



# **Creating Affirming, Responsive, and Equitable Schools (CARES)**

**MENTAL HEALTH SYSTEM ASSESSMENT  
RESOURCE WORKBOOK**

**2024**



**National  
Black Women's  
Justice Institute**

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## Addressing the Mental Health Needs of Black Girls in Schools





***There is a need for schools to prioritize the mental health of Black girls.*** The mental health crisis among young people in the United States, particularly Black girls, is worsening, with high levels of persistent sadness and hopelessness exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic<sup>1</sup>. Black children, girls, and LGBTQ+ students are disproportionately affected, with a significant increase in reported feelings of sadness and hopelessness over the past decade<sup>2</sup>. Suicide ranks as the second leading cause of death for U.S. children ages 10–19, with Black girls facing a particularly high risk, as evidenced by elevated rates of suicide attempts, compared to their peers<sup>1</sup>. Between 1991 and 2017, suicide attempts by Black youth increased, while suicide attempts among youth of other races and ethnicities decreased. Suicide death rates for Black teenage girls increased by 182% from 2001 to 2017<sup>3</sup>. Unique stress factors, including disproportionate family responsibilities and discrimination based on race and gender, contribute to their heightened risk<sup>4</sup>, highlighting the urgent need for targeted interventions and support systems tailored to Black girls' needs and experiences.

## ***Why We Created the CARES Mental Health System Assessment Tool***

Current school-based assessment tools do not accurately gauge the extent to which schools address Black girls' and gender expansive young people's mental health and wellness needs. Although existing tools recommend comprehensive school-based mental health systems (CSMHS), they do not have an intersectional lens that can respond to the unique ways that gender, race, and other identities shape young people's mental health and help-seeking behaviors. The CARES Mental Health System Assessment tool helps schools understand how the mental health policies, practices, and programs they have in place contribute to the emotional well-being of their students, particularly Black girls, and offers a roadmap for creating a school-based mental health system responsive to all students across social identities.



## How We Created CARES Mental Health System Assessment Tool

*The CARES Mental Health System Assessment tool incorporates insights from Black girls to establish comprehensive mental health systems responsive to needs of Black girls and gender-expansive youth.* By prioritizing the experiences of Black girls, the CARES Mental Health System Assessment tool aids schools with implementing policies, practices, and programs that are attuned to the mental health and emotional well-being of all students. To develop the CARES Mental Health System Assessment tool, NBWJI examined existing frameworks, interventions, and assessment tools related to school-based mental health systems. We engaged two advisory councils: one involving Black girls ages 12–19 and the other consisting of professional subject matter experts.

- **Youth Involvement:** Over a 9-month period, the Youth Advisory Council (YAC) actively participated in discussions with the NBWJI team, sharing their experiences and providing invaluable recommendations for enhancing school policies, services, and practices. Additionally, they offered feedback on the CARES Mental Health System Assessment tool, ensuring its relevance and effectiveness.
- **Community Engagement:** NBWJI conducted listening sessions with Black girls to ensure the CARES Mental Health System Assessment tool reflects critical issues facing Black girls in school. Listening session participants engaged in discussions with the NBWJI team to learn directly from Black girls about their experiences, insights, and recommendations for how schools can improve their policies and practices to best support their mental health and wellness.
- **Expert Advisors:** The advisory committee of subject matter experts included Black women in school administration, mental health, and community services. They shared their professional expertise and reviewed the CARES Mental Health System Assessment tool to ensure it meets professional standards.



### *Understanding the Impact of Trauma and Punitive Disciplinary Practices*

*Black girls face disproportionately higher rates of trauma exposure, often leading to behavioral responses that are met with punitive measures instead of understanding.*

There is evidence that decisions to punish Black girls for their behaviors are fueled by unconscious bias and stereotypes about Black girls and gender-expansive young people. The use of exclusionary discipline (e.g., suspension, expulsion, referrals to law enforcement, etc.) pushes Black girls out of school, exacerbating mental health challenges and weakening students' commitment to their education, ultimately resulting in Black girls disengaging from school, and some leaving school altogether (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1**

*Understanding the Impact of Trauma and Punitive Disciplinary Practices*



### **Higher Rates of Trauma Exposure**

Black girls experience trauma at elevated rates, leading to behavioral manifestations often met with punishment rather than empathy due to stereotypes and adultification<sup>5</sup>.



### **Consequences of Exclusionary Discipline**

Subjective offenses like “willful defiance” and “insubordination” drive disparities in exclusionary discipline, reinforcing stereotypes and pushing Black and Brown girls out of school, exacerbating mental health challenges<sup>6</sup>.



### **Pushout Phenomenon**

Schools’ reliance on punitive measures creates harmful environments, causing students to disengage and leave school altogether, further perpetuating racial and gender biases<sup>7</sup>.

## ***Barriers to Mental Health Support for Black Girls***

Black girls and children of color are at a disadvantage when it comes to receiving mental health treatment compared to other young people. This is due in part to a lack of culturally sensitive services, a shortage of Black mental health providers, and barriers such as lack of insurance or being underinsured. Additionally, many providers of color do not accept insurance, further limiting access to care. Another factor contributing to these barriers is the unspoken cultural norm within many Black communities, where youth are often taught not to share personal problems outside of the home. This expectation around confidentiality can further hinder Black girls from seeking mental health support, leaving their needs unmet and them feeling unsupported (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2**

*Barriers to Mental Health Support for Black Girls*



### **Unaddressed Mental Health Needs**

Despite significant demand, Black girls and children of color face the highest rates of unmet mental health needs due to limited access to culturally responsive services and Black mental health care providers<sup>8</sup>.



### **Lack of Culturally Affirming Care**

Existing tools and methods used in mental health care are often inadequate for Black girls, who receive less positive interaction from providers. Moreover, the scarcity of Black mental health professionals exacerbates the issue<sup>9</sup>.



### **Barriers to Help-Seeking**

Social stigma, distrust of providers, and structural barriers hinder Black girls' engagement with mental health services, leaving them unsupported despite their significant needs<sup>10</sup>.



*I feel like not everybody wants help because if you tell your problems to the guidance counselor, they're gonna have to tell somebody that you're either doing something that you're not supposed to be doing or hurting yourself, and you don't want that. It's hard for you to tell somebody, it's gonna be even more hard when they tell other people. They try to give you hope, but you don't feel comfortable.*

—Youth listening session participant



# How the CARES Mental Health System Assessment Tool Enhances Comprehensive School Mental Health Systems (CSMHS)

What is a Comprehensive School Mental Health Systems (CSMHS)?

A Comprehensive School Mental Health system is an equitable multi-level system of support (MLSS) that offers an array of mental health services that promote school climate, social and emotional well-being, and the mental health of students. A CSMHS includes the following domains teaming, needs assessment and resources, multi-tiered system of support, mental health screening and referral, data and impact, and funding and sustainability. In order to build a CSMHS, there needs to be a strong foundation of district and school professionals in place, including administrators, educators, and specialized instructional support personnel (e.g., school psychologists, school social workers, school counselors, school nurses, and other school health professionals) committed to creating an environment that supports the mental health of all students. A CSMHS uses evidence-based and emerging best practices to ensure high-quality services and supports are made available to students<sup>11</sup>.



It is important to establish this system because CSMHS promotes collaboration with students, families, mental health partners, and communities which is vital for nurturing students' social and emotional well-being across all levels of need. CSMHS yields tangible benefits, such as improved attendance and academic performance (e.g., improvements in student grades, test scores, and overall academic performance), fewer disciplinary issues, and a safer and more welcoming school environment (see Figure 3)<sup>12</sup>.

**Figure 3**  
*Comprehensive Mental Health System Outcomes*



Although CSMHS offers evidenced-based and promising practices schools can benefit from, **school-based mental health systems must also operate through an intersectional, trauma-sensitive lens** to address how race and gender interact with other elements of identity and uniquely shape Black girls' mental health needs and experiences. By infusing the CSMHS framework with an intersectional, trauma-sensitive lens, the CARES Mental Health Assessment tool enables schools to implement mental health-related policies, practices, and programs that can **respond appropriately with gender-responsive, culturally affirming, and trauma-informed** services and supports of a diverse student body (see Figure 4).

**Figure 4**  
*Six Domains of CSMHS*

Domain Component	Description
<b>Teaming</b>	Structures and processes facilitating collaboration among students, families, schools, community partners, policymakers, funders, and providers to address academic, social, emotional, and behavioral needs. Effective teaming structures prevent problems such as work duplication and unclear responsibilities.
<b>Needs Assessment and Resource Mapping</b>	Continuous evaluation of school and student needs, coupled with mapping of school and community assets, to inform decision-making about necessary supports and services.
<b>Multi-Tiered System of Support</b>	Tiered, evidence-based processes, policies, and practices promoting mental health and reducing mental illness. Tier 1 focuses on universal mental health promotion, Tier 2 offers early intervention services, and Tier 3 targets support for students with serious concerns.
<b>Mental Health Screening and Referral</b>	Early identification and treatment of mental health concerns through screening and referral strategies.
<b>Data and Impact</b>	Utilization of data to monitor student needs and progress, assess implementation quality, and evaluate support and service impact.
<b>Funding and Sustainability</b>	Diverse funding sources and continuous monitoring for new opportunities to support the sustainability of the comprehensive school mental health system.





## ***NBWJI's 6 Guiding Principles for Supporting Mental Health and Wellness of Black Girls and Gender-Expansive Youth***

*The CARES Mental Health System Assessment Tool is designed to evaluate how schools address the emotional and mental health needs of Black girls and gender-expansive young people.* At the National Black Women's Justice Institute, we have outlined and infused our **6 guiding principles for supporting the mental health of Black girls and gender-expansive young people** into the existing CSMHS framework to create the CARES Mental Health System Assessment tool (see Figure 5). The guiding principles aid the identification of culturally affirming, gender-responsive mental health services to implement in schools and adjust disciplinary policies for a supportive school climate. Each section of the CARES Mental Health System Assessment tool reflects the 6 guiding principles: address adultification bias, confront stereotypes and biases, support rest, uphold Black girls' agency, amplify Black girls' voices, build trust, and attend to holistic needs.

**Figure 5**  
*NBWJI 6 Guiding Principles*

## ***NBWJI's Black Feminist Framework for Evaluating School Mental Health Programs***

- 1 Address Adultification Bias**  
Counteract the tendency to perceive Black girls as adults often referred to as Adultification bias, granting them the same understanding and patience as peers their age rather than holding them to higher standards.
- 2 Confront Stereotypes and Biases**  
Challenge biases and stereotypes about Black girls' behavior and attitudes, recognizing their individuality. Avoid making assumptions and seek to understand and support Black girls on an individual basis.
- 3 Support Rest**  
Acknowledge the importance of rest in countering racial gender bias. Encourage Black girls to prioritize self-care and rest, challenging societal expectations that often demand they prioritize others over themselves.
- 4 Uphold Black Girls' Agency**  
Empower Black girls to have control over their lives and experiences, respecting their autonomy and avoiding actions that diminish their agency. Support their leadership and decision-making, recognizing their expertise in their own lives.
- 5 Build Trust**  
Establish trusting relationships between Black girls and adults in the school community, acknowledging past harm and committing to creating a safe and supportive environment. Address historical distrust and work towards healing and mutual understanding.
- 6 Attend to Holistic Needs**  
Recognize that addressing Black girls' mental health requires addressing their broader needs, such as food insecurity and housing instability. Take a holistic approach to support, addressing all aspects of their well-being.

Infusing our **6 Guiding Principles** into this assessment not only enhances its effectiveness but also aligns seamlessly with our **Black Feminist Framework for Research and Evaluation**. Traditional approaches fail to consider the voices, experiences, and expertise of directly impacted people when assessing program activities and interventions. This framework serves as a comprehensive guide for educators, students, families, mental health partners, and communities in assessing the suitability, effectiveness, and impact of program activities and interventions. The Black Feminist Framework offers an alternative paradigm for prioritizing the needs and desires of directly impacted Black women and girls, girls of color, and gender-expansive youth in research and evaluation while promoting social justice.



**Figure 6**  
*Black Feminist Framework*

<b>Framework Aspect</b>	<b>What It Involves</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Example</b>
<b>Teaming</b>	Understanding how race, gender, and class affect Black girls.	Assess how these factors impact student experiences.	Ensure policies consider the unique challenges faced by Black girls.
<b>Strength-Focused Approach</b>	Building on the strengths of Black girls.	Highlight strengths and resilience in evaluation tools.	Create surveys that ask about achievements and positive experiences.
<b>Cultural Affirmation</b>	Making sure evaluation tools are culturally relevant.	Involve Black girls in developing these tools.	Use sensitive language and scenarios in surveys.
<b>Dialogue and Self-Definition</b>	Giving Black girls a voice in the evaluation process.	Include regular feedback sessions with Black girls.	Hold meetings where Black girls can share their experiences.
<b>Reflexivity</b>	Addressing personal biases in the evaluation.	Train evaluators to recognize and reduce biases.	Include self-reflection questions for evaluators.
<b>Community Care and Social Change</b>	Ensuring the evaluation benefits Black girls and their communities.	Share findings with the community and make improvements.	Present findings in community meetings and work with local groups.



*There needs to just be a commitment to unpacking the images that have been associated with Black girlhood and Black young people that cloud the way that they are perceived and treated within spaces . . .the way they're adultified, the way they're seen as aggressive, all the stereotypes that we have to navigate growing up. Because any tool or any way that folks are trying to be responsive to the needs of these young people is not going to work if there are these negative images that are clouding the way that they're perceived and how they're treated; that are limiting our vision of who they can be and who they are.*



—Asamia Diaby

## **Using the Assessment Tool**

CARES Mental Health System Assessment workbook is divided into six sections, one for each component of the comprehensive school mental health system: (1) Teaming; (2) Needs Assessment and Resource Mapping; (3) Multi-Tiered System of Supports; (4) Mental Health Screening and Referral; Pathways; (5) Funding and Sustainability; and (6) Data and Impact. Each section offers a brief synopsis of what the domain is and why it's important based on insights from subject matter experts, Black girls, and the research literature on effective and promising practice. Each section also includes suggested reading, and resources to build capacity in that domain.

We have created a separate document that contains the actual assessment tool, which includes six different assessments designed to help you evaluate your school's mental health systems. This document also features reflection questions for your team to consider as you work to strengthen capacity in each area. You can download the document from our website at <https://www.nbwji.org/cares-initiative>.





# Teaming

*Domain 1*





**What you need to know:** Teaming refers to a collaborative approach involving various stakeholders within a school or district. Comprehensive school mental health systems rely on teaming across key stakeholders, including school and district staff, community partners, out-of-school time providers, students, families, policymakers, and funders to address the interconnected academic, social, emotional, and behavioral needs of all students. The hallmarks of teaming include multidisciplinary and diverse staffing, and family-school-community partnerships. Multidisciplinary and family-school-community partnerships are equally important as a vital aspect of teaming. As such, it's important to highlight the effect they can have on Black girls' experiences, ensuring culturally responsive and inclusive support that addresses their unique needs.

**Why is this important?** Teaming processes toward a mental health system that works for Black girls explore new ways to involve and collaborate intergenerationally with students, families, and communities, forge partnerships with people and organizations that have a better understanding of Black girls, their strengths, and their needs, and hire people best positioned to provide support to Black girls (and students overall) rather than exacerbating trauma and criminalization. These factors have direct implications for how Black girls experience school climate and their feelings of safety, and overall wellness at school.

*A vital aspect of teaming in a system that works for Black girls in diverse staffing.*

NBWJI's conversations with Black girls and subject matter experts emphasized the importance of diverse staffing schools with Black women in whom Black girls can see themselves. Beyond simply being role models, hiring Black women ensures that Black girls have adults in school who have a better understanding of their experiences, strengths, difficulties, and behaviors (rather than them being misunderstood and punished where support is needed). Additionally, hiring well-trained, culturally competent people best positioned to provide support to Black girls (and students overall) is critical. Beyond diverse staffing in mental health roles, specific roles such as school administrators, teachers, counselors, and extracurricular program leaders are equally important. These positions provide daily, holistic interaction with students, offering mentorship, guidance, and academic and emotional support that resonates with Black girls' lived experiences. Hiring and retaining Black women mental health providers can improve relatability and accessibility and reduce stigma among Black girls.<sup>14</sup> While the shortage of Black mental health providers is out of the control of schools, conscious efforts should be taken to put them in schools whenever possible.





# Promising practices to apply the guiding principles and better support Black girls

## Diversified Staffing

- Gather and regularly review staff demographic data (including leadership, educators, and support staff), compare the data to neighboring districts, county, and statewide averages, and set employment goals for Black women. Some guiding questions might include:
  - What is the demographic composition of the school’s leadership and staff? How does that compare to the student body? Is there alignment?
  - In looking at your demographic data, do these numbers reflect a need to recruit more Black women? If so, in what areas?
  - What do you think will be some of the challenges or barriers?
- Attract Black women to schools through incentives if feasible, such as higher salaries, housing assistance, or education/certification sponsorship.
- Providing healing and support resources for staff and team members is crucial for retention and well-being. Programs like the [Healing Schools Project](#) highlight the importance of creating spaces that promote self-care and emotional support for educators, which in turn enhances their ability to care for and support students effectively.
- Recruit Black educators from existing school employees by creating paths to certification (i.e., Grow Your Own Teacher programs)
- Ensure that any initiatives put in motion to attract Black women to schools are led by Black women, when possible, or staff trained in [cultural competence](#).
- Implement surveys and feedback mechanisms to gather input from both staff and educators regarding their experiences with recruitment and retention policies
- Compare the identities of employees with the diversity of the school or local community to identify any gaps or discrepancies
- Establish partnerships with community organizations and networks that promote diversity and inclusion to tap into a wider pool of candidat



*I always wonder, what would happen if I did have an African-American as a teacher, or an African-American woman as a teacher? I think that would be just a different connection or a different schooling experience in general. And I really want to have that happen. I really want a teacher of color.*

— Youth Advisor, age 16



## Strategies to Establish a Culture Where Black Women Thrive

- **Intersectional Approach:** Recognize and address the intersecting identities and experiences of Black women, including gender, race, class, sexuality, ability, and others, in all aspects of school policies, practices, and programs.
- **Community Care and Engagement:** Foster partnerships with families and communities to support the academic success and well-being of Black women students. Involve parents, guardians, and community members in school activities, decision-making processes, and educational initiatives.
- **Addressing Bias and Discrimination:** Create and enforce policies that address bias, discrimination, and microaggressions in the school environment. Provide avenues for reporting incidents of bias or discrimination and ensure that they are promptly and effectively addressed.
- **Culturally Affirming:** Create safe, inclusive, and affirming spaces where Black women feel valued, respected, and empowered to express themselves authentically without fear of judgment or discrimination.
- **Celebrating Achievements and Contributions:** Recognize and celebrate the achievements and contributions of Black women within the school community through awards, ceremonies, and other forms of recognition.
- **Affinity Groups or Support Networks:** Establishing affinity groups or support networks specifically for Black women can provide a space for them to connect, share experiences, and support one another. These groups can organize events, discussions, and workshops that celebrate Black culture, address relevant issues, and foster a sense of belonging.

## Inclusive Involvement and Collaboration Practices

- Uplift the voices of Black girls and students overall by:
  - Creating a youth-specific group that can freely bring up and discuss concerns with their peers, and send representative(s) to participate in intergenerational planning groups.
  - Ensuring that their voices are valued and respected by all adults in the room. Be aware of power dynamics (specifically, [ageism](#) and [misogynoir](#), [ableism](#)) that might cause adults to discount or reduce the value of Black girls' voices. This also involves *addressing and counteracting biases about Black girls* and *committing to trust-building* so that Black girls feel safe speaking up.
- Meet families where they are: provide opportunities for virtual engagement, do home visits when able or necessary, provide childcare to caregivers attending meetings or events, etc. Commit to trust-building, especially with families who have had negative experiences with the school system. Additionally, provide community resources to parents and caregivers to support their well-being and involvement. Create opportunities for training and support groups among parents and caregivers to foster a sense of community and equip them with tools to better support their children. These efforts help strengthen the school-family relationship, ensuring a collaborative approach to student success.
- Ensure the presence of translator/interpreter services to enable students and caregivers to engage even if English is not their primary language.

## Effective Communication

- Create structure and predictability of team processes by tracking meeting attendance, creating and using an agenda, focusing on making actionable decisions, following up on the status of action items, and defining member roles and responsibilities.\*
- Engage in equitable communication practices that center inclusion, cultural humility, and sustainable change (i.e., providing translation services and multilingual resources/materials, using language that is plain/comprehensible, person-first, and strength-based).



*When we think about the attempts schools typically make to have parent/community engagement, it's often in this really narrow structure. Like, it has to happen either during school hours, or, if it's an afternoon, it ends at six o'clock... So I think, first things first, there needs to be a concerted effort to expand resources on the school level so that principals, deans, and educators can actually meet the parents where they're at. So that they can offer extended hours; they can offer multiple ways for parents to engage that isn't just, 'You have to be here on a Tuesday morning at 10 o'clock, because that's just the time that we have allocated.'*



—Asamia Diaby



# Resources to Build Teaming Capacity

## General Resources for Collaboration and Teaming

- National Center for School Mental Health's (NCSMH) [School Mental Health Quality Guide: Teaming](#) contains background information on teaming, best practices, possible action steps, examples from the field, and resources. It is part of a collection of resources developed by NCSMH at the University of Maryland School of Medicine to help school mental health systems advance the quality of their services and supports.
- [WORKSHEET](#): Establishing gender responsive and culturally affirming community partnerships
- The School Mental Health Team Alignment Tool, available as a resource with a [SHAPE System](#) account, maps out all teams that currently address student mental health and well-being as well as overall school culture and climate. This allows school leaders to observe their current teaming structure and make improvements.
- The [Healing Schools Project](#) website serves as a valuable resource for educators, administrators, and mental health professionals aiming to create trauma-informed, healing-centered school environments. It offers tools, workshops, and resources focused on promoting well-being for both staff and students, fostering resilience, and integrating restorative practices into schools. By prioritizing healing and support, the site helps schools cultivate a compassionate, inclusive atmosphere that enhances learning and mental health outcomes.

## Further Reading

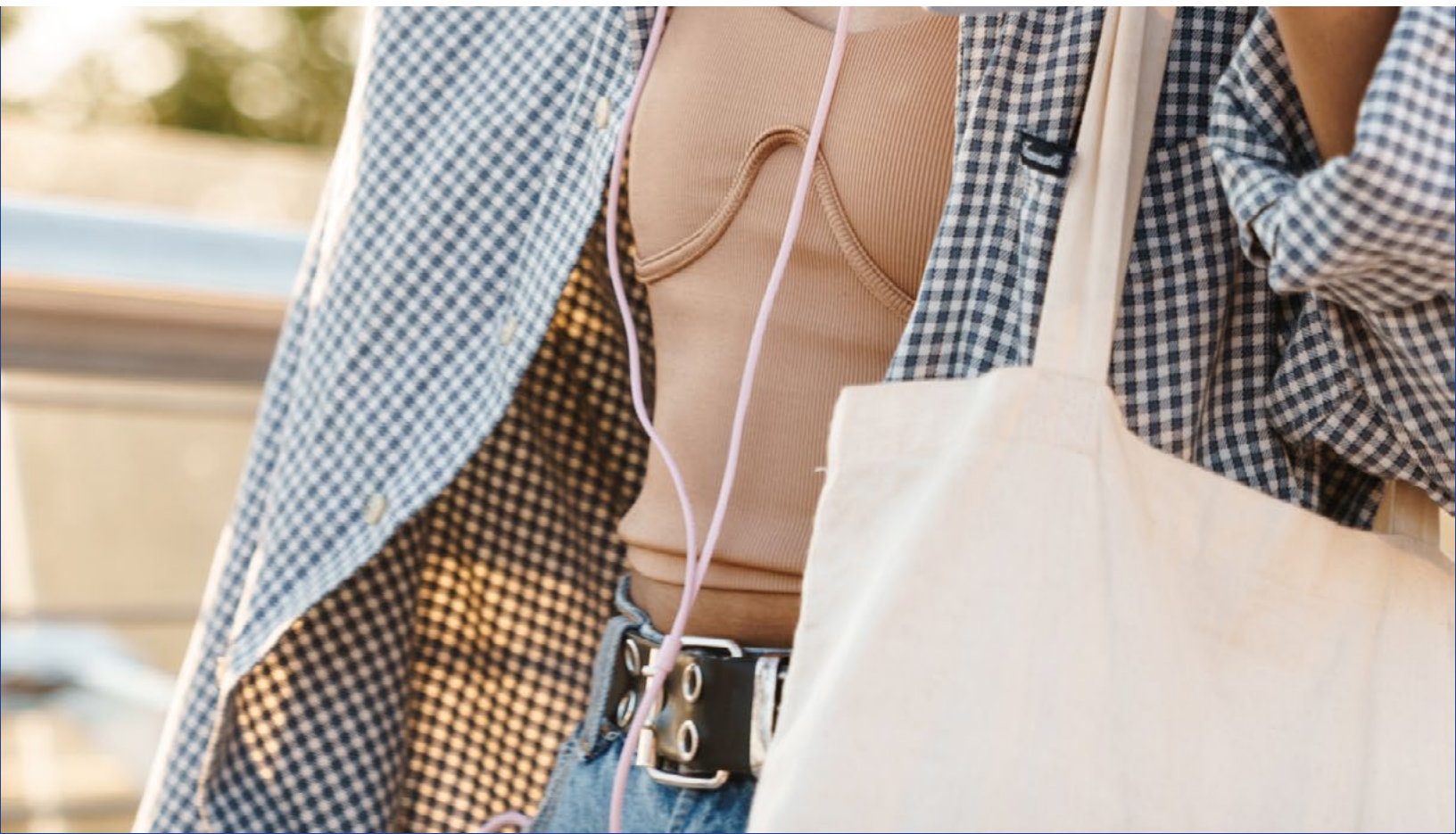
- [Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools](#) (2016) by Dr. Monique Couvson – This book explores how Black girls are disproportionately criminalized in schools and details the ways in which educational policies and practices push them out of school and into the criminal justice system.
- [Sing A Rhythm, Dance A Blues: Education for the Liberation of Black and Brown Girls](#) (2019) by Dr. Monique Couvson – Morris discusses how education can be transformed to create spaces of empowerment and healing for Black and Brown girls, offering strategies for supporting their academic success and emotional well-being.
- Check out chapters 1 and 2 in SAMSHA's [School Mental Health Referral Pathways Toolkit](#) for further reading and sample tools on establishing a school mental health team and building partnerships.
- [Roadmap for School Mental Health Improvement](#) is a good resource to help figure out where and how to start the process of building a comprehensive school mental health system
- [Strategies for Designing, Implementing, and Evaluating Grow-Your-Own Teacher Programs for Educators](#)
- Tips for [communicating with your community about screening tools](#) provides a list of presentations, videos, webinars, websites and articles that will provide an overview of systematic screening
- This [classroom family engagement rubric](#) provides educators with specific steps they can take to improve family engagement on a classroom level





# Needs Assessment and Resource Mapping

*Domain 2*





**What you need to know:** A [needs assessment](#) is a systematic set of procedures that is used to collect data and identify gaps and strengths in a system, helping schools pinpoint mental health needs, evaluate existing services and supports, and prioritize actions for school mental health programming. A resource map is a directory, a list or a guide of resources in the school or community that can be used to address the needs that have been identified. [Resource mapping](#) is an “active, ongoing process to identify, visually represent, and share”<sup>36</sup> this information, informing resource utilization efficiently. Schools typically possess lists of programs that outline community resources. Expanding upon these lists is encouraged, don’t reinvent the wheel if you don’t need to.

## Needs Assessment Overview

**What Can You Do With A Needs Assessment:** When conducting a needs assessment, the wellness team (e.g., caregivers, students, school mental health and health staff, community-based providers, school administrators, students, school staff, community leaders) should gather current existing data such as, attendance records, office referrals, incident reports, nursing and counselor logs, suspension rates, truancy records. You and your team will identify your school’s strengths, needs and challenges when addressing Black girls mental health. When conducting a needs assessment, this process should be collaborative and should include all voices and perspectives who are part of the receiving services from the school, i.e students, families.



**Guiding Steps to Conduct a Needs Assessment:** To begin a needs assessment your wellness team should consider the following steps outlined in the chart below:

## 1 *Explore What Is (determine your team and objectives)*

**Create Your Team:** Convene a diverse team to conduct the needs assessment (e.g., school staff, school mental health staff such as licensed social workers, and community-based leaders) to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the needs and perspectives.

**Identification of Objectives:** Identify and address mental health needs that are the most pressing. Brainstorm a list of concerns/factors for each of the concerns. Consider the current existing data your school already gathers (e.g., attendance records, office referrals, incident reports, nursing and counselor logs, suspension rates, truancy records) as a starting point. Refine your list to your top 3–5 concerns the team wants to prioritize. During this stage your school should be able to recognize its resources and capacity and if additional resources and help is needed from other professionals or community members.



## 2 *Gather and Analyze Data (gather data and prioritize needs)*

**Data Collection:** Gather current data and Identify your schools mental health system challenges, gaps, and strengths this can be through various methods such as surveys, interviews, observations. Consider the following questions to be included in your needs assessment:

- What are the two greatest stressors faced by Black girls and gender-expansive youth?
- What are some of the community strengths?
- Would you recommend the available mental health services to your current students?

**Analysis of Data:** Understand how well existing services and supports are meeting Black girls and gender-expansive needs. Consider the following:

- Are there common problems?
- Where are they occurring most frequently? (e.g., specific grades)
- Disaggregate the data to identify inequities or disparities among Black girls and gender-expansive youth





### **3** *Make Decisions (set priority needs and propose solutions)*

**Development of Action Plans:** Creating an action plan that outlines steps to begin addressing the needs. The action plan should prioritize selection of areas of focus, programs, services and strategies of outreach.

**Exploring “What is” Group Activity:** When conducting a needs assessment the goal is to pinpoint your schools mental health needs for Black girls and gender-expansive youth. To support this process your team can consider the following questions listed below in the “What is” group activity template to support identifying mental health needs for Black girls and gender-expansive youth.

### **“What is” Group Activity Template**

*What is the goal your team wants to achieve?*

*What are the concerns your team wants to address?*

*What are the indicators (data that can verify a concern exists)?*

**Gathering and Analyzing Data Group Activity Template:** When gathering and analyzing data in a needs assessment, the goal is to determine the priority of each need, examine both the difficulty to correct the need and the degree of criticality. To support this process below is an example of a cause and analysis template that can be used to determine the priority of each need with instructions on how to complete each column. This information can also be used to move towards making decisions about solution strategies.

**Cause and Analysis Template Example**

Need	Causes	Consequences	Difficulty to Correct [low, medium, high]	Criticality 1 2 3 4 5

- In column 1: List needs that were previously identified in the needs assessment.
- In column 2: List all possible “treatable” causes of each need (concern), itemized separately for each need. A given need may have more than one cause.
- In column 3: List consequences if the cause is not removed and the need is not met, also itemize separately for each need. There may be more than one consequence for each need.
- In column 4: Enter a rating (low, medium, high) of the difficulty of correcting the problem once it has occurred.
- In column 5: Enter a rating, on a scale of 1 to 5, of the degree of criticality of the need if it is not met, with 5 being the most critical.



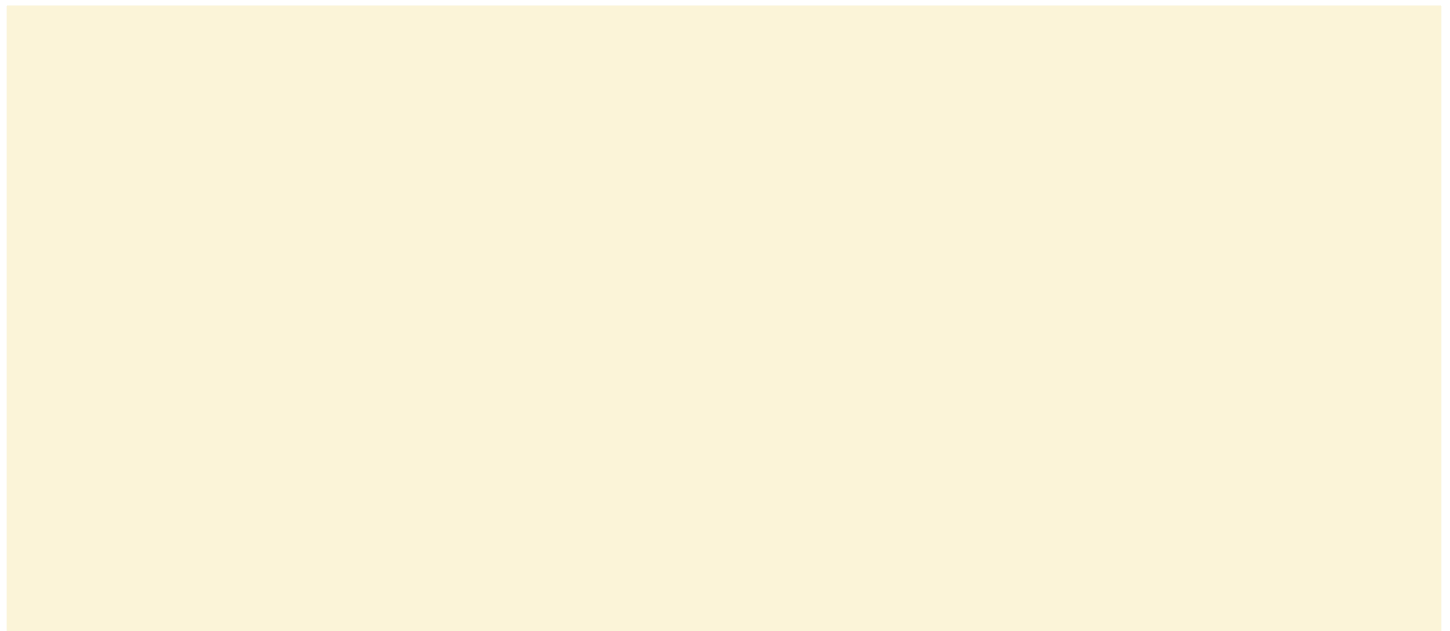
# Resource Mapping Overview

**What Can You Do With A Resource Map:** when establishing a resource map (a directory, a list or a guide of resources in the school or community), this is a process in which you're identifying, finding local resources and services that exist already within your community to support the mental health needs of Black girls and gender-expansive youth. Ultimately, the goal is to improve awareness and access to resources and services, reduce duplication and inappropriate use of services and enhance communication and collaboration.

**Developing a Resource Map:** When creating a resource map, the wellness team (e.g., caregivers, students, school mental health and health staff, community-based providers, school administrators, students, school staff, community leaders) are essentially creating a directory, a list or a guide where staff, families and students are aware of the available resources and services to them. When creating a resource map, there is specific information that can be included. Below is an example of the type of information the wellness team should include within a resource map:

- Name of the program/organization Description of service
- Website, Address, Phone number
- Hours of service
- Waitlist status
- Eligibility requirements
- Insurance accepted
- Cost of service
- Any other unique considerations (e.g., language, culture, immigration status)

**Reflect and consider, are there other types of information that should be included when creating a resource map. Write your reflection thoughts below (e.g.; Bus routes that go to the service location):**



**Conducting a Gap Analysis for Resource Mapping:** A wellness team (e.g., caregivers, students, school mental health and health staff, community-based providers, school administrators, school staff, community leaders) should consider conducting a gap analysis when resource mapping. A gap analysis can inform your decisions about selecting, planning and putting into action appropriate services and supports to meet Black girls and gender-expansive mental health needs. Below is an example of a gap analysis template plan to help guide your wellness team document needs, current resources and identify gaps between resources and needs.

**Gap Analysis Template Example**

Identified Need	Available Resources	Are the needs met by existing resources? (Y/N)	Initial steps to begin Outreach

**Guiding Process to Create a Resource Map:** After a gap analysis is conducted, the wellness team can consider the next steps to resource mapping which include: pre-mapping checklist, resource mapping (e.g., creating a directory, or list of available resources), maintaining and updating mapping. Below is a table to describe the steps in detail and additional resources to support the process such as a [resource mapping checklist in stage one](#).

1

### **Pre-Mapping Checklist ([Resource Mapping Checklist](#))**

Identify current mental health resources that are part of your continuum of supports.

2

### **Resource Mapping (A [SAMHSA web-based resource](#) to help with searching your community for local services and support)**

Create a directory, a list of available resources utilizing the data mentioned above (i.e. name of the program, website, cost of services etc.) to Black girls, gender-expansive youth and families both inside and outside of the school. (i.e. [Black Girls Smile](#), [Black Mental Wellness](#)). When mapping it is essential for there to be collaboration with community resources and programs that cross over child-serving agencies (e.g., education, health, mental health, juvenile services, social services) so that there is necessary staff capacity and the fiscal means available so that the needs of the whole child are addressed.

3

### **Maintaining & Updating Mapping (The Ector County Independent School District uses [a Strategic Abandonment Tool](#), a worksheet that helps teams determine the utility, cost effectiveness, and necessity of various services and supports).**

Continuously reviewing and updating your resource map to ensure it accurately reflects available resources and the effectiveness of referral services and supports.



**Guiding Template to Create a Resource Map:** To further support resource mapping in stage two where a wellness team is creating a directory with a list of available resources, below is an example template that can be used as a starting point of information that can be used to create a resource map.

**Mental Health Program Resource Mapping Template Example**

Program Name	Program Location	Target Population	Program Focus	Eligibility Requirements	How To Enroll

Resource mapping links community and school resources to shared goals, strategies, and outcomes, ensuring comprehensive support for youth and families. Above are the different three essential steps we will use to begin resource mapping. We will ask you to Inquire within your wellness team about existing resource maps and directories for your school or community, as this can streamline the resource mapping process. When utilizing existing lists, ascertain their creation date and update status for accuracy.

## How Do Needs Assessment and Resource Mapping Fit Together?

- Needs assessment identifies pressing strengths, needs, and challenges in a system.
- Resource mapping offers a clear representation of resources available to address identified needs or enhance identified strengths.

**Why is this important:** Together, these processes are essential for establishing inclusive mental health systems and effective resource allocation. Resource mapping provides comprehensive information about available mental health support, enhancing families' ability to access resources. Centering Black girls' mental health involves recognizing them as experts in their experiences and empowering them to lead research. Resource mapping should include Black girl-specific and gender-expansive resources, a practice that can benefit other marginalized groups like LGBTQ+ youth.



*How are we thinking about the holistic needs of the student? It's not just, 'Let's make sure they have access to a guidance counselor and that they can go to a session when needed,' but, what are the practices within schools that negatively impact students? What are our grading policies? What are our uniform policies? What is the access to nutritious and tasty foods on the school level? How expansive can we be with thinking about the whole needs of the students and how we can be resourceful and responsive to that? We can make some changes that will just make students have a better experience across the board.*



—Asamia Diaby, education & racial justice organizer, Alliance for Quality Education



*They need support. They need somebody who's not only teaching them how to conduct the research, but somebody who they can regularly ask questions to, somebody who can regularly look over their work if they want a second set of eyes. If they're going through an interview and they're coding it, somebody to help them code it. Those sorts of things, if they're leading the research in this way and we're expecting them to help with the data analysis, they shouldn't just be left to their own devices.*



—Dom Garrett-Scott, Statewide Campaign Researcher, Californians for Justice

## ***Promising practices to apply the guiding principles in Needs Assessment to support Black girls***

- Support Black girls' agency by involving Black girls (and students more broadly) as leaders in collecting data for needs assessments, as they are experts of their own experiences. In planning for their involvement, consider the following:
  - Creating a plan for teaching them self-care and restoration while doing this work.
  - Compensating them for their work.
  - Crediting them for their work by putting their names on any outputs that come from their needs assessment activities
- Assess common risk and stress factors faced by Black girls in your school (e.g., caregiving responsibilities, [parentification](#), where children take on adult responsibilities prematurely).
- Uplift Black girls' voices by administering surveys specific to students' experiences with particular classes, teachers, and staff to identify members of the school community who form negative perceptions of Black girls, hold Black girls to different expectations or otherwise violate the guiding principles outlined in this framework.
- Support Black girls' agency by making efforts to present the findings of the needs assessment to students and families, particularly Black girls and their families, and get their input on how gaps can be addressed.
- Ensure that resources listed in resource maps are not limited to only mental health support, but resources targeting social determinants of [mental] health, including food, housing, childcare, etc.



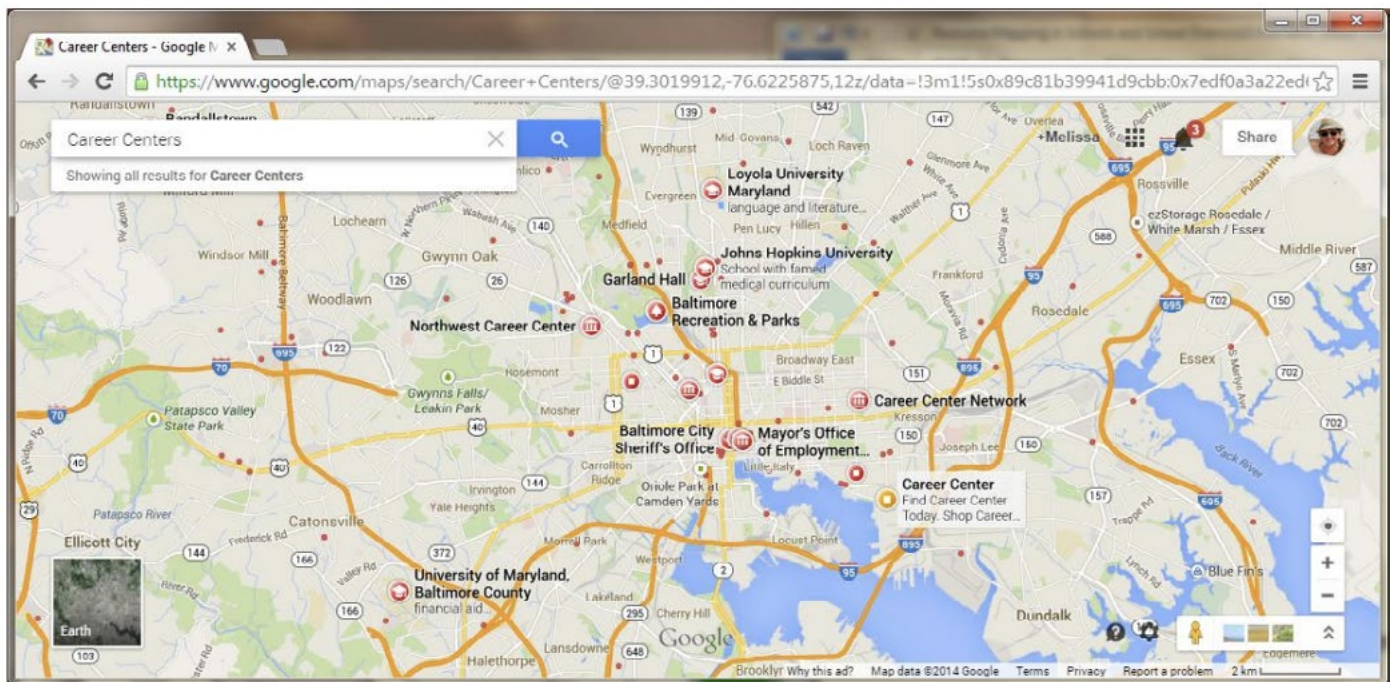
## ***Promising practices to apply the guiding principles in Resource Mapping to better support Black girls***

- Dedicate a section of the resource map to resources specific to the needs of Black girls (i.e., [Therapy for Black Girls](#), [Black Girls Smile](#), and local organizations) and ensure that the resource map is user friendly, includes all necessary information for resources (e.g., name of the program/organization, description of service, website, address, phone number, hours of service, eligibility requirements, insurance accepted, cost of service, waitlist status, any other unique considerations– e.g., language, culture, immigration status), and is available online and in multiple languages.
- Support Black girls' agency by disseminating a resource map throughout the student body to ensure that students are aware of available resources; have a staff member of your mental health team visit classrooms to review the resource map.
- When discussing potential referrals with individual students and their families, use the resource map to aid in the collaborative selection and planning of appropriate services and supports–this supports the agency of Black girls and their families in choosing the services and supports most appropriate

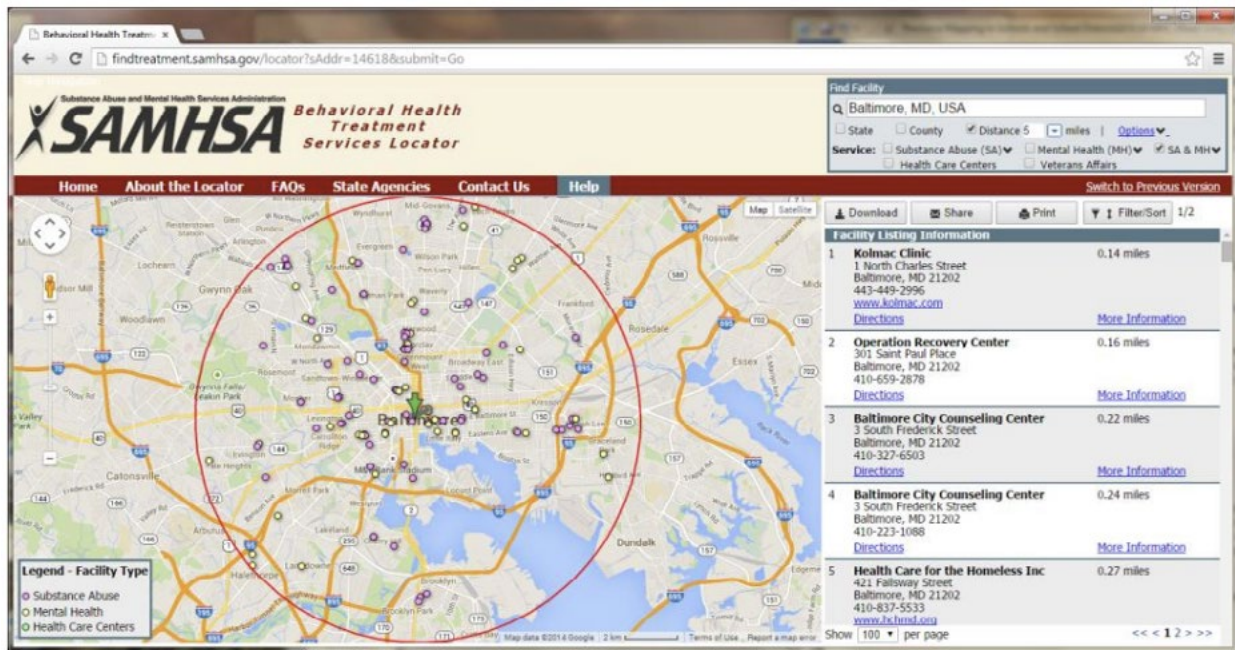
# Resources to build needs assessment and resource mapping capacity

## General Resources on Needs Assessment and Resource Mapping

- [School Mental Health Quality Guide: Needs Assessment and Resource Mapping](#): From the National Center for School Mental Health, this guide provides background information on needs assessment and resource mapping, best practices, possible action steps, examples from the field, and resources.
- [Resource Mapping Checklist](#): This template provides a list of possible resources to be included in the resources mapping process.
- Searching the Community and Developing a Directory: A simple web-based search can also be tremendously helpful! Below are some tips on some ways to effectively conduct these searches.
  - 1. Use search engine such as [www.google.com](http://www.google.com)
  - 2. Click “Maps” at top of page and locate your neighborhood, city, or state
  - 3. Click “Search maps” button
  - 4. Click “Search nearby” and enter words related to the resource. For example, we searched for “Career Centers” in Baltimore.



- The Behavioral Health Treatment Services Locator: <http://findtreatment.samhsa.gov/> This online database was developed by SAMSHA’s Center for Mental Health Services. It provides comprehensive information about mental health services and resources and is useful for professionals, consumers and their families, and the public. Information can be accessed by zip code and service setting.



- Your team should educate themselves on local, district and state-wide mental health statistics surrounding prevalence and access, please see below some helpful resources:
  - **State and Local Health Departments** often publish detailed reports on mental health prevalence, access to services, and disparities. Encourage the team to review these publicly available reports on the health department’s website. Departments like the [CDC’s Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System \(BRFSS\)](#) or [Healthy People](#) can also provide state-specific data.
  - **School districts and state education departments** often collect data on student well-being, including mental health. The team can engage with district-level reports or request data from school board meetings to understand the prevalence of mental health concerns in schools.
  - **State-level initiatives, like the National Center for School Mental Health (NCSMH)**, provide useful resources and data about how mental health is integrated into educational settings.

Public databases, such as the National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH), Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS), or the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), provide in-depth state and regional data on mental health prevalence and access to care.

*What we have found is, when we focus specifically on mental health and well being, there’s normally some other needs that at times can preclude a girl or a group of girls from participating or finding mental health services or support to be beneficial, because they have issues around housing insecurity, nutritional insecurity . . .*

—Lauren Carson, Founder & Executive Director, Black Girls Smile





**Multi-Tiered System of Supports**  
*Domain 3*



**What is a multi-tiered system of supports?** A multi-tiered system offers different levels of mental health support. **Tier 1** provides activities for all students, focusing on positive skills and well-being, including staff support and improving school climate. **Tier 2** intervenes early for students with mild distress, using assessments to address concerns culturally and equitably, while **Tier 3** provides intensive treatment for students experiencing significant distress (e.g., severe anxiety, depression, trauma from abuse or neglect, suicidal ideation, or self-harming). These tiers involve various professionals, both within the school and community, to ensure comprehensive care.

**What you need to know:** Mental health supports should be implemented along a continuum or multiple tiers that include mental health promotion and prevention for all students, early intervention for students showing early signs of distress, and intervention or treatment programs and services for specific students with identified needs through partnerships between schools, families, and collaborating community agencies. It's important that schools be expansive about what falls within the scope of mental health services to include promotion of racial and ethnic affinity practices, and build the capacity of youth peer leaders to provide culturally responsive and gender-affirming peer support, mental health education, and wellness promotion. As highlighted in the [National Black Women's Justice Institute's Youth-Centered Strategies for Hope, Healing and Health report](#), because students' mental health is influenced by a wide range of factors that go beyond traditional notions of mental illness. The report emphasizes that schools should address not only mental health conditions but also the socio-emotional, behavioral, and environmental challenges students face. For Black girls, in particular, this includes addressing trauma, experiences of discrimination, family dynamics, and societal stressors that can impact their mental and emotional well-being. This continuum of system-wide proactive and responsive supports is built to match all students' mental health needs and an emphasis on Black girls mental health, behavioral, social, and emotional strengths and needs as they shift over time.<sup>15</sup>



*I think there needs to be a more holistic response because I used to stay at the guidance counselor's office starting from sixth grade all the way up until I graduated. I would have a beautiful session with my guidance counselor, and then I'll go back to class and have fifty assignments that I need to do, and my teacher is talking to me like I'm not a person, and I'm having to deal with colorism and anti-Blackness from my fellow students. If the environment is not safe, our interventions, although they're beautiful and they're important, they may not have the reach that it needs to be as transformative as it can be.*

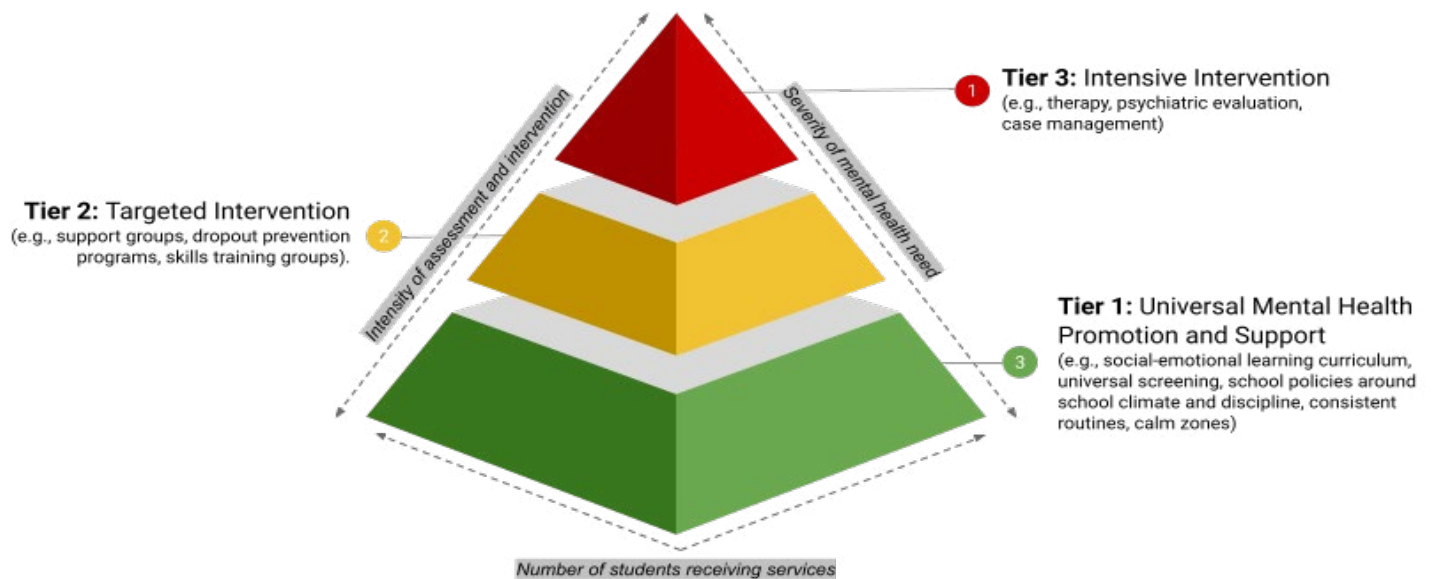


—Asamia Diaby, education & racial justice organizer, Alliance for Quality Education

**Why is this important:** A multi-tiered mental health system is critical due to major levels of unmet needs in mental healthcare, especially for Black girls and other girls of color. Various barriers to accessing mental health care through the traditional healthcare system paired with a greater probability of exposure to adverse childhood experiences and environments necessitate that Black girls (and children in general) have the ability to access necessary care through the schools they attend every day. **MTSS is particularly important for Black girls because it allows for a spectrum of mental health needs and places a strong emphasis on personalized support and early intervention**, a much-needed approach that is often missing when addressing Black girls' well-being. This framework ensures that early signs of distress in Black girls are identified and addressed proactively, reducing the risk of escalation and promoting better mental health outcomes. By being embedded in the school environment, MTSS also helps to bypass common barriers like stigma, transportation, and cost, ensuring more equitable access to mental health services.

**Figure 7**

*The Multi-Tiered System of Support Model for Mental Health Supports in Schools<sup>16</sup>*



*I feel like us just being there for somebody is enough. Even if you just listen and don't say anything, sometimes people just need to talk, or cry, or somebody to hug. And it's very easy to be that person if you're willing to. I feel like that should be like our main role. To be a comfort, basically.*



—Youth Advisor, age 18





## *Promising practices to apply NBWJI’s guiding principles and better support Black girls aligned with MTSS framework*

### **Tier 1 (Universal Support for All Students)**

- **Direct instruction in mental health terms and concepts:** Support Black girls’ agency and uplift their voices by providing direct instruction in mental health terms and concepts that will allow students to meaningfully engage with the topic. For example, content that gives Black girls terminology like *adultification* (e.g., adults’ perception that Black girls are less innocent and more adult-like than their white peers and, in turn, need less nurturing, less protection, less support, and less comforting) allows them to be more aware of and expressive about what is happening to/with them and why.
- **Use culturally affirming mental health education materials:** Seek out and use mental health education and social-emotional learning materials developed by Black women. Using mental health education materials developed by Black women, such as those from [Black Girls Smile](#), ensures that resources are culturally affirming and directly relevant to the lived experiences of Black girls. Programs like [Black Girls Smile](#), provide workshops and tools to address racial trauma, mental health stigma, and identity issues. This approach is promising because it fosters early intervention, increases engagement through relatable content, and fills the gap in traditional mental health education, which often overlooks Black girls’ unique needs.

### **Tier 2 (Targeted Support for Some Students)**

- **Peer mentorship/ambassador programs:** Train Black girls and other students as mental health advocates who can provide support to their peers and create peer mentorship/ambassador programs that facilitate peer support.
- **School climate assessments:** When assessing school climate, whether in surveys, listening sessions, or other means, ask students directly if they feel supported in their multiple identities.



*We collected stories of students that have had negative experiences with a staff member out of school. And we . . . read them during one of the staff training days at our school, so the teachers got to hear the firsthand experiences of the students that they might not have otherwise been able to hear . . . the teacher that facilitated that meeting afterwards told us that the staff members had come up to her and said that that was, more than any DEI training that they'd ever had, some of the most impactful stuff that they had heard. Something where teachers are able to hear directly from the students . . . that kind of thing, I feel like it's more impactful than any training from a book or like a video or Zoom call that they could get.*

—Youth Advisor, age 16

### **Tier 3 (Intensive Support for Individual Students)**

- **Confidentiality in school-based mental health:** Consciously address confidentiality in school-based mental health supports with a focus on the student, especially as a mandated reporter.
- Aid students in creating a “wellness plan” that includes their personal network of support (the people they trust and can rely on to support their mental health), self-care and coping strategies, triggers, and stressors.
- Build opportunities for storytelling within mental health supports and services and teacher training.
- Incorporate mental health days into attendance policies to encourage rest for the sake of rest.
- Implement breaks throughout the day, such as 3-minute stretch breaks or meditation breaks.
- Avoid last-minute and/or high-pressure tasks, which can create anxiety.
- Expand the continuum of care through technology (i.e., virtual services) to expand access to care for students who are not comfortable with traditional access points and those for whom direct contact with a mental health professional is stigmatizing.
- Have a “mental Health keyword” – similar to a safe word, a mental health keyword is a prearranged and unambiguous call for support. In other words, if a Black girl struggling with a mental health difficulty says the agreed-upon keyword, then a specific action happens.

*Teachers should consider how much stuff we have to do, so should our parents. Because with the chores and stuff, everything that they ask us to do, and then we have stuff from school, and it's just building up.*

—Youth Listening Session Participant



*I feel like Black girls, in so many spaces, are expected to . . . be the caregiver or act older than your age or to take on more responsibility . . . be the educational voice for matters on racism or sexism . . . resting and giving yourself the space to not do those things, in a way, is resistance to a system that puts like so much expectation and pressure on us all the time.*

—Youth Advisor, age 16

## ***Resources to Build Capacity to Provide a Continuum of Supports***

### **General guidance on multi-level systems of support**

- National Center for School Mental Health’s [School Mental Health Quality Guide: Mental Health Promotion Services and Supports \(Tier 1\)](#) contains background information on mental health promotion services. The [School Mental Health Quality Guide: Mental Health Promotion Services and Supports \(Tiers 2 & 3\)](#) contains background information on early intervention and treatment services and supports. Both guides also include best practices, possible action steps, examples from the field, and resources.
- [Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support \(PBIS\) Fundamentals](#)
- [Your Mental Wellness Plan](#) from Take Action for Mental Health, a guide that can be printed and used to aid students and staff in creating their mental wellness plans.

### **Mental Health Support for Black Girls**

- The APA’s [Guidelines on Race and Ethnicity in Psychology](#) and [Guidelines for Psychological Practice With Girls and Women](#) cover the intersectional needs of Black women and girls.
- Girls Circle Model ([onecirclefoundation.org](http://onecirclefoundation.org)) is one model of group-based support and affinity spaces to proactively build a sense of community among girls.
- [My Therapy Cards™ – Teen Edition](#) were created with Black girls in mind to be used by teens, parents, therapists, and teachers. It aids in guiding teens through self-exploration and self-discovery and can facilitate meaningful engagement with Black girls that centers them.
- [Black Emotional and Mental Health Collective \(BEAM\) Wellness Tools](#) provides resources targeted toward Black women, men, and young people, and includes resources such as a model for peer support, fillable community care support plans, and self-care maps, guides for before, during, and after therapist visits, self check-ins, and coping strategies
- Reference [Black girl-specific resources](#) under Needs Assessment and Resource Mapping

## School Climate and Policy Support

- For NYC schools: [Citywide Behavioral Expectations to Support Student Learning Grades 6–12](#)
- *Example policies for bullying and harassment:* [Model Laws and Policies | GLSEN](#)
- [WORKSHEET](#): Guiding questions to conduct a complete racial and gender equity assessment of codes of conduct, classroom management expectations, and parental engagement guidelines.]
- [WORKSHEET](#): Staff/Educator Reflection on Response to Problem Behaviors
- [Vermont Restorative Approaches Collaborative \(VTRAC\)](#): a collection of resources centered around restorative school climate and discipline practices
- From the Schott Foundation: [Restorative Practices: Fostering Healthy Relationships & Promoting Positive Discipline in Schools, A Guide for Educators](#)
- Whole-School Restorative Approach Resource Guide

## Existing Assessments for Staff/Teacher Well-Being

- The book [Assessing Well-Being in Schools: An Educator's Practical Guide to Measuring Wellbeing](#) includes a wealth of assessments that measure the well-being of students and staff in schools.
- The [Panorama Teacher and Staff Survey](#) is a tool school leaders can use to learn more about and address educators' professional, social, and emotional needs.

## Professional Development Programs/Mindfulness-Based Interventions for Educators

- [Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education \(CARE\)](#) is a professional development program that helps educators handle stress and enjoy the experience of teaching.
- [CALM](#) is a program that supports educators' daily well-being in a mindful way.

## Culturally Responsive Curriculum/Teaching and Social Emotional Learning

- [Culturally Responsive Curriculum Scorecard](#) from the NYU Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools, an assessment that can be used to evaluate an English and Language Arts curriculum for cultural responsiveness
- [Culturally Responsive Teaching Rubric](#) from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, The Teachers' Lounge Inc., and the Teacher Collaborative to assess teacher practice and student engagement. It's applicable in all content areas and a variety of contexts.





# Mental Health Screening and Referral Pathways

## *Domain 4*





**What you need to know?** Mental health screening and referral pathways should include formal procedures to ensure students with emerging and established mental health challenges are identified and connected to resources. Additionally, screenings should be available to all students to promote mental wellness and provide early intervention, fostering a proactive, school-wide culture of mental health support. Universal screenings help identify students who may not yet show obvious signs of distress but could benefit from early intervention, fostering a school-wide culture of mental health awareness and support.

**Why is this important?** Once a student is identified as having mental health needs, the school community must be prepared to respond with robust referral pathways along a continuum of support. When considering referral pathways, schools must consider the stigma surrounding mental health in many Black families and social determinants of mental health to ensure that referrals yield maximum impact for Black girls.

Screening is necessary because mental health needs in Black girls may manifest differently compared to other demographics. Research indicates that depression, for example, might exhibit as irritability or anger rather than typical signs like hopelessness or sadness.<sup>20</sup> Given the disproportionate adversity Black girls face,<sup>21</sup> which can contribute to the development of mental health issues,<sup>22</sup> screening for adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) is valuable for students, educators, and staff. However, solely screening without a coordinated response would be inadequate. Screening serves as an initial step to help explain students' behaviors, but it's also a foundation for training, climate cultivation, and activities that can facilitate healing. Devising a wellness plan to address the trauma Black girls encounter is essential to provide a foundation for investments in school staff and partnerships with agencies that can help create learning environments where Black girls understand and feel that someone cares about their well-being. Screening and referral processes must take into account these unique manifestations to ensure Black girls get the support they need.



*One of the biggest challenges that we face in Black girls' mental health and wellness, is that sometimes the students who are displaying the least amount of behavioral problems, or the least outward symptoms, are the ones who are least likely to get the help that they need . . . I am finding that sometimes the high achieving Black girls are overlooked because they're not a behavioral problem. Or how about the girls who are quiet in class, minding their own business? They're slipping through the cracks*



—Dr. Venus Evans-Winters, LCSW, CCTP-I/CCTP-II, Ph.D., Visiting Professor of Education, Ohio State

## Promising practices to apply the guiding principles and better support Black girls

- Address and counteract stereotypes and biases about Black girls by training educators to recognize behaviors that might be indicative of mental health needs in Black girls, such as sleeping in class and lack of engagement, and move toward wellness checks rather than reprimands.
- Support Black girls' agency by piloting any universal screeners under consideration with Black girls and their families for their feedback on the cultural relevance before deciding on a tool and fully implementing it.
- In addition to conventional screeners (ex., [PHQ-9](#)), assess for social determinants of mental health and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs).
- Use [culturegrams](#) during screening to better understand Black girls' individual and family culture and incorporate that into service and support planning.

*That's one of the biggest problems that I'm seeing in the school system, that teachers don't have that knowledge and understanding. So because they lack that understanding, everything is looked at as a disciplinary problem instead of a mental health issue. It gets addressed in discipline, rather than getting help for that student and getting the right kind of support and help for that student. It starts because that teacher isn't trained and knowledgeable to recognize what the real issue is. Not only whether it's a mental health issue, but whether it's an issue that stems from something in home life that stems over into an issue at school. Not looking at the whole picture, just looking at this behavior. And, 'I'm going to discipline you for this behavior' without understanding all of the other dynamics that might be contributing to this behavior.*

—Dr. Stacey Olden, PhD, LPCS, LAC, Executive Director of New Visions  
Wellness Center

# Resources to Build Mental Health Screening & Referral Pathways Capacity

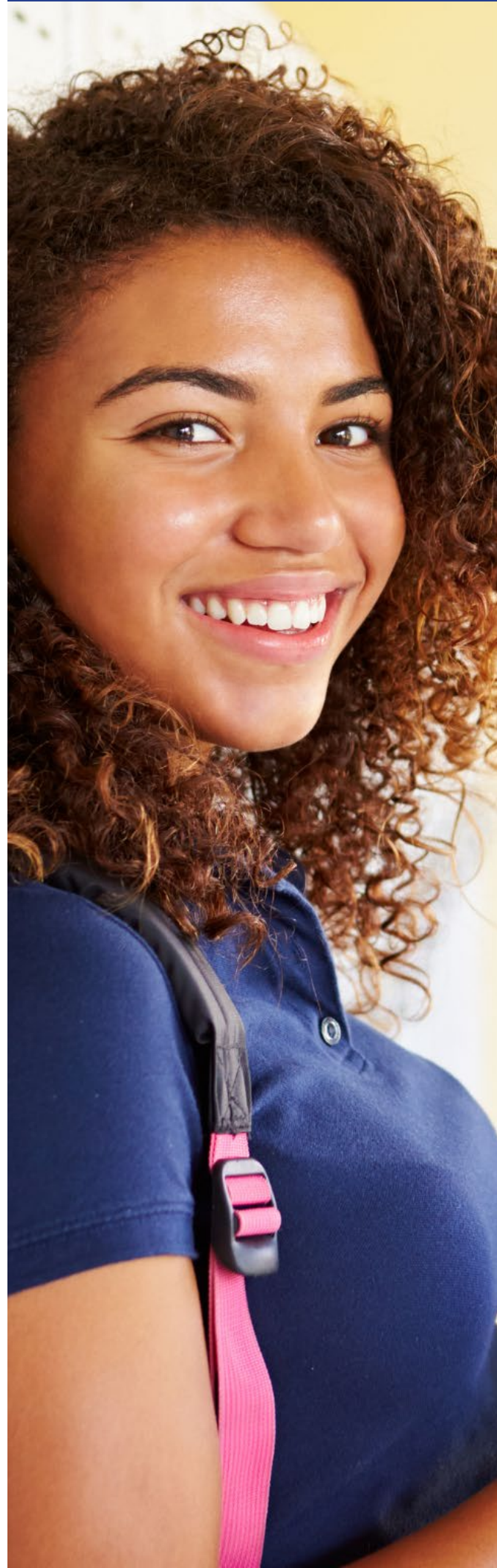
## General Guidance on Mental Health Screening and Referral Pathways

- [School Mental Health Quality Guide: Screening](#). From the National Center for School Mental Health, this guide provides background information on needs assessment and resource mapping, best practices, possible action steps, examples from the field, and resources.
- Using a tool or process employed with an entire\*population, such as a school's student body, to gather anonymous information about school and student strengths and needs see examples below:
  - Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System- <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/data/yrbs/index.htm>
  - The Children's Health and Education Mapping Tool- <https://www.sbh4all.org/resources/mapping-tool>
- Building or strengthening existing pathways to mental health support, refer to Wisconsin's Department of Public Instruction's [School Mental Health Referral Pathways Guide](#)
- For a comprehensive look at school mental health referral pathways, refer to [SAMHSA's Mental Health Referral Pathways Toolkit](#)
- [Referral Phase: Data Collection Checklist](#) from Turnaround for Children outlines data needed for Tier 2 and 3 support.

## Screening Assessment/Resources

- [Screening and Assessment Library](#): This SHAPE system resource includes a list of free and low-cost screening and assessment tools.
- ACEs survey resource: [Help Youth At Risk for ACEs |Violence Prevention|Injury Center|CDC](#)
- Guide to using culturagrams in assessment to help clinicians understand culturally diverse clients: [Culturally Responsive Evaluation and Treatment Planning](#)
- [The Feelings Wheel](#): Useful for facilitating check-ins in classrooms or clinical environments.

## Mental Health Screening and Referral Pathways







## Funding and Sustainability

### *Domain 5*





**What is funding and sustainability?** Funding and Sustainability refers to strategies to optimize financial and non-financial assets needed to create, maintain, and improve school mental health systems over time.

**What you need to know:** According to an analysis of schools' barriers to offering services during the 2021–2022 school year, 48% of school staff who did not strongly believe they could provide mental health services to all students in need identified inadequate funding as a major barrier.<sup>23</sup> Funding challenges for school mental health services have long existed. In order to provide and sustain services, many schools use funding from multiple sources, including the national, state, and local governments. At the federal level, many schools can apply for various grant programs offered by the Department of Education (e.g., grant programs and the Every Student Succeeds Act), the Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). Below are examples of federal funding streams to support school mental health:

- **Block Grants:** funds provided to states based on factors like population and unemployment rates, States then decide how to use these funds within certain guidelines, examples of block grants that help support mental health services are: Title V Maternal and Child Health (focuses on the health of mothers and children), Title XI Funds for Disadvantaged Youth (supports programs for young people facing challenges).
- **Project Grants:** this is also known as discretionary grants, which are funds awarded through a process to support specific projects for a set period of time, examples of project grants include: Project Advancing Wellness and Resilience Education (supports mental health awareness and education), and Project PRevent (focuses on preventing violence and improving student safety).

Schools may receive funds through Medicaid in several ways, including reimbursement for medically necessary services that are part of a student's Individualized Education Plan (IEP), reimbursement for eligible health services for students with Medicaid coverage, and for some administrative services. Additionally, many state budgets appropriate funds toward mental health services, though fewer states allocate funds directly in their school funding models. These multiple funding sources present several challenges as schools navigate varying specifications of how to utilize funds based on the source and changes to funding streams over time.

**Why is this important?** Sustainability in school mental health systems means ensuring schools can adapt to the changing needs of students, families, and communities. Key factors include funding, retaining well-trained staff, educator wellness, stakeholder support, data tracking, mental health policies, and integration with existing support systems. It's crucial to increase funding for comprehensive school mental health systems (CSMHS) and allocate funds specifically to support the mental health of Black girls, avoiding investments that could harm or provide minimal benefit to their well-being. In order to maintain long-term programming, schools must develop strategies that account for the economic and political shifts.

## ***5-Step Process for Strategic School Mental Health Financing and Sustainability***

**Guiding Steps to Develop Process for Funding and Sustainability:** To develop a process on how to create, maintain, and improve school mental health systems over time, please see the chart and resources below:

<b>Step 1</b>	<b>Clarify what you need, and by when.</b>
<b>Step 2</b>	<b>Map current funding and resources.</b>
<b>Step 3</b>	<b>Determine gaps in needs versus existing resources.</b>
<b>Step 4</b>	<b>Select financing strategies and funding sources.</b>
<b>Step 3</b>	<b>Make an executive a financing action plan.</b>

### ***Resources to Put Into Action***

**Resources to support with developing your schools process for funding and sustainability:** Below are worksheet templates your school can utilize to begin some of the steps outlined above such as, mapping current funding/resources, and financing strategies.



# Funding Resource Mapping Template

This template will help your school to create a detailed and organized funding plan that aligns with their strategic goals, promotes efficient use of resources, and enhances their ability to secure and sustain funding over the long term:

<b>Strategies/ Activities:</b> list all your planned strategies and activities, ensuring all initiatives are considered in the funding plan.	<b>Source of Funds:</b> track the origin of your funding, whether from federal, state, local, private grants, or donations.	<b>Amount:</b> record the exact amount of funding available from each source	<b>Restriction on Uses of Funds, If Any:</b> ensure compliance with funding requirements and avoid misallocation of resources.	<b>Expected Timeframe Funding is Available:</b> plan for long-term sustainability by understanding when each funding source will be available and for how long.
<b>Infrastructure Investments</b> (e.g., physical and technological infrastructure improvements)				
<b>Services and Supports</b> (e.g., student mental health services and support programs)				
<b>Training, TA, Consultation</b> (e.g., professional development)				
<b>Management and Administration</b> (e.g., operational functioning and effective leadership)				
<b>Other</b>				

(National School Mental Health Best Practices Manual 2021).

## Financing Resource Template

This template enables your school to map out their financial needs and resources over a multi-year period, ensuring a strategic approach to funding and sustainability.

Strategies and Activities, services and supports that we want to develop and sustain?	Over what time period will we develop, implement and sustain?	At what scale and pace will we build and sustain them? (e.g., school-wide, grade-specific) and pace, phased implementation)		
		Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Infrastructure Investments (e.g., physical and technological infrastructure improvements)				
Services and Supports (e.g., student mental health services and support programs)				
Workforce Development (e.g., professional development, capacity building for staff)				
Consultation/ TA (e.g., expert consultation and technical assistance)				
Other				

(National School Mental Health Best Practices Manual 2021).



# Funding Gap Analysis Template

This template will help your school to identify, analyze, and address financial shortfalls in their strategic plans.

Strategies/Activities	Year 1		
	<b>Total Costs:</b> calculate and document the total costs associated with each strategy and activity.	<b>Available Resources:</b> list all available funding sources, including grants, donations, and other revenue streams	<b>Gap:</b> compare total costs with available resources
<b>Infrastructure Investments</b> (e.g., physical and technological infrastructure improvements)			
<b>Services and Supports</b> (e.g., student mental health services and support programs)			
<b>Evaluation and Data Collection</b> (e.g., costs associated with evaluating program effectiveness and collecting necessary data)			
<b>Management and Administration</b> (e.g., resources for effective management and administrative functions)			

Strategies/Activities	Year 2		
	<p><b>Total Costs:</b> calculate and document the total costs associated with each strategy and activity.</p>	<p><b>Available Resources:</b> list all available funding sources, including grants, donations, and other revenue streams</p>	<p><b>Gap:</b> compare total costs with available resources</p>
<p><b>Infrastructure Investments</b> (e.g., physical and technological infrastructure improvements)</p>			
<p><b>Services and Supports</b> (e.g., student mental health services and support programs)</p>			
<p><b>Evaluation and Data Collection</b> (e.g., costs associated with evaluating program effectiveness and collecting necessary data)</p>			
<p><b>Management and Administration</b> (e.g., resources for effective management and administrative functions)</p>			

Strategies/Activities	Year 3		
	<p><b>Total Costs:</b> calculate and document the total costs associated with each strategy and activity.</p>	<p><b>Available Resources:</b> list all available funding sources, including grants, donations, and other revenue streams</p>	<p><b>Gap:</b> compare total costs with available resources</p>
<p><b>Infrastructure Investments</b> (e.g., physical and technological infrastructure improvements)</p>			
<p><b>Services and Supports</b> (e.g., student mental health services and support programs)</p>			
<p><b>Evaluation and Data Collection</b> (e.g., costs associated with evaluating program effectiveness and collecting necessary data)</p>			
<p><b>Management and Administration</b> (e.g., resources for effective management and administrative functions)</p>			

(National School Mental Health Best Practices Manual 2021).



*If you have a teacher or an educator that looks like you, you look up to them and you want to succeed for them. For me, the first year I had a teacher of color was my last year of high school. I think that really impacted my education experience.*



—Samantha

## ***Promising practices to apply the guiding principles and better support Black girls***

### **Funding**

- Take steps for your school to become a direct Medicaid provider (e.g., Nevada – Governor’s Social Workers in Schools state-funded block grant provides a full-time social worker to address behavioral health issues based on school climate survey data. The 2015 Legislature passed SB 515, Section 23, which funded social workers and other licensed mental health workers).
- Maximize reimbursement opportunities for eligible services (e.g., Medicaid, CHIP private insurance).
- Choose a staff member(s) to attend grant writing workshops in order to better understand how to construct a budget and allocation of funds for each category of need.
- There are many funding resources that are complex and can include restrictions related to insurance and HMO, so be sure to choose the best funding source to fit the needs of your students and staff. [State funding for Student Mental Health](#) resource explores and describes common sources of funding that states use to support mental health programs in K-12 schools. It provides an overview of how states utilize these funds to serve students, ensuring they receive the necessary mental health support.
- Make a plan to identify and regularly monitor Medicaid plan and waivers, federal guidance about Medicaid coverage and public education/policy related resources.





### On Allocating Funds for Mental Health Support Systems:



Often when there is an influx of a funding to school districts, particularly around the areas of like mental health support and mental health systems, the idea is, 'Let's train our school safety officers or school safety guards in how to be responsive to a mental health crisis or some type of like social-emotional disturbance that a young person might be feeling.' We need to push back on that. This is a question around who are the folks best positioned to provide support to students in a way that's not going to re-traumatize them or reinforce this criminalizing pattern that they've been in for so long? Who are the individuals that can be tasked with responding to the needs of students? Even if we get increased funding, if we're just gonna train the school police to not put handcuffs on a student who's going through something, I don't think that's gonna get us where we need to go

—Asamia Diaby

- Regularly assess job satisfaction to tease out any issues Black women experience in their work environments and take measures to address those issues as they arise.
- Conduct exit interviews with staff leaving to ascertain the “why” so that it can be addressed in the future.
- Consider engaging with the community and with parent-teacher organizations to decide on ways the groups can work together to support teachers and school staff.
- Develop quarterly or semi-annual reports and newsletters or host meetings to share your impact data with those who submitted or contributed to the data or are interested in helping fund school mental health.

# Resources to Build Funding & Sustainability Capacity

## General Resources on Funding and Sustainability

- National Center for School Mental Health (2023) [School Mental Health Quality Guide: Funding and Sustainability](#) contains background information on funding and sustainability, best practices, possible action steps, examples from the field, and resources. It is part of a collection of resources developed by NCSMH at the University of Maryland School of Medicine to help school mental health systems advance the quality of their services and supports.
- Education Commission of the States (2021) [State Funding for Student Mental Health](#) This Policy Brief explores and describes common sources of funding that states use to support K-12 school-based mental health programming. It includes a 50-state scan that displays how each state funds student mental health services.

## Funding Resources and Grants

- [A federal funding toolkit for planning and providing links](#) to many additional resources that may be useful to states. Its parts lead states through information and processes to help with assessing needs, opportunities, and potential funding sources in order to comprehensively plan prevention services, including those reimbursed by Title IV-E.
- [Private funding: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation](#) grants focused on public and community health initiatives.
- The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) administers three formula grant programs authorized by the Individuals with [Disabilities Education Act \(IDEA\)](#).
- The Office of Special Education offers a variety of discretionary grants through a competitive process. Visit the [Discretionary Grants](#) page for more information. For additional information about OSEP discretionary grant recipients, visit the [OSEP's Discretionary Grants Public Database](#).
- [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration grant programs](#) for Safe Schools and Healthy Student Initiatives
- DoE Office of [Elementary and Secondary Education grant programs](#)
- U.S. Department of Justice, [Office of Justice grant programs](#)
- State [Planning Grant Guidance](#) on applying for crisis intervention services
- Medicaid is the principal source of funding for mental health services provided to children of school age, review [Medicaid.gov](#) website for funding resources and provides information to States managed care organizations, providers, beneficiaries and others regarding mental health and substance use disorder – referred to as behavioral health services.

## Staff Well-Being Resources:

- [Assessment Tool for Teacher and Staff Wellbeing](#) called “Teacher Subjective Wellbeing Questionnaire” created by the School Mental Health Lab Utah State University: The Teacher Subjective Well-Being Questionnaire is an 8-item self-report rating scale for measuring teachers’ job-specific well-being. It comprises two subscales: (1) School Connectedness and (2) Teaching Efficacy.

- [Educator Resilience and Trauma-Informed Self Care: Self-Care Assessment tools and self-care plan](#) template adapted from Saakvitne, Pearlman, and staff of TSI/CAAP (1996) & Lisa D. Butler, Ph.D., at the University at Buffalo School of Social Work. Adapted by the American Institutes for Research.
- Self-care [resources for Educators](#) and other helping professionals
- [Teach for America](#) resource list includes articles, organizations, apps, and program artifacts to support staff, teachers, and student wellness.



Data and Impact  
*Domain 6*





**What is data and impact?** Data and impact refers to the lasting effects of programs, practices, and policies within a school's mental health system. It's crucial to document and report this impact to various stakeholders to ensure sustainability. Having readily available data on the impact of mental health systems helps schools advocate for continued funding and support from their district.

**What you need to know:** Documenting and reporting the impact of school mental health programs allows your school to demonstrate the successes and advocate for ongoing funding, support, and resources from your district. Both quantitative and qualitative data should be collected and reviewed by teams in an ongoing manner to inform priorities, policies and action steps to continuously improve the comprehensive school mental health system (CSMHS). There are several types of outcomes schools mental health program can impact including the following:

- **Educational Outcomes:** Better grades, higher test scores, and improved teacher retention.
- **Health Outcomes:** Improved health and well-being for Black girls and staff, including better social, emotional, and behavioral health.
- **School Climate and Safety:** Stronger relationships between staff and students, less school violence, and a greater sense of safety for everyone.
- **Cost Savings:** Reduced costs related to staffing, services, and preventable issues like dropouts and suspensions.

**Why is this important?** In order to design and evaluate interventions that address the unique needs of Black girls and other students, data must be collected that is disaggregated by race, gender identity and expression, nationality, ethnicity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, religion, and other pertinent variables.



# Understanding Social Influencers of Health and Education and Its Importance of Data and Impact

What are social influencers of health education (SIHE) your school should be aware of when collecting data to support Black girls' mental health?

Social influencers of health education are conditions in the environment that affect a student's health and quality of life. When collecting data to support Black girls' mental health, your school should be aware of the following factors: neighborhood safety, family socioeconomic status, access to necessary services, availability of healthy food, quality of the physical environment, and experiences with racism or discrimination significantly influence well-being and can greatly restrict growth opportunities. By understanding and addressing these influencers, your school can help students lead healthier and more successful lives academically and personally.

By systematically collecting data on the factors listed above school can:

1. Identify the specific needs and challenges faced by Black girls
2. Develop targeted interventions to address these challenges
3. Create a supportive environment that promotes the mental health and well-being of Black girls
4. Monitor the effectiveness of these interventions and make data-driven decisions for continuous improvement.



To learn about understanding social influencers of health education you can read the 3-page brief report here: <https://www.schoolmentalhealth.org/media/som/microsites/ncsmh/documents/fliers-resources-misc-docs/resources/Understanding-Social-Influencers-of-Health-and-Education.pdf>

## ***How to Promote Students Health and Academic Achievement in Data Collection***

Student Information Systems (SIS) can be defined as electronic systems used to organize and manage student data (health records, behavioral data, attendance records, academic records, special education, etc.). SIS typically requires initial setup by installing the software. Schools can develop their own SIS from scratch, this requires significant technical support and ongoing maintenance. Most schools opt for commercially available systems designed for educational data management. These systems store data that is entered manually and then combined into one place for easy access and management. There are several ways SIS tools enhance student health and academic success through effective data collection. Here's how they help:

- 1. Early Identification:** SIS helps in the early detection of students who require extra support, allowing for timely interventions.
- 2. Decision Support:** These systems aid in making informed decisions by aligning student needs with the appropriate services, ensuring each student receives the help they need.
- 3. Service Gaps Identification:** SIS can pinpoint areas where existing services are lacking, guiding schools to allocate resources or introduce new services where they are most needed.
- 4. Monitoring Effectiveness:** They alert school staff when a service or support is failing to assist a student, allowing for quick adjustments to the approach or intervention.
- 5. Impact Documentation:** SIS track and document the effectiveness of services and supports on students' health and academic outcomes, providing data-driven insights into what works.

To better support your school with developing data systems to promote students health and academic achievements in data collection your school can learn more about the SIS, you can read the 5 page Student Information Systems Issue Brief Below linked here: <https://dmogz550769cd.cloudfront.net/shape/97/9715bd99a6c54cfcbaaba66f78cc8eea.pdf>

# Evaluating School Mental Health Programs Through a Black Feminist Framework

At the National Black Women’s Justice Institute, we developed the Black Feminist Framework to provide a structured approach for evaluating school mental health programs, specifically aimed at ensuring the inclusion and empowerment of Black girls. We encourage you to utilize this framework as you assess your school’s mental health programs and interventions.

## Benefits of the Black Feminist Framework

- **Better Decisions:** Enables schools to make informed choices that address the unique needs of Black girls.
- **Improved Outcomes:** Promotes enhanced mental health and academic performance.
- **Inclusivity:** Ensures that Black girls’ voices are heard and valued in the evaluation process.
- **Accountability:** Holds schools responsible for their support of Black girls.
- **Empowerment:** Equips Black girls to advocate for themselves effectively.

**Figure 8**  
Black Feminist Framework

Framework Aspect	What It Involves
Intersectionality	Understanding how race, gender, and class affect Black girls.
Strength-Focused Approach	Building on the strengths of Black girls.
Cultural Affirmation	Making sure evaluation tools are culturally relevant.
Dialogue and Self-Definition	Giving Black girls a voice in the evaluation process.
Reflexivity	Addressing personal biases in the evaluation.
Community Care and Social Change	Ensuring the evaluation benefits Black girls and their communities.



## *Check for Understanding*

Read the following scenario about evaluating a high school’s mental health program, specifically focusing on a new social–emotional learning (SEL) curriculum. As you review the scenario, consider the various aspects of the Black Feminist Framework. Reflect on how the principles of intersectionality, strengths–focused approaches, cultural affirmation, dialogue, self–definition, reflexivity, community care, and social change are represented or missing in the evaluation process. After reading, respond to the reflection questions provided to deepen your understanding.

### *Program Evaluation Scenario*

Your high school has recently launched a new social–emotional learning (SEL) curriculum designed to support the mental health of Black girls. This curriculum focuses on culturally relevant themes, resilience, and self–advocacy. To assess its effectiveness, the school received funding for an evaluation.

The funder recommends an evaluator known for educational assessments. This is your first experience with evaluation, and while you’re eager for insights, you’re concerned about whether the evaluator will understand your students’ unique needs.

In the initial meeting, you notice that there are no people of color on the evaluation team. After introductions, the evaluator asks you to explain the SEL curriculum. He responds, “Your program addresses important issues, but many programs like this struggle to show real success. The challenges your students face can be overwhelming. I admire your dedication, but I’m not sure your team has the capacity to meet these complex needs.”

The evaluator outlines their plan: reviewing program data, analyzing student feedback, and interviewing students and teachers to understand how the curriculum is working. They will compare your program’s outcomes to similar ones in the region. After gathering this information, they will prepare a report for you and the funder.

As the meeting ends, you wonder how well the evaluation will capture the needs and experiences of the Black girls in your program. You’re excited for insights but worried that the process may overlook the cultural context of your students’ lives.

### *Reflection Questions*

1. What strategies can be implemented to foster genuine dialogue and ensure that the insights and feedback of students are prioritized throughout the evaluation?
2. How does the evaluation process involve the voices of Black girls and their communities in shaping the assessment?
3. How does the evaluation process consider the unique identities and experiences of Black girls, particularly in relation to race, gender, and socio–economic status? What steps can be taken to ensure that these intersecting identities are reflected in both the evaluation design and the data collection methods?

# Guidance on How To Conduct Program Evaluation Utilizing a Theory of Change

## Understanding a Theory of Change for Schools

A Theory of Change is a strategic planning tool that helps schools and communities map out their goals, strategies, and the expected outcomes of their programs and services. A Theory of Change is like a roadmap for making big improvements in a school or community. It's a plan that helps everyone understand:

- 1. What you want to achieve:** This means defining the goals or “outcomes” for students, families, and the neighborhood. These are the big changes or results that you hope to see in the long run.
- 2. How you plan to get there:** The Theory of Change outlines the steps and strategies your school will use to reach these goals. It helps you figure out what actions will lead to the desired changes.

**Why these steps will work:** It explains why the chosen strategies are expected to work, helping everyone from teachers to families understand the plan. Here's how you can use it to monitor the impact of your mental health programs, services, and initiatives:

Component	Explanation	How to Use It
Define Goals (Outcomes)	Identify what you want to achieve for students, families, and the community.	Action: Clearly state the long-term and short-term goals for your mental health programs.
Plan Strategies	Outline the steps and strategies you will use to reach these goals.	Action: Develop a detailed plan of actions and interventions that will help achieve the desired outcomes.
Rationale for Strategies	Explain why these steps are expected to work, making the logic behind your plan clear to everyone involved.	Action: Provide evidence or research that supports the effectiveness of your chosen strategies.

## Steps to Implement a Theory of Change

Step	Example	Action
Identify Desired Outcomes	Improve the mental health and well-being of Black girls in your school.	Set specific, measurable goals such as reducing anxiety and depression rates or increasing feelings of safety and support among Black girls.
Develop Strategies	Implement school-wide mental health training, establish support groups, and create safe spaces.	Outline each strategy, detailing the activities, resources needed, and who will be responsible.
Explain the Rationale	Use evidence-based practices that show mental health training improves student well-being.	Provide data and research that support why these strategies are expected to lead to the desired outcomes.

## Quick Tips for Monitoring

Tip	Description	Action
Set Baseline Data	Collect initial data on mental health indicators specific to Black girls before starting the program.	Use surveys, interviews, and existing records to gather baseline data on the mental health and well-being of Black girls.
Track Progress	Regularly collect data to monitor how well the program is supporting Black girls.	Schedule regular check-ins (monthly, quarterly) to collect data through surveys and focus groups focused on Black girls' mental health outcomes.
Evaluate Outcomes	Compare the collected data against your initial goals and baseline data for Black girls.	Analyze the data to see if the mental health program is meeting its goals and identify areas for improvement specifically for Black girls.
Adjust Strategies	Make necessary adjustments based on evaluation results to better support Black girls.	Modify strategies if they aren't working as expected, using feedback and data focused on the experiences of Black girls.
Report Findings	Share the results with stakeholders to maintain transparency and accountability in supporting Black girls.	Create reports and presentations to clearly communicate the progress and outcomes of the mental health program for Black girls to teachers, families, and students.

Developing a Theory of Change can help your school and district teams map short and long-term outcomes they expect to result from various mental health services and supports. [The Annie E. Casey Foundation's Developing a Theory of Change: Practical Theory of Change Guidance, Templates, and Examples](#) provides helpful information for teams to create a concrete Theory of Change.





### Examining School Discipline Data and Using it for Change: A Case Example

“ One of the things that we looked at was discipline; we looked at what kind of infractions are Black girls being suspended for. Most of them are being suspended for subjective behaviors like insubordination, talking back, or those type of things. So we started to read the narratives that were being written and sent to the principal that made the decision to do a suspension, and what we learned is that it wasn’t always necessarily an infraction that should have amounted to a removal from school, but could be an alternative behavior being taught. Taking out the judgmental language like, ‘She was nasty.’ That’s not what the infraction is. What did the student do? What did the students say? You know what I mean? Retraining how we interpreted their behavior violations, and then does the consequence match the action, or are we being extreme? Is the student getting 10 days because they wouldn’t stop disrupting class? That’s a major consequence for maybe a medium infraction. So that’s where we’ve been working.”

I pulled discipline and tracked to see, is there even accuracy in the data? We found out it’s not. Like we had something under insubordination, but the student had a vape pen. Well, that’s not insubordination, that’s ‘tobacco product’ or a ‘narcotic, not tobacco.’ So, first of all, are we just going to the stereotype of what we feel that Black girls are? Loud, disrespectful, insubordinate. That’s when I look at trends and patterns, because that’s going to impact their grades, is going to impact their attendance if they’re being suspended. That’s how we use a data point to change our practices.

—Stephanie Patton, Area Superintendent, Ohio Public Schools

## ***Promising practices to apply the guiding principles to better support Black girls***

- Review existing student information for relevant demographic data (race/ethnicity, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, language, religion, nationality/immigration status, disability status, tier of services received) and develop methods of data collection that help capture missing elements to better understand student experiences through an intersectional view of their identities.
- Students struggling to cope with mental health needs often make frequent trips to the nurse's office, so nurse records might be another beneficial source of data—pay special attention to complaints related to potential somatic symptoms, such as stomach aches, headaches, and nausea.<sup>25</sup>
- Go beyond school attendance data to look at class attendance, amount of time spent in class, and class participation.<sup>26</sup>
- Perform a careful review of existing social, emotional, and behavioral outcome data (e.g., health screenings and assessments, data on discipline, attendance, academic outcomes, crisis incident reports, and behavioral observations) and identify additional potential data points to add to your data collection infrastructure.

# Resources to Build Data & Impact Capacity

## General resources on Data & Impact Domain

- National Center for School Mental Health (2023) [School Mental Health Quality Guide: Impact](#) contains background information on the impact of implementing a comprehensive school mental health system, best practices, possible action steps, examples from the field, and resources. It is part of a collection of resources developed by NCSMH at the University of Maryland School of Medicine to help school mental health systems advance the quality of their services and supports.
- Schools and districts might find it important to track and show the benefits of their mental health services and supports. A special [online learning module](#), part of a [Comprehensive School Mental Health Program](#), teaches how to evaluate these programs effectively

## Data Collection and Analysis: Tools and Support

- Consider [conducting your own Youth Risk Behavior Survey \(YRBS\)](#) – which collects data from students in grades 9–12 on key health behaviors and experiences that contribute to the leading causes of death and illness during both adolescence and adulthood – to monitor changes over time, identify emerging issues, and plan and evaluate programs to support the health of youth.
- [The Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports](#) developed a template to measure academic and behavioral data to create a snapshot of your school’s performance overall (e.g., by grade level, intervention status, race/ethnicity, gender).
- Check out DPI’s [Data Inquiry Journal](#) for tools to document ongoing data investigation and design continuous improvement plans
- Check out the [OSEP Technical Assistance Center on PBIS](#), which has developed several resources to support the development of partnerships, including families, community members, and other critical partners.
- Check out [A Blueprint for Using Data to Reduce Disparities/Disproportionalities in Human Services and Behavioral Health Care](#) from the Cultural Competence Action Team of the Technical Assistance Partnership for Child and Family Mental Health and the American Institutes for Research

# Glossary

- **Ableism:** Ableism is a set of beliefs or practices that devalue and discriminate against people with physical, intellectual, or psychiatric disabilities and often rests on the assumption that disabled people need to be ‘fixed’ in one form or the other.<sup>26</sup>
- **Adultification bias:** adults’ perception that Black girls are less innocent and more adult-like than their white peers and, in turn, need less nurturing, less protection, less support, and less comforting.<sup>27</sup>
- **Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs):** traumatic events that occur in childhood, such as physical and emotional abuse, neglect, caregiver mental illness, and household violence. These experiences can have a lasting impact on a person’s mental and physical health, as well as their general well-being.<sup>33</sup> The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) questionnaire asks about ten categories of events or conditions that shape not only our physical development but our learning as well. The higher the ACEs score, the more compounded the trauma. Someone carrying a score of four or more is at an increased likelihood of illness and negative life outcomes. It is estimated that approximately one in eight people in the United States is living with an ACEs score of four or more, disproportionately girls and other students vulnerable to school pushout.
- **Ageism:** “refers to the stereotypes (how we think), prejudice (how we feel) and discrimination (how we act) towards others or oneself based on age.”<sup>29</sup>
- **Complex trauma:** describes the exposure to multiple traumatic events, often of an interpersonal nature, and the long-term effects of this exposure. Complex trauma usually occurs during childhood or adolescence and may include abuse, neglect, violence, racism, discrimination, and war. Complex trauma affects the development, functioning, and well-being of the survivors.<sup>30</sup>
- **Culturagram:** an assessment tool that helps clinicians understand culturally diverse clients and their families. It examines 10 areas of inquiry, which should include not only questions specific to clients’ life experiences, but also questions specific to their family histories. This diagram can guide an interview, counseling, or clinical supervision session to elicit culturally relevant multigenerational information unique to the client and the client’s family.<sup>31</sup>
- **Culturally affirming:** treating diverse cultures with “respect and high regard”<sup>32</sup> while supporting the development of positive beliefs around an individual’s own culture(s) and experiences.
- **Cultural competence:** “the ability to understand, appreciate, and interact with people from cultures or belief systems different from one’s own.”<sup>33</sup>
- **Disaggregated data:** “data that has been separated by specific demographic categories (i.e., gender identity, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, etc.) to reveal differences, including inequities, that may not be fully reflected in aggregated or combined data.”<sup>34</sup>
- **Exclusionary discipline:** a type of school disciplinary action that removes or excludes a student from his or her usual educational setting. It can include in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, placement in an alternative setting or program, and expulsion.
- **Gender responsive:** attuned to the different experiences, needs, concerns, and situations that come with an individual’s experience of gender (e.g., womanhood, being transgender, etc.)
- **Impact data:** data that demonstrates the long-term effects or changes that occur as a result of the



services, programs, practices, or policies implemented within a comprehensive school mental health system.<sup>35</sup>

- **Implicit bias:** “the automatic and unconscious stereotypes that drive people to behave and make decisions in certain ways”<sup>36</sup>
- **Misogynoir:** a type of misogyny, or hatred of women, directed specifically at Black women, where both gender and race play a role in their discrimination.
- **Needs assessment:** a collaborative process used by a system to identify gaps between current and desired conditions, as well as system strengths. A needs assessment allows a school or district to identify and address mental health needs that are the most pressing; understand how well existing services and supports are meeting student needs; identify and leverage strengths; and inform priorities and actions for school mental health programming.<sup>37</sup>
- **Referral to law enforcement:** “an action by which a student is reported to any law enforcement agency or official, including a school police unit, for an incident that occurs on school grounds, during school-related events (in-person or virtual), or while taking school transportation, regardless of whether official action is taken.”<sup>38</sup>
- **Resilience building:** resilience is the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or significant sources of stress. Building resilience involves intentional focus on building connections with empathetic and understanding people, fostering wellness, healthy thinking, and finding purpose.<sup>39</sup>
- **Resource mapping:** an “active, ongoing process to identify, visually represent, and share information about internal and external supports and services; it is used to inform effective use of resources.”<sup>40</sup> A resource map may also be referred to as an asset map or environmental scan.
- **School climate:** the quality and character of school life. School climate is based on patterns of students’, parents’ and school personnel’s experience of school life and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures.<sup>41</sup>
- **School discipline:** “refers to the rules and strategies applied in school to manage student behavior and practices used to encourage self-discipline.”<sup>42</sup>
- **School mental health team:** “a group of school and community stakeholders at a school or district level that meets regularly, uses data-based decision making, and relies on action planning to support student mental health”<sup>43</sup>
- **Trauma-informed:** recognizing “the prevalence of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) / trauma among all people[,] . . . that many behaviors and symptoms are the result of traumatic experiences[,] . . . [and] that being treated with respect and kindness – and being empowered with choices – are key in helping people recover from traumatic experiences”<sup>44</sup>
- **Trauma-sensitive:** creating an atmosphere that is inclusive of those who have experienced trauma by promoting safety, trust, and empowerment.<sup>45</sup>

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## *Questions? We're Here to Help!*

If you're interested in learning more about the CARES Initiative or would like the National Black Women's Justice Institute to bring this transformative program to your school, don't hesitate to reach out. Contact Tenaj Moody, Director of Capacity Building and Learning, at [tmood@nbwji.org](mailto:tmood@nbwji.org).

At NBWJI, the CARES Initiative is at the heart of our mission to combat school pushout. We provide essential tools, resources, training, and targeted assistance to help schools enhance educators' awareness, skills, and commitment to creating inclusive policies and practices. Together, we can ensure that every student—especially Black girls and gender-expansive youth—feels safe, valued, and empowered to thrive.

Let's work together to foster a supportive environment that promotes safety, belonging, and opportunity for all!

Learn more about our work: <https://www.nbwji.org/cares-initiative>

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