



Applying Preventative Strategies to Prevent Behavioral Challenges in Schools

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While schools anticipated increased stress, anxiety, and uncertainty in the 2021-2022 school year due to the COVID-19 pandemic, behavioral challenges have exceeded their expectations. In a recent article on Mindshift (Belsha, 2021), the issue of rising behavior problems in schools was highlighted. These behaviors range from mild such as refusing to participate to more extreme (e.g. fighting, destruction of property, or running off). For example, **fights have increased by 21%** in Denver Public Schools (in Colorado) this fall compared to previous school years before the pandemic. Many students are dealing with trauma (e.g. grief, poverty, racism), while others are trying to cope with mental health issues (e.g. anxiety, depression, substance use), while many are just dealing with the dramatic transition from at-home remote learning to being back in school full-time. **A large number of students are behind academically and socially, often by 2 grade levels**, and many are fearful and unmotivated to learn.

Teachers are also being pushed to their limits and schools across the country are experiencing staff shortages, higher burnout, emotional and physical exhaustion, lack of resources such as how to handle COVID requirements, and lack of support for their own social-emotional needs. **In a study conducted by You Gov, 1,059 educators were surveyed and 43% reported experiencing all of the components of burnout during the 2020-2021 school year and 46% of these educators reported that they were considering leaving the field** (Speck, 2021). Another study that included over 300 educators identified certain factors that contributed to teacher burnout and stress which included anxiety and stress about COVID-19, anxiety about teaching under COVID conditions, parent and student communication, and support from administration (Pressley, 2021).

43% of teachers reported burnout and 46% reported leaving the field (Speck, 2021)

Schools are stepping up to the challenge and are seeking solutions to get themselves and their students back on track. Some districts such as Missoula County in Montana and Phalem Leadership Academies in Indianapolis, Indiana are hiring additional staff specifically to help with the social-emotional needs and behaviors of students. Other schools like Detroit Edison Public School Academy in Michigan offer time every morning for students to engage in social emotional and mental health activities to prepare for the school day. Creative solutions such as theatre and art programs are also ramping up to meet the needs of students (e.g. Phalem). Even students are pitching in to help out by organizing social groups to help with bullying for the LGBTQIA+ community.

RethinkEd's Social Emotional Learning (SEL), SEL and Equity, Trauma, and Mental Health series may provide educators with a solution not only for their students, but also for their own well-being. With 30 SEL, 4 SEL and Equity, 2 Trauma, and 11 Mental Health topics, educators can watch videos with subject-area experts and learn more about each topic through the extensive strategies, resources, and activities offered in the Professional Development series. **Research indicates that completing professional development in these areas can improve overall perceptions of well-being and decrease stress and burnout for**

PD can improve well-being and decrease stress and burn-out (Schonert-Reichl, 2017; Whalen, 2021)

educators (e.g. Schonert-Reichl, 2017; Whalen, 2021).

Antecedent (i.e. preventative) strategies are often more effective for decreasing problem behaviors than reactive or consequence-based

strategies. For instance, using visual supports like schedules, or using video priming to show students what is going to happen to prepare them, or setting up the environment for successful learning (e.g. minimizing distractions, pleasant lighting, comfortable seating and temperature, etc.) can help to minimize triggers for many behavioral challenges. Video modeling can also help students learn more socially appropriate replacement behaviors and teaching social skills helps to alleviate a great deal of behavior problems. One important antecedent strategy supported by a large body of research is to address the social, emotional, mental health, and trauma issues that often accompany behavioral challenges. **Research supports that SEL is an effective pro-active solution for remediating behavior problems in schools (National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2017).** RethinkEd provides a comprehensive suite of videos, activities, discussions, and resources to help students with their social, emotional, mental health, and trauma needs.

Suggested RethinkEd PD Modules for Helping with Educator Well-Being

- SEL Modules
 - Growth Mindset
 - Stress Management
 - Resilience
 - Empathy
 - Support Systems
 - Mindfulness
 - Self-Efficacy
 - Optimism
 - Self-Compassion
- SEL and Equity Modules
 - The Impact of Implicit Biases
- Trauma
 - Coping with Trauma
- Mental Health Modules
 - Trauma
 - Anxiety
 - Depression
 - Mental Wellness

Suggested RethinkEd PD Modules for Helping with Educator Well-Being

- SEL Modules
 - Emotions
 - Growth Mindset
 - Self-Control
 - Stress Management
 - Problem Solving
 - Resilience
 - Fairness
 - Respect
 - Cooperation
 - Conflict Resolution
 - Empathy
 - Safe & Ethical Behavior
 - Support Systems
 - Actions & Consequences
 - Mindfulness
 - Self-Efficacy
 - Optimism
 - Self-Compassion
 - Self-Advocacy
 - Healthy Boundaries
- SEL and Equity Modules
 - Addressing Injustice
 - The Impact of Implicit Biases
- Mental Health Modules
 - Trauma
 - Substance Use
 - Reducing the Risk of Suicide
 - Anxiety
 - Depression
 - Bullying and Violence
 - Mental Wellness
 - Developing Healthy Identities
 - Digital Citizenship and Online Safety

Addressing these critical skills and behaviors can help students build resilience and coping skills and better manage their emotions, thoughts, and behaviors. For each grade level, there are 30 SEL, 4 SEL and Equity, 2 Trauma, and 11 Mental Health Tier 1 lessons with accommodations for Tier 2 students, as well as SEL lessons for Tier 3 special education students.

Now more than ever it is essential to address the well-being of staff so that they can better manage the difficult challenges they are facing with students during and following the pandemic. Professional development in social-emotional well-being, mental health, and trauma can help educators with their personal stress, burnout, anxiety, and ability to build relationships with students. Similarly, addressing the social, emotional, mental health, and trauma needs of students can help to decrease challenging behaviors and improve student engagement, motivation, and overall well-being, which can lead to more learning and better academic outcomes.

SEL can remediate behavioral challenges in schools (National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2017)

References

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Rethink Ed combines the power of technology and research to deliver innovative, scalable and evidence-based instructional materials and supports for learners with disabilities. The comprehensive suite of tools ensures that every student develops the academic, behavioral and social/emotional skills they need to succeed in school, at work and in life. Rethink Ed positions educators, students and families for success. Rethink Ed is a division of Rethink First, a company that aims to place evidence-based treatment solutions in the hands of every educator, clinician or parent working with a child with special needs. We are unique in our footprint, leveraging the power of technology to provide clinical support, best-practice tools, and research-based content to all market segments, reaching more children with special needs than any other solution.

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