

A woman in a dark suit and glasses is smiling and talking to a young woman with long blonde hair. The woman in the suit is holding a clipboard. The young woman is also smiling and holding a stack of papers. They are in a school hallway with other students in the background. The entire image has a blue tint.

THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE

K-12 Mental Health Programs

Enhancing wellness transforms school life

Superintendents, teachers, school partners, and community members like you may be concerned about declining mental wellness.

That's because wellness is at the crux of so many challenges K-12 schools and their community partners face.

When schools promote wellness through effective mental health programs, they:



Retain staff

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, 86% of members within the National Education Association have reported seeing more educators leave the profession due to increased stress and workload ([Devlin Peck](#)).



Decrease absenteeism

Data shows that students with Social, Emotional, and Mental Health (SEMH) needs have some of the highest rates of overall, persistent, and severe absenteeism ([Nesta](#)).



Improve behavior/safety

Poor mental health is strongly linked to an increase in behavioral problems in students ([CDC](#)).



Boost academic performance

A [2022 YouthTruth survey](#) found that over 50% of high school students cited depression, stress, and anxiety as major obstacles to learning.

It starts with a comprehensive solution

If your school or community are not experiencing the staff satisfaction, attendance, behavior, and academic numbers you'd like to see, you're not alone. The missing piece is a comprehensive solution that leads to:



So what does a comprehensive solution look like?

Our K-12 wellness experts have weighed in on the **6 key essentials to a comprehensive K-12 wellness program.**

6 essentials for a comprehensive K-12 wellness program

Essential 1

Adopt an evidence-based approach

Essential 2

Develop a personalized strategy

Essential 3

Establish internal ownership

Essential 4

Leverage community partnerships

Essential 5

Connect with other schools and networks

Essential 6

Emphasize staff and teacher care

Essential 1 | Adopt an evidence-based approach

Evidence-based goes beyond K-12 traditions or watching what other schools or districts are doing. Rather, evidence-based wellness strategies have been tested in schools like yours and proven to actually help students and staff.

Why it's so important

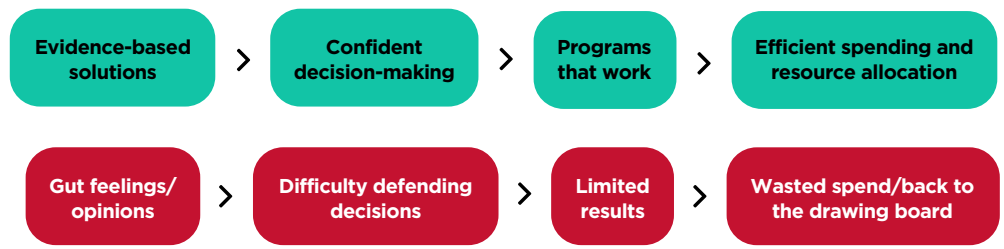
Gut feelings and community input are important — but they need backing.

When it comes to wellness, there are many strategies that may “look right” or “feel right” but may not support all students. With limited school budgets and resources, strategies and interventions need to be grounded in solid research and proven to be effective.

What happens without evidence-based programs?

When your school experiences disjointed wellness, it's tempting to make a fix as soon as soon as possible, without looking at the whole picture. It's difficult to see students and staff struggle. But when solutions aren't carefully measured against evidence and past results, you may disadvantage students in the long run.

Evidence-based vs. feelings-based solutions



STEP 1

What you can start on now

✓ Researching proven programs

Look for wellness programs and interventions that have been rigorously evaluated and shown to be effective. Resources such as academic journals, government reports, and reputable health organizations can provide valuable information. Contact us to discuss options and best practices.

✓ Set up a monitoring system

Establish a system for regularly monitoring and evaluating the impact of wellness programs.

✓ Partner with a support organization or community partner

Organizations that specialize in K-12 wellness often offer a range of evidence-based and approved supports for wellness.

Essential 2 | Develop a personalized strategy

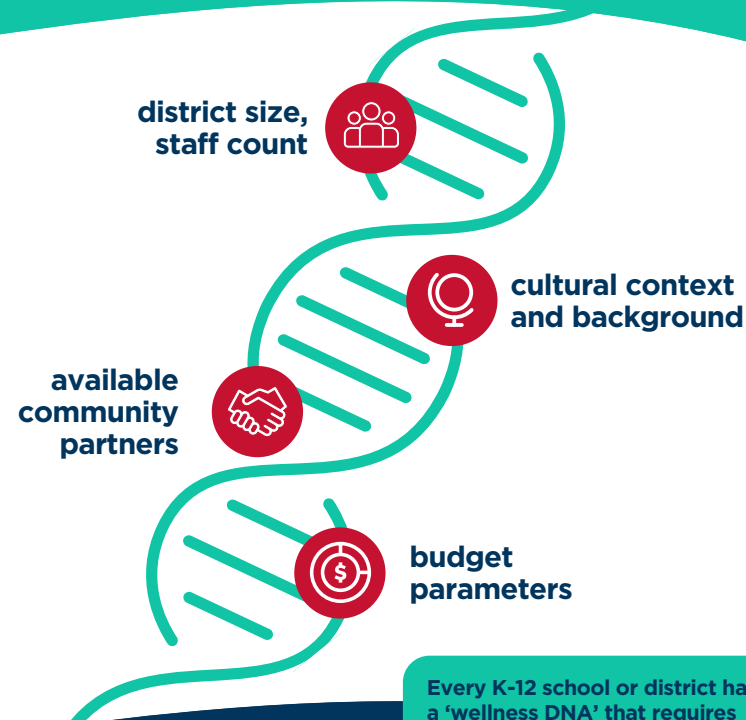
No school or district is the same. A personalized approach to K-12 wellness is essential to address each school and district's unique needs, ensuring wellness supports remain engaging and relevant.

Why it's so important

Tailoring wellness programs to the specific context of your school ensures that interventions are relevant, effective, and engaging for students. By addressing the particular health and wellness issues faced by your community, you can create a supportive environment that fosters students' physical, mental, and emotional well-being, leading to improved overall outcomes.

What happens without evidence-based programs within an overarching wellness system?

Without a systems approach to unifying your efforts, stand alone programs may not meet the unique needs of students and staff, leading to low engagement, poor outcomes, wasted resources, and missed opportunities to address community-specific issues like local health trends and cultural considerations.



Every K-12 school or district has a 'wellness DNA' that requires personalized solutions

STEP 1

What you can start on now

✓ Conduct a needs assessment

Gather data on the specific health and wellness needs of your students and staff. This can include surveys, focus groups, and health screenings. Understanding the unique challenges and strengths of your community is the first step in creating a tailored program.

Essential 3 | Establish internal ownership

Establishing internal ownership with a dedicated Behavioral Health and Wellness Coordinator (BHWC) or splitting responsibilities among staff is crucial for K-12 wellness because it ensures consistent, focused attention on student and staff wellness needs.

Why it's so important

Having a specific person or team responsible for wellness initiatives allows for the development and implementation of comprehensive programs that address physical, mental, and emotional well-being. This dedicated oversight ensures that wellness is prioritized, integrated into the school culture, and continuously improved based on feedback and outcomes.

What happens without ownership?

Everyone at your school is probably already doing too much — we've seen it! But without internal ownership, wellness programs lack direction and consistency, resulting in fragmented efforts and minimal impact. A designated coordinator monitors overlooked health issues, resource utilization, and compromised effectiveness.

Splitting up wellness responsibilities

PROS

- Utilizes existing staff resources
- Encourages team collaboration
- Can be cost-effective

CONS

- May lead to inconsistent implementation
- Can result in fragmented efforts
- Staff may be overburdened, leading to burnout

Hiring a full-time Behavioral Health and Wellness Coordinator

- Provides dedicated focus and expertise
- Ensures consistent and coordinated efforts with team
- Allows for comprehensive program management

- Higher upfront cost
- Requires budget allocation for a new position
- May need time for the coordinator to integrate and establish programs

STEP 1

What you can start on now

✓ Define roles and responsibilities

Before you decide how to split up roles or whether to hire a BHWC, consider your evidence-based approach and personalized strategy. Clearly outline the roles and responsibilities that have to be covered to ensure programs are executed to fidelity.

Essential 4 | Leverage community partnerships

No school is an island. When you leverage community partners, you expand the resources, expertise, and support available to your K-12.

Why it's so important

By collaborating with local health providers, non-profits, and other organizations, schools can offer a comprehensive wellness approach that meets diverse needs. These partnerships provide access to additional programs, services, and funding, creating a more robust and effective wellness environment.

What happens without community partnerships?

When you start out, it may feel challenging to know your community organizations. But without them, schools may struggle to provide adequate wellness support, leading to fragmented programs that don't meet all needs. This lack of collaboration can result in lower student engagement, higher absenteeism, and a less supportive environment.



Your school your community

- Expanded resources
- Increased funding
- Stronger community
- Access to expertise
- Enhanced program effectiveness

STEP 1

What you can start on now

✓ Share your vision with partners

Take your personalized, evidence-based vision to community supports so they can see your goals for every student. It'll get them on the same page as you, and ensures they'll be part of your comprehensive solution — not outside of it.

Essential 5 | Connect with other schools & networks

While every school is different, there's much to be learned from schools who face similar obstacles to wellness.

Why it's so important

Connecting with other schools, networks, and communities of practice (CoPs) is crucial for K-12 wellness because it fosters collaboration, sharing of best practices, and continuous improvement. Engaging with a broader community helps schools learn from others, access new resources, and stay updated on the latest trends, making wellness programs more comprehensive and effective.

What happens without connections with other schools?

Without these connections, schools may become isolated, missing valuable insights and resources, leading to stagnant wellness programs. This isolation can result in lower engagement, poorer health outcomes, and difficulty addressing emerging challenges in student wellness.



Share

crucial insights and learnings

Learn

innovative practices from K-12 leaders who have been there before

Collaborate

with schools facing similar obstacles

Attend

conferences and seminars with valuable information

STEP 1

What you can start on now

✓ View upcoming Ohio CoPs

[Find a meeting](#) that works for you and your school's needs.

Essential 6 | Emphasize staff and teacher care

Yes, it's the last step in this guide, but perhaps the most crucial of all. Educators are the backbone of the K-12 environment. Their well-being directly impacts their ability to teach effectively, engage with students, and contribute to a positive school culture.

Why it's so important

When teachers and staff feel supported and valued, they are more likely to exhibit higher levels of job satisfaction, reduced stress, and improved overall health, which in turn benefits students and the entire school community.

What happens when teachers and staff aren't looked after?

55% of teachers are considering leaving the education field earlier than planned due to the stress and demands of their job (NEA).

Neglecting staff and teacher care can lead to burnout, high turnover, and decreased job performance, resulting in a decline in education quality. This negative cycle undermines the entire educational mission, as stressed teachers are less effective and overall school morale decreases.

Right-sized trainings and professional development



Teacher specific wellness care



Clear internal ownership of wellness



Equipped/prepared teachers stay longer



Happy teachers contribute to a positive overall culture



Enthusiastic and engaged teachers inspire students

STEP 1

What you can start on now

✓ Get visibility

Regularly assess the well-being of your staff through surveys or focus groups to identify their needs and concerns.

With comprehensive solutions, real change is possible.

It's tempting to make band-aids fixes, but when you take a step back, and address the core issues at play, you unlock lasting, scalable change:

1. Adopt an evidence-based approach
2. Develop a personalized strategy
3. Establish internal ownership
4. Leverage community partnerships
5. Connect with other schools and networks
6. Emphasize staff and teacher care

Next steps

Schedule a meeting

Let's talk about your school's wellness challenges and the goals you have for students and teachers.



Discover how a wellness partnership could help you

See how the SBCOE goes a step deeper for Ohio educators with full guidance, support, and strategy at every stage.



IN COLLABORATION WITH

