to say I would do something different, which unfortunately is resource dependent, I would have a whole cadre of folks whose time was dedicated to supporting schools and social emotional learning. We have been building a department, if you will, this was not a department, we created an actual SEL department in our district. We have not had one at all. But I think that some of the other lessons that we learned, and exactly what you hear me saying is really spending time, not just prescribing for schools what they have to do, but spending more time getting feedback from educators and shaping our practices to what it is that they need.

Because we spent a lot of time, and it's great, because we spend it on the research and these are the best research practices, but what we needed to do is pivot based off of what we were hearing from our teachers and really trying to figure out those pathways. So I think that if I were to change two things, I wish I would have a, or we would as a New Haven Public Schools have a larger department addressed to building capacity of the schools. And then a second is really earlier on I wish we would've really shaped all of our work based off of the feedback that we were getting from our educators.

**Greta Colombi:** Great. Thank you so much.

**Typhanie Jackson:** Monica, I didn't know if you had anything. I'm sorry.

**Greta Colombi:** Yeah, Monica-

**Typhanie Jackson:** The time was up.

**Monica Abbott:** I just want to add that in addition to that is to always keep adding, come back and modify and there's always new things like obviously we know the pandemic, but then mental health, we're adding and continuously look at what else can we do to be supportive.

**Greta Colombi:** Love it. Continuous quality improvement using feedback and having a bigger team. Excellent. Thank you. How about Kris in Albuquerque?

**Kristine Meurer:** So I love the lessons that you all had and that I think some of the lessons that we've learned as we're moving through this is there's a scattergram approach that's happening around SEL efforts. And that's not good, bad or indifferent, but it does mean that we've realized that we don't have all of the supports to support that many different approaches. It's not that one approach isn't better than another or that type of thing. So we've got to figure out what can we

support. That doesn't mean that a school has to stop what they're doing, but they will need to know that if it's not on our list of what we can support, they're on their own. So these are the programs that we can support and the processes that we can support. I think a big thing that we learned is we can't do it in isolation. And so I love that they have a department, but there are pros and cons to a department.

When we have a department, a lot of times people just say, oh, that's their job. Because we don't have a department, we don't have the full-time staff dedicated, but we have to look at it from multiple, multiple different people and we just have to keep the energy going of all these different departments that it's another duty as assigned, but then it becomes everybody's job. But we did learn that we cannot do this in isolation. There's not one person that can take this on and make it happen, or even just a small team. We are growing our team for SEL as we speak, and we're actually bringing in people from the schools, not just from the district level. So how can we get more people from the schools that are doing really good efforts and really good things to support their peers in other schools? So those are the lessons that I think that we're starting to learn. This is a planning year, a big planning and implementation year for us so I think there's going to be a lot more lessons coming as we move forward with this.

**Greta Colombi:**

That's the whole continuous quality improvement part, right. And it sounds like engaging, having school folks as part of that process is going to be really, really important and really reflects what we were hearing from Typhanie and Monica. Excellent. And Thomas, how about for the state of Kentucky and your lessons learned?

**Thomas Woods-Tucker:**

Yes. We learned this very early on, and it was probably an intentional strategy, and that was to elevate student voice. As I said earlier, we have a commissioner's student advisory committee. We also have a statewide independent committee called the Prichard Committee. If this work is going to take hold and germinate, it cannot, and to Kris's point, it cannot be the sole responsibility of one unit at central office if you're at the district level or one unit at the state department level. This has to be a statewide initiative. We all have to gravitate to this if we're really serious about the importance of students' academic and mental health needs. So again, elevation of student voice, elevation of parent voice, we call that campaign united we learn. It's not something that we just defined. It was a grassroots, organic campaign to really help work along our parents to understand the needs of our students in the commonwealth, both presently and in the future, and elevating our parents and student voices.

It can really offset the nastiness, the vitriol that comes from many of our political leaders attacking SEL. And I don't want to spend much time in the few seconds I have left talking about that, but we also have to, and again, we need support from the U.S. Department of Education as well, because the attacks are real. And I'm sure you all have experienced them, and some of you may have had to call SEL something else, which is okay as long as the work gets done. But

again, ensuring that you have all of your constituents involved in promoting the social emotional learning and wellbeing of our students.

**Greta Colombi:**

Thank you so much. Okay. So as Joe was saying earlier, we know a lot and the guiding principles provides a really great framework and focus for this very important work to support student social, emotional, behavioral, and academic wellbeing. And we know that there's been some impact, and you're working on that and you've been learning some good lessons. What gives you hope as you move forward with this work? What is really inspiring you to do this work? And if we could just do a quick rotation, that would be great. And how about we start with Kris in Albuquerque?

**Kristine Meurer:**

So I think it's not just hope, but it's energy. I have the team that has come together around this is just so energetic and wonderful and part of what gives me hope is that it's definitely a focus of our school board. So it gives us the ability to move forward. And I know it's an old cliché, but it's still true. We are investing in our future. And so that gives me hope that I think this work will do that. It will help us invest in our future, which is our kids, giving them the skills, the mindsets, the strategies to become productive members of society and take care of me when I'm in my nursing home and those types of things.

And I just wanted to end with a quote by I think one of the greatest fictional characters of our time, and that's Albus Dumbledore. And I think it speaks a lot to what we're facing now in this political arena. And we must all face the choice between what is right and what is easy. And this is not necessarily easy, but it's absolutely right. And we need to join forces, and we need to come together and do what's right for kids.

**Thomas Woods-Tucker:**

What certainly gives us hope, what gives us energy, what inspires us is the fact that we have more people than ever through our surveys involved in public education in a very, very politically charged state, Commonwealth like Kentucky. Kentucky was rated by a recent study for whatever it means as the seventh or eighth most equitable place for public education. But it also sounds an alarm. If Kentucky is ranked seventh or eighth, where are these other states and we know it's a constant battle each day. This work is not easy. And to quote another great person, Dr. Martin Luther King, or paraphrase him, he said that the quality of a person, in essence is not, or character of a person is not where he or she stands during these easy times, it's where he or she stands during these tough times, these challenging times to improve and save the lives of kids. And so it does give me hope that we've made tremendous and we're making tremendous progress in Kentucky. We were able to... And I'm sorry, I'm going over time here. We were able to approve over a hundred thousand dollars in grants for common spaces to help young kids, our young kids deescalate and to get them back into classrooms, as opposed to expelling them. So there is hope in Kentucky and there's hope across America.

**Greta Colombi:**

Excellent. Thank you so much, Thomas. And Typhanie and Monica.

**Typhanie Jackson:** So what gives me hope is really seeing that as a district, that folks are collectively responsible, and you start to see that, because again, I'm going to say it over and over again, I know the conversation about the departments, but the department really does help to support in the buildings. This work is hard, these folks cannot do it on their own. And really being able to front load and seeing the response from our teachers, to be able to do the work when there's folks that are there helping and feeding them information to make this easier.

We have a lot of folks, both our staff who are excited about this work, and we also have students who advocate for more of this work. And I think those are the things that continue to help inspire us to continue, as Monica said, to add more and to do more. And like I said, again, I know we can do it. The work is hard. We all just have to support each other and be collectively responsible for the outcomes for our students.

**Greta Colombi:** Excellent. And Monica, a final thought.

**Monica Abbott:** Everyone that shared, really, shared about the importance of the togetherness of it, and I really... As Typhanie stated, we are a team and we rely on each other and we work together to really spread the word. And there's always hope when you meet with staff, that even if they learn or take away one small thing, that one small thing then goes to a hundred students and it just trickles down. And that's really the highlight of this work, that it spreads, and it gives me hope to see that happening.

**Greta Colombi:** Excellent. Thank you so very much to all of you for sharing really thoughtful comments. I think what resonates for me is just the focus on students, the focus on collaboration, the focus on working through things that are really hard because it's really important. I think those are the big takeaways I have and would welcome our participants to share on the Q and A, their big takeaways as well, if you'd like.

So with that, I would love to close the formal content delivery of this webinar so that we can move to our live Q and A. We're going to be pulling some questions from what has been submitted via registration, as well as through the Q and A feature in Zoom, so that we can have all of our wonderful speakers be able to respond.

I want to thank each and every one of our presenters and panelists for excellent information and strategies that you've shared today, and motivation, honestly. This is such an important topic, such an important area of work to really ensure student success and wellness.

And I would like to also thank all of our participants for your active engagement. I could see the questions popping through and seeing all the emoticons coming up. Just really appreciate having you with us.

Please remember that you can find additional resources and assistance via Nestle and the Best Practices Clearinghouse. And in addition to the four up and

coming miniseries events that Ruth mentioned at the start, we also have a few more via our general lessons from the field webinar series, as well as our human trafficking webinar series.

And you can see here that we will be speaking on a range of topics from teacher apprenticeships to newcomer students to supporting and understanding the male experience in human trafficking. So please keep an eye out in your email for an announcement with links to be able to register. You are also welcome to visit our Nestle webinar webpage where you can see those events popping up.

And, I think final... Okay, we're going to transition in just a moment.

And then finally, we have this link for our feedback form, which we now have on the screen. We encourage everyone who has attended to take just a few minutes to provide feedback on today's session and share what topics and format you prefer for upcoming sessions, for the miniseries and all of our webinars.

In addition, please visit our website where today's presentation will be posted, so you can already find the slides there. Tomorrow, the link to the archived recording of the presentation will be up, so you can share it with your colleagues who may have an interest in this topic. And you can also see all the resources that folks have shared will be up there, as well. For any final ones that came in this afternoon, they'll be added.

And as a reminder, as we go through all these questions, we will get through as many questions as possible, but please know if we don't touch on your question, we are sharing it with the U.S. Department of Education to help really use for us to continue planning, informing upcoming events and resources and what have you.

So with that, I think we're ready to go to our live Q and A, and we have got a bunch of questions that we've been hearing from y'all about. And let's see, I was trying to make it bigger and then it just got smaller. So I'll start with a question for Kris. How do schools ensure safe and welcoming learning environments for transgender and non-binary students amidst all the political tax on gender diverse people?

**Kristine Meurer:**

That's a really good question. I can tell you what Albuquerque Public Schools does. We have a couple of things in place.

One is we have a program called Safe Zones, which is, we train coordinators at each of our schools. It's a K-12 program. A couple of years, maybe three years back, we opened it up to elementary. It was a secondary program. And teachers, nurses, counselors, even the custodian can be a safe zone for children, and they have signs and they go through a training to be a safe place that any student can go to if they need a safe place to go. And it's a great program. It works really well. We do ongoing training and support for that. We just are getting ready to

roll out our first training, because school has already started in Albuquerque, our first training for coordinators.

And for transgender supports, we actually have transgender support plans that can be put in place for any transgender student. And that's an official plan. It's in our board policy and our administrative procedural directives. And those are plans not only to ensure safety for them, but it's also to ensure that they have the supports that they need in the school as they go through a very hard time in their lives.

So those are two specific things that we have in place to support students to feel safe, specifically in the schools. And we also have hotlines that they can call, but I'm talking specifically about some of the programs that we have in our schools. And that's district-wide, every school.

**Greta Colombi:**

Excellent. Thank you so much, Kris.

The next question we have is for Kayla, and the registrant shared federal requirements for and role of local school wellness policy. I would love to just hear what your thoughts are on the federal requirements and the role of the local school wellness policy and the best practices for such, especially for whole school and child efforts.

**Kayla Patrick:**

Yeah, I can definitely take at least the first part of that question and say that there is a small section around the role of school resource officers included in the guiding principles. School resource officers, like all other employees in the school building, must comply with federal civil rights law. And that is very clear. And I think there was some other guidelines and a link to a DOJ resource that really details some other considerations for how to engage school resource officers in a way that that is appropriate for a school building.

And here at the department, we always say that that decision shall be done at the local level with the input of local community and parents, as well. And so ensuring that that is a part of the decision is important. And yeah, I think that's it.

**Greta Colombi:**

Great. Anybody else want to add your thoughts on that? If not, we can go to the next question.

**Kristine Meurer:**

I could add real quickly that if they're asking specifically about the federal requirement on wellness policies for schools, that comes from the US Department of Agriculture, actually, through the states. And so if you take USDA money, you have to have them. That's really important, to look at what your state has required around wellness policies. New Mexico went beyond what US Department of Agriculture requires, so it's only like three or four areas, but we look at the whole coordinated school health or the whole child model that comes out of the Center for Disease Control, and we require every school in the state of New Mexico to have policies around each and every one of those areas. And we have to put data up on how we're complying with that.

And so, all of this is inter-sectional and integrated into what we do for kids. And so, look at what your individual state requires around the wellness policies. And if it's more than just nutrition and physical activity, then what does that look like in your state?

**Greta Colombi:** Thanks so much, Kris. Another question that we have is how important is moving away from exclusionary discipline practices, such as suspension and expulsion, to meeting the goals of the general support for the social, emotional, behavioral, and academic wellbeing of students? And I'm just wondering if some of our panelists might want to respond to that.

**Kristine Meurer:** I'm happy to respond again to that. We are really trying to move away from exclusionary discipline practices. It's actually in our student behavior handbook now. We're looking at restorative practices and utilizing those. We have a lot of... We're implementing in-school suspension versus out of school suspension kinds of things. We're also trying to use just restorative practices where we can and looking at what are we doing to exclude kids from things. So really taking a strong look at that and moving towards, like I said in my talk, interventions versus necessarily just some things have to have some disciplinary actions attached to them, but what are the interventions? What are we looking at? What are the core causes? Why is the student acting out? Why is the student doing that? And how do we support the student and/or the family so that the student can be part of the system of school, which is why they're there. They're there to learn. And so if we exclude them, then how are they learning?

And so, we're really trying to move from exclusionary practices, looking at our suspension rates, and those kinds of things and what's happening with that. And as Dr. Woods said, we're looking at are we suspending higher at certain races and those types of things.

**Greta Colombi:** Excellent. Thank you. And Typhanie, please.

**Typhanie Jackson:** So I just wanted to add also, I just... Again, the notion of maximizing the instructional minute, so it's crucial that we do keep our students in school. I think it does go back to some of those conversations, in particular for systems that have high concentration of children of color, where we are going to have to engage in those kinds of conversations about race and have it to endure and really disaggregate and put it in front of folks more often than not.

I do believe, and I think it was in the chat, that we do have to look at this gap, however, of how we're looking at, as just was said, about the strategies that are needed to prevent exclusionary practices. There's a big disconnect between higher ed and between pre-service teaching, and teaching, and how do we close that gap quickly enough so that people are equipped enough to be able to address it?

I think that the same way that we spend a lot of time in academics and the PD calendar focused on academics, we spend not enough time on really how we're building capacity to do the things around culture and climate and classroom

management. So again, we have to put our time and our money where we're saying that we need to, enough to address the whole child.

**Greta Colombi:** That's right. And it can prevent things, so it can prevent the energy suck of having to discipline a student, as well.

So Thomas?

**Thomas Woods-Tucker:** Very quickly, in addition to moving to eliminate those exclusionary practices, we have to give our educators, both our pre-service educators that Typhanie talked about, as well as our in-service or practicing educators, the tools to help keep students in school. And part of those tools, really, one of the more important tools is really helping staff members look at their biases, and providing data and professional learning opportunities to help staff members see these disproportionalities.

And again, in Kentucky, giving our educators the tools to close those particular opportunity gaps. And I know it's tricky, especially if you're in many states where there are so-called local control states, where the State Department of Education gives guidance, and we certainly thank the U.S. Department of Education for providing us guidance on all the topics we just talked about. But providing that guidance, both the U.S. Department of Education guidance, the state guidance, and the tools to our educators who are in the field, and pre-service teachers.

**Greta Colombi:** Thank you so much. So many important points that you all made there. Thank you. We have another question about how are students with disabilities included in an MTSS, and thinking about the supports for all students for social, emotional, behavioral, and academic wellbeing? And do you see that as a strategy for improving inclusive learning environments?

**Typhanie Jackson:** I can actually answer that. I am a special education director. Similar to students with special education needs, students with disabilities, and multilingual learners. We don't parse them out separate. And I think that unfortunately, has been a part of the problem, is that there's been two different trajectories for students. As best as possible, we are including folks, and then we're talking to folks about how for students with disability, how this particular behavior may a manifestation of a child's disability.

So it's just being able to understand that a little bit differently, so that there may be some additional information that needs to be shared, but it's not as if there is a separate track for a child. We're looking at all children, similar to what we should be doing in academic world, as well. We look at all children the same way. We just look at some of those other factors that may impact students with disabilities, or some other factors that may impact a multilingual learner, that we have to look at those things. And even for students with 504 needs, as well.

And too often, I'll be honest with you, some of those things are not considered. Those are an afterthought, especially if a child, for instance, is a child with



attention issues. We don't think about those things first. We think about what's the behavior and then how are we addressing those, whereas we have to equip folks to understand this child may be doing X, Y, and Z because of this.

I just want to answer this really quickly. I know I'm out of time because it was in the chat. There was a question about whether or not there's zero tolerance policies for students with disabilities and 504. And the answer is no. There's no zero tolerance. It's really that again, we always have to look at the child and whether or not there's a manifestation of the child's disability. And zero tolerance policies, we're hoping that people don't indulge in those kinds of practices anymore. We're beyond that, at least I hope so.

**Greta Colombi:**

Well, the research says otherwise, right? So any other final thoughts on supporting, engaging students with disabilities in this process or other special populations? Okay, excellent.

Okay, so I think we have time for one more quick question. How do you go about bringing resistance educators on board when thinking about... I think, I forget who mentioned it earlier. There's the academics and then there's student supports, and there's some folks who are very resistant to student supports. How can you go about bringing resistant educators on board?

**Monica Abbott:**

I can answer that. In our district, we have an approach that allows us to have leads in every school. We call them our SAL ambassadors. And they help the small team department that we have in our district. And what we find is you have to meet people where they are, and you have to give them time to, just like our students sometimes need extra supports, and that's what we do. We go into those schools more often. We allow them to be vulnerable, and we create safe environments where they're able to share the truth of the why behind why they're not maybe engaging in the way that they should be.

And as Thomas stated earlier, sometimes it's their own bias. And to say that out loud can be challenging and scary for our educators. So we try to create the safe space and provide them the opportunity to share that and learn from that. And it takes time. I will give you that. It can take up to two years for someone to finally have that aha moment, where they realize the importance of the work.

**Greta Colombi:**

Thank you so much, Monica. Well said.

**Typhanie Jackson:**

Can I?

**Greta Colombi:**

Yeah, go ahead, Typhanie.

**Typhanie Jackson:**

Can I add something? I think that we have to be, and I know this is a hard time to say this given the teacher shortage, but I think we have to think about our talent management strategy, and thinking about the kinds of questions that we ask that are not just the technical questions, but the questions that really are going to get to give you some insight into how folks are thinking about students, and thinking about relationships, and get to some of those interpersonal skills. I

could teach you some of those technical skills, but I can't teach you to be a nice person, the children or staff. So I think that we have to think about our talent management strategy and rethink that, and stop just asking those technical questions. But really thinking about some of those questions that are really going to give you some insight into how someone thinks.

**Greta Colombi:** Excellent. And we are at time, so Kris and Thomas, if you have a ten second blip, we can... Happy to have that last final...

**Kristine Meurer:** I was just going to say to that question, we also look at the, "What's in it for me?" because if they don't see that this is not something more that I have to do, that's where the resistance comes. "I'm not doing one more thing," but understand the reason behind it. So we do a lot of educating on why will this make your job easier to do this? And we work with our teachers union too, on SEL approaches so that they can, we're giving a common message out there.

**Greta Colombi:** Excellent. Thank you, Kris. And Thomas, last word.

**Thomas Woods-Tucker:** Yeah, 10 seconds, Greta. 10 seconds. You have to make it local. And I think Monica talked about that. You have to make it local to your specific district or to your specific state. We heard our professor talk about the California MTSS system. We have a Kentucky system that addresses the specific needs of our students and staff, many times we forget about staff, in the Commonwealth of Kentucky.

**Greta Colombi:** Excellent. Well, with that, I just want to thank our speakers again for having such an engaging discussion, and really talking about a lot of issues that we're all thinking a lot about. We're thinking about how we can better support our students, and I think there was just a lot of great nuggets shared today.

So with that, I want to thank you all again, thanks to our participants, as well. We hope that you have a wonderful day and look forward to your participation in future lessons from the field webinars, and as well as this mini-series. Thank you so very much, and have a great day.