

CAAASA presents:

Lifting Our Voices:



Presenter:
Kenneth Wesson
Brain-considerate Learning
Educational Consultant: Neuroscience
kenwesson@sciencemaster.com

Field Guide #2:
***Learning and Healing Together:
Heading to School Ready to Learn***

School Re-orientation for Post-COVID Learning: What to Know, Do, and Expect as In-Person Instruction Resumes



Sponsored by:
California Collaborative for Educational Excellence (CCEE)



California Association of African-American
Superintendents & Administrators



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Field Guide #2: Learning and Healing Together: Heading to School Ready to Learn

Introduction video: Dr. Adam Clark, Superintendent of Mount Diablo School District	1
The Why, the What, and the How of Field Guide #2	1-5
Field Guide Overview	7-10
• Description and Purpose	
• Learning objectives	
• Components	
Introduction to the Voices Videos on SEL: <i>Neuroscientist, Kenneth Wesson</i>	11
Lifting Our Voices: Interviews	11-12
Professional Learning:	13
• Participant Responses	
• Reflections and Applications	
Easy-to-implement SEL Recommendations	15
Lessons Learned since 2020: Neuroscientist, Kenneth Wesson . .	17
Conclusion	22
Every Child Needs to Know	23
Evaluation Survey	24
Resources	24
References	25

Introduction to Field Guide #2
Learning and Healing
TOGETHER

Dr. Adam **Clark**
Superintendent
Mount Diablo School District.

Click to Play



The Why

With students going back to classrooms after a yearlong hiatus, the delayed back-to-school season has shifted into high gear. However, the added novelty will be students meeting their teachers and classmates during the 3rd trimester of school (May) rather than at the beginning of the first trimester (typically August or September). In spite of the financial incentives to schools willing to re-open this spring, for some students, schools may not welcome them back until the fall. Whatever the official date, the return to the brick-and-mortar school building will be like no other in their lifetime.

The single word we hear most frequently in describing school re-entry is “pivot,” conceding that nearly all established aspects of education previously considered “normal” have changed significantly. Yes, eventually, we may return to our everyday habits from pre-pandemic times, but long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic will be permanently etched into our minds. To reduce the negative effects on our youth, schools are re-examining the need for greater access to emotional, psychological and social services to support developing children, from pre-K to high



school. We are also envisioning ways to work more closely with families in the future to identify better means of assuring that, during times of tremendous change requiring a quick adjustment, our youngsters are able to survive and thrive.

The new health practices designed to ease the spread of the coronavirus disease require temperature checks upon entering school buildings, plexiglass partitions between students seated in classrooms, hand sanitizers stationed throughout the school campus, and other precautions including social distancing. Of equal importance should be our concern for the mental well-being of students and their families. Our focus cannot be exclusively student wellness, ignoring the distressed homes from which they may come. Family upheavals have ranged from job loss and housing insecurities to neglect and abuse, and sadly, living in homes with dying family members. The onslaught of serious mental health issues affecting children may take months to curb and years to overcome.

The COVID-19 pandemic has left few individuals untouched economically, socially, or emotionally. When a large-scale traumatic event occurs, no family can stand safely out of its reach, which may come in the form of contracting a lethal disease or suffering its secondary psychological consequences. There are rising numbers of mental health indicators suggesting that the emotional well-being of our children warrants our immediate consideration, particularly for the most vulnerable, including students of color.



The pandemic exposed many of the well-known health disparities and the ongoing disinvestment in public mental health. State and national data indicate that a disproportionate number of Black and Brown families fell victim to coronavirus hospitalizations and deaths. Prohibitions on funeral gatherings made the grieving process more complicated and closure impossible. Making social emotional learning a priority is no longer optional. It has become mandatory.

Compared to other mammals, human beings are fragile, weak, and slow. However, we have evolved into “hyper-social animals,” a trait that has served us well over the millennia. Medium to large groups of socially connected individuals worked collaboratively, defended one another, and reproduced in a reasonably well-protected environment that allowed their offspring to reach maturity. Researcher Brene Brown said that connection is why we are here. We are hardwired to connect with others.

We have altered the landscape of our planet to accommodate our social behaviors, and our predisposition to be socially connected to one another. Today, we possess a “social brain” that lives comfortably in socially constructed environments – houses, streets, neighborhoods, cities, apartments, and office buildings. Nearly every daily experience has a social aspect to it. Neuroscientists have discovered a correlation in primates between the size of the brain (relative to the body) and the size and complexity of the social group in which that primate customarily lives.

In most early societies, the ultimate punishment for the most egregious of offenses was banishment from the village to live in isolation, disconnected from loved ones and friends. Fast forward to today, with students experiencing sudden separation from friends, classmates, and teachers, the modern proxy for being exiled from the tribe. Self-quarantining, sheltering in place, learning remotely (from home), and keeping a distance of 6 feet from others, are all antisocial measures that can come at a psychological price for each of us.

The What

As the rapidly increasing numbers of coronavirus cases showed no signs of abating, over 51 million students nationwide found their schools shuttered almost without warning. Overnight, classroom teachers became Zoom-room teachers, with little technology training to adeptly make the transition, which added new complications to an already demanding profession. Needless to say, the teachers’ general stress level was substantially elevated.

Companies forced employees to exchange their corporate office for a home office, with the expectation that workload expectations would go unchanged. To maintain employee communications, regular Zoom meetings were placed on the daily calendar. Parents found themselves with an expanded daily role – that of a teaching assistant for all subjects supporting kindergarten through high school students. Employers were under no obligation to reduce workload expectations to accommodate the new role of employee-parent-TA (teaching assistant). As a testament to how trying these times are, these parents were the lucky ones!

Millions of other parents, particularly hourly workers, saw their employment end as the pandemic began. Housing instability, the loss of company-provided health care, mortgages and rent payments were still due, living expenses mounted with no counterbalancing income, a shortage of new job openings, and being quarantined at home, often in multigenerational residences, resulted in a tense and unstable home life for all. The stress level of parents soared.

Students had grown accustomed to sitting at desks only a few steps away from a cornucopia of classroom supplies, printed materials, technology tools, reliable Internet connections, and other ancillary learning materials, which collectively supported their academic growth and development. With the sudden onset of the pandemic, access to these valuable learning assets was immediately

lost. Making matters worse, were the emotional requirements forced on children of essential workers, many of whom are children of color. They were worried about their parents being temporarily unemployed, permanently jobless, possibly homeless, but justifiably anxious about the family's short-term prospects.

Not only were these children required to learn at home remotely, but many also needed to supervise younger siblings, as well as assist the youngest among them with logging-on to their school-issued laptops, making sure their Internet signal was adequate enough to stay connected, open the device, complete classwork, and assist with their homework. The lengthy catalog of worries served as a major distraction to content learning.



Students were physically separated from their classmates, teachers, and friends. The daily view of small squares with tiny faces cropped inside them (Zoom) mimicking the TV game show "Hollywood Squares," were the go-to alternative to a conventional classroom, and a remarkably poor substitute for the normal face-to-face interactions that are critical features of normal child development. Stress in children skyrocketed to dangerous levels.

For decades, educators have recognized that:

- there is a strong correlation between high academic achievement and low levels of stress,
- when stress is high, motivation is often low,
- high motivation typically precedes high achievement.

Stress, emotions and our children

A child distressed because the only breadwinner in his/her home is only tenuously employed, meaning the family may be evicted from their home shortly, or that a grandparent with whom he/she shares a bedroom may have been exposed to the COVID-19 virus, is a child whose learning may be in peril. These children are not worried about how proficiently they can add or subtract. Their

concern is, “Will we eat tonight? Will we have a place to sleep tomorrow? Are we going to survive?”

Nervousness, an increased heart rate, sweaty palms, accelerated breathing, etc., are all normal reactions to threatening circumstances. Once the threat or challenge has subsided, a normal physiological state resumes. However, what happens when a child remains in a stressful condition for an extended period of time? What if these circumstances stretch over the course of twelve to eighteen consecutive months?

A term you may not have heard since your high school biology class is homeostasis, the internal equilibrium that we seek, keeping our bodies in a steady comfortable balance. Numerous systems in the body help us adapt and survive, but they are designed around the proposition that “stressors come, and stressors go.” When confronted by a stressor, we react, and we later return to our “normal set point” (homeostasis), when the stressor has gone. Coping is our adaptive response to stress, where we (1) respond to the stressor, and (2) we relax once the stressor is no longer present.

Our bodily systems launch a physical, chemical, and emotional response to threats and danger. Emotional distress occurs when we are unable to cope with the observed stressors and returning to homeostasis does not take place. Allostasis is the process by which a new set point for homeostasis (our internal equilibrium) is established as a response to the stressors that will not go away. The body sets a new (abnormal), point for “normal,” which allows us to function in light of the continued threat. If we are not extracted from this stressful condition, the body will eventually concede that a return to a normal state of functioning lies somewhere between difficult and impossible. The allostatic load can cause mental or physical exhaustion, where normal functioning breaks down, a point which many students have reached.

Neuroendocrinologist Bruce McEwen, defines allostatic load as the physiological cost of “the excessive wear and tear on the body and mind,” when an individual is exposed to repeated stress or chronic stress. The intensity and duration of stress causes physical health to break down and mental health problems begin. The coronavirus pandemic lasting well beyond a full year, provides us with constant reminders that:

- (1) death from the disease is indeed possible
- (2) anyone/everyone is a potential disease carrier
- (3) our best defense is a protracted quarantine from practically everyone, including our loved ones.

Further prolonging our overall anxiety is the prospect that newer strains of the coronavirus may trigger mandated quarantines and school closures in the coming months. Thus, the “lessons learned” described later in this Field Guide may help direct us, as we navigate through a second wave of the coronavirus pandemic.

The How

The human brain responds to our experiences in ways that physically shape the brain known as neuroplasticity. Consequently, all brains are different, including the brains of monozygotic (identical)

twins. With these facts in mind, we know that every child/student (1) has likely had a different response to the events of the past 12-18 months, and (2) had experiences that were unlike the others. Some students were affected most by wildfires, others felt more impacted by the incessant police killings of African Americans and the resulting social injustice issues. Still others were more personally affected by housing insecurity, financial difficulties, and domestic abuse. Although their number may be smaller, some children received more personalized and enriching experiences at home, and subsequently fared far better than others.

Both experience and research have shown that academic achievement is higher, and students fare better emotionally, when they have the added protection that comes by way of positive relationships with teachers, other school-site adults, and adult family members (a well-balanced “emotional constellation”). Children who feel a sense of belongingness, valued, safe, and competent, weather traumatic storms with fewer lingering effects than those for whom these prophylactic features are absent in their lives.



School counselors, nurses, school psychologists, and county social workers should be readily available to local school districts to provide targeted training in basic mental health to teachers, which can help them identify and support students who are struggling psychologically. A student experiencing an emotional crisis can be immediately directed to the appropriate mental health services. The State of California has set aside \$750 million to address the mental health outcomes of

the pandemic. Another proposal will provide funding to train teachers and staff in social emotional learning practices along and funding for SEL activities for students.

As children attempt to cope during a crisis, occasionally there are behavioral changes, to which parents and educators should pay close attention, including the following:

- Excessive worry or sadness
- Unhealthy eating habits
- Inconsistent sleeping habits
- Difficulty paying attention or concentrating at home or in school
- Inattention to school matters (attendance, late assignments, grades, class participation, etc.)
- Refusal to engage in activities that a student had enjoyed doing in the past
- Excessive crying without explanation
- Irritability over minor frustrations
- Returning to developmental behaviors that were outgrown (toileting accidents or bed wetting).

It will be difficult to assess the full extent of the COVID-19 pandemic effects until students return to school or when they seek therapy. It is our hope that regular annual investments in the emotional well-being and mental health of children and adolescents will become a permanent fixture in state funding.

Field Guide #2 Learning and Healing Together: Heading to School Ready to Learn

Field Guide Overview

Description and purpose:

Over the years, when teachers have said, “I teach mathematics,” (or any other subject), our retort has been, “No, you teach children,” who have a full spectrum of personal backgrounds, academic histories, and a broad range of educational needs. Until we acknowledge students as individuals rather than a single part of a large group, we are unlikely contributing substantially to their wellness.

Today, many California educators (including CAAASA) support giving every child an ILP, an Individualized Learning Plan, similar to those required for special education students. Doing so would give all children access to therapeutic services. As a matter of educational equity, every student should be extended mental health benefits, and we should be unapologetic about making this mandatory.

As increasing numbers of school campuses were closed, all grade levels reported the following:

- waves of isolation and loneliness
- fear and anxiety
- grief and suicidal thoughts
- academic disengagement and social withdrawal
- lethargy and restlessness
- feeling miserable and unhappy.

Unrelenting stress on students can lead to impaired cognition, decrease in attention, diminished social skills, discipline problems, and motivation problems that become learning and memory problems, leading to academic failure in school. A survey conducted by the ACLU, found that more than 50% of students reported suffering from stress, anxiety or depression at least sometime during the past year, and that they would benefit from mental health services. Any one of these would suggest that our concern is warranted. Collectively, they indicate a mental health crisis for our children. Educating the whole child must remain our mission in education.

Prior to the pandemic, it was not uncommon for our “overly scheduled” children to feel overwhelmed by the demands of school, extracurricular activities, family events, and their social lives. Today, an increasing number of students report feeling emotionally and psychologically “underwater,” and not exclusively due to the pandemic. There were multiple traumas faced in the past year, some of which had a greater tendency to affect students of color. There were compounding negative incidents including:

- (1) the news reports of African American men and women killed from overly aggressive policing practices
- (2) social unrest and protests
- (3) business closures and massive job layoffs, leading to an economic crisis
- (4) fears of contracting COVID-19
- (5) a divisive presidential election, intensified by white supremacy “dog whistles” and allegations of fabricated election results
- (6) a scarcity of reliable medical information from the executive branch of the federal government.

The Stress in America 2020: A National Mental Health Crisis survey conducted by the Harris Poll on behalf of American Psychological Association, found that

- 78% of adults reported that the coronavirus pandemic was a significant source of stress in their lives,

- 60% indicated that the number of issues faced by the country is overwhelming.
- Nearly 20% indicated that their mental health was worse than it was at the same time in the previous year.

One of the most important resources in addressing a mental health crisis experienced by a child is the strong emotional support system surrounding him or her. Children living in unstable home environments are frequently at risk of abuse or neglect, particularly without the customary safety net provided by school personnel (teachers, nurses, counselors, and school staff members) who report such circumstances to social services or law enforcement.

In addition to taking care of students, the emotional health of teachers warrants our attention. A teacher's mood is often the most accurate emotional barometer for gauging the emotional tone of a classroom, and consequently, the emotional state of every child in the room on that day. A teacher's temperament influences whether her students will be listening to her in order to learn or paying attention solely for their own physical, psychological, or emotional safety.



Learning objectives:

Although we hear yearnings to return to normal, the space where that particular normal once existed is no longer there. How we interact with one another has changed. The ways we live have changed. How we think has changed. If the environment has changed, and we have changed, then where might we find what was once normal? More importantly, the old "normal" was plagued by systematic inequalities that often failed to meet the learning and cultural needs of students of color. Although we have seen decades of educational reform, the COVID-19 pandemic has opened the door for us to think in new ways about education and students.

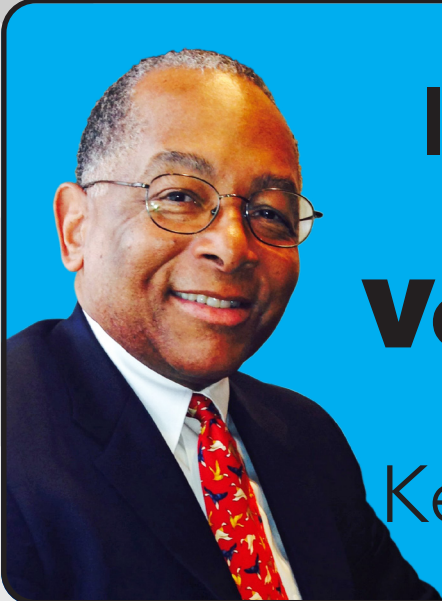
The learning objectives for Field Guide #2, Learning and Healing Together are as follows:

1. Identify what the research tells us about social emotional learning, and what parents, students, teachers, and an administrators have to say about SEL through their own “voices,” describing their personal experiences.
2. Understand that our human brain is simultaneously a social brain, a biological brain, and an emotional brain. Each of these facets of the brain influences our daily behavior.
3. Develop an appreciation for the role that emotions play in the classroom, both positive and negative.
4. Be able to describe the effects (emotional, psychological, economic, and behavioral) that the coronavirus pandemic has had on children and adults.
5. Become equipped with knowledge that can be useful to your school or school district, if you are asked to offer informed recommendations addressing the social-emotional needs of students and their families.

Components:

The Learning and Healing Together Field Guide is built around the following components:

- A. Eight “Voices” -- excerpts from interviews with students, parents, teachers, and an administrator. The focus is on how their personal experiences intersected with remote learning, living under a pandemic, and adapting to the “new normal.”
- B. Lessons learned – analyzing our experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic, focusing on what worked, what was unsuccessful, and how we can apply those lessons in our schools.
- C. Each of the above experiences will be accompanied by
 - Questions and written responses, to be completed individually or in small groups (with an opportunity to share responses with colleagues)
 - “Reflections and Applications.”
- D. Videotaped excerpts from the “Advancing Equity in an Era of Crisis” webinar conducted by a distinguished California educational leader.
- E. Recommendations of additional printed and video resources related to Social Emotional Learning.
- F. A survey tool to evaluate Field Guide #2.

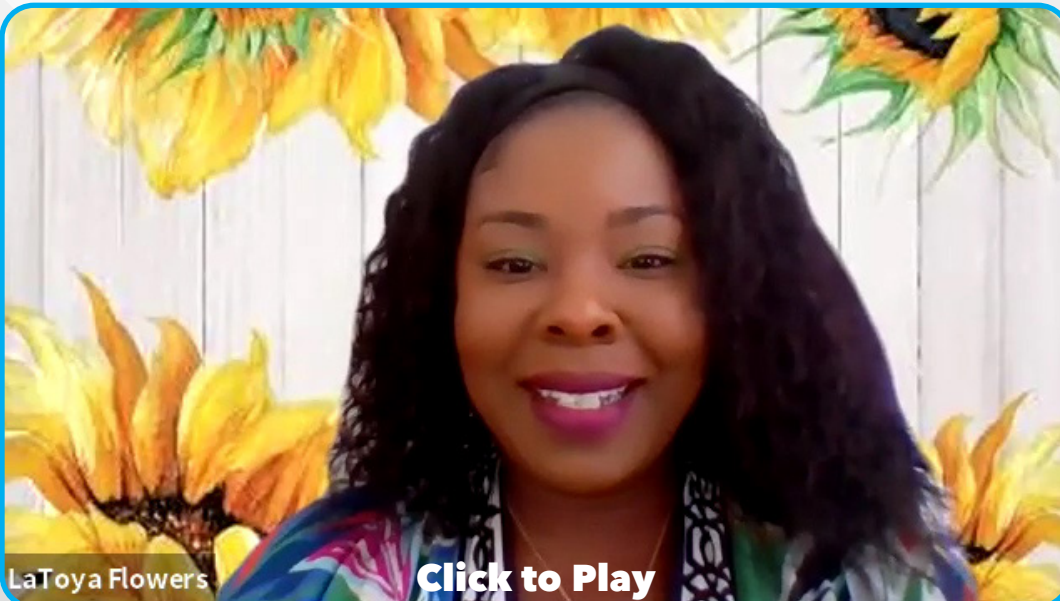


**Introduction
to the
Voices on SEL**
Neuroscientist
Kenneth Wesson
[Click to Play](#)

Addressing the emotional and psychological needs of your students should be one of the most important first steps that your school can take when your students return to their “brick-and-mortar” classrooms after a full year of remote learning at home. Using time set aside for professional development to complete the suggested learning activities for Learning and Healing Together will be time well spent if you are a teacher, administrator, or staff member.

“Lifting our Voices”

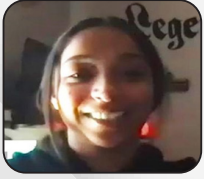
- a. What were some of the most important lessons that you learned about emotions, and the essential interpersonal connections that we usually have enjoyed with one another?
- b. How did the COVID-19 pandemic impact student emotions and their overall emotional state? Was the mental health of the adults working with children affected? How so?
- c. What supportive role did parents and families play, which enabled students cope?



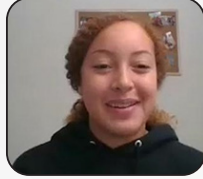
LaToya Flowers
[Click to Play](#)

LaToya Flowers
Teacher

The Interviewees



Kaleena **Fowler**
Student



Jordan **Fletcher**
Student



Jihawna **Johnson**
Parent



Deyango **Harris**
Teacher



Nicole **Brown**
Parent



Kalilah **Hudson**
Parent



Shunna **Bradford**
Teacher

Buried beneath the rubble of the pandemic are valuable “lessons learned” that can translate into useful planning for the future. This Field Guide offers professional development exercises that will lead to answers to the following questions:

- What have we learned from the pandemic experience about children, emotions, and mental health?
- How have we grown?
- What were some of the factors that helped us make progress?
- What obstacles did we encounter?
- How do we get all students on a positive learning trajectory following this crisis?

To see and hear more about how much we have learned and how much we have grown while adapting to the pandemic, watch the videos of students, parents, teachers, and an administrator below.

1. How can teachers support students emotionally?
Click to Play <http://bit.ly/response1fieldguide2>
2. What is the importance of emotions and human interactions?
Click to Play <http://bit.ly/response2fieldguide2>
3. What emotional damage did the pandemic inflict on children/students?
Click to Play <http://bit.ly/response3fieldguide2>
4. What lessons did you learn from the past 12 months of the pandemic?
Click to Play <http://bit.ly/response4fieldguide2>
5. What should we plan to do differently when school resumes?
Click to Play <http://bit.ly/response5fieldguide2>



Learning and healing together

Professional learning: Participant Responses

- a. What were your two or three key “take-aways” from the interviewees concerning the impact that the pandemic had on their emotions and on the mental health of those around them? (Comment on at least two of the four different perspectives).
 1. students
 2. teachers
 3. parents
 4. the administrator

- b. What did the different voices tell us about the importance of emotional connections with family members?
- c. What were some of the negative reactions to remote learning and how they affected students? Did your students have similar experiences?
- d. What are some of the positive roles that emotions can play in the classroom?
- e. During the pandemic, opportunities for human contact decreased. What were some of the consequences? Were your experiences any different?
- f. There are times when students cry out for help in the most silent of ways. What were some of the comments concerning these “cries for help”? What experience have you had with similar events with students in your classroom or school?
- g. The pandemic offered time for reflection and introspection. What were some of the comments made that would fall into one or both of this category? Did you take time out for personal introspection? What were some of your discoveries?

Reflections and applications

- a. If you were commissioned by the Department of Education to make a list of back-to-school SEL priorities, what would be your top three recommendations?
- b. What are some of the positive contributions that emotions make to student learning?
- c. As teacher LaToya Flowers summarized, “If you don’t take care of the heart, how are you going to teach the mind?” Please elaborate on what you believe Ms. Flowers meant and why it is so important to classroom learning.
- d. The parents, teachers, and students all described the impact of Zoom used for classroom learning. What were some of its benefits and its drawbacks?
- e. The quality of the relationships that students have with teachers is often a strong predictor of school success, according to researchers. The pandemic put these relationships under a new spotlight. What did parents, teachers, and students have to say about student-teacher relationships?
- f. Most students felt some level of loneliness and isolation during the past 12-15 months, some more than others. What emotional experiences did they described? How can teachers help?
- g. What were some of the “lessons learned” about the importance of emotions? What lessons were learned about interpersonal relationships?
- h. When school resumes, what would you recommend as the five most important steps a school can take to serve as a safety net for students and their families?
- i. Based on the videos, what recommendations would you make to a young teacher-in-training about how emotions can support learning or interfere with learning?
- j. What are some of the non-academic priorities that you teach in your classroom to develop

a “whole child”? How do you share those priorities with parents?

- k. It is often said that “Some students do well in school, while others do well in life.” What are some of the SEL “life skills” that contribute most to career success?

Our individual stories shape how our brains get wired and who we become as individuals and adults. These diverse accounts foreshadow how we manage our experiences and recollect those events. Who is listening to and cataloging the most informative student narratives at your school?

Easy-to-implement SEL Recommendations:

How do we create and maintain conditions for students to feel more hopeful and to become happier, when they are in our schools or off campus? Here are some tips.

Back-to-school planning

An elementary school teacher recently said, “If it was up to me, I’d focus on nothing but SEL and mental health until the end of the school year.” Whether your school reconvenes in May or September of this year, teachers and administrators should find the tips below useful and instructive.

- Become more tolerant and flexible. Focus less on the rules and regulations, and more on creating a positive emotional climate.
- Students need time to reconnect with friends, to practice their social skills, to get acquainted with their teachers, and to adjust to the on-campus procedures again.
- Plan plenty of (non-competitive) physical activities and fun, stress-free experiences.
- Assessments and rigorous content work can wait until students readjust to school.
- Develop a “welcome back” survey for students and a survey for parents. The survey instruments should be well thought-out, concise focused on
 - students’ short-term and long-term emotional health
 - gathering an overall picture of each student’s sense of well-being
- Schedule SEL professional learning for teachers, administrators and school staff members to help ease students’ transition back to campus and, with trauma- informed practices
- Remember that self-care is not equivalent to self-indulgence. Make sure you have “put on your oxygen mask” before you try to help your students.
- Polish up your face-to-face social skills.


Daily routines

- Greet students personally at the door as they enter.
- Begin with a welcoming ritual or a SEL warm-up activity to start each day
- Plan an emotional check-in for the whole class, small groups, or one-on-one. Give students time to talk about their emotional state.

- Use Mindfulness activities that emphasize the five SEL competencies and ways to express emotions.
- Have students listen to their classmates to develop empathy and build back their communication skills after a year of limited social contact.
- Never imply to a student that his/her problem is not big enough to discuss. Do not invalidate his/her feelings. Instead, work with that child to find solutions, which may be merely changing perspectives.
- Give each student a dry erase board which:
 - adds constant interactivity
 - allows you to see what students are thinking/doing.
 - forces them to think and makes their thinking visible
 - provides a simple means of ongoing formative assessment, which will be critical for monitoring student progress after being out of the classroom for 12 to 16 months
 - is a non- threatening means of self-assessment, where they can compare their answers with their peers' understanding
 - tells the teacher who is on track and which students may be falling behind.

General SEL practices

- Always prioritize students' mental health before delving into content.
- Stay in regular written or verbal contact with each student's family (a strong family is often the best medicine for emotional and mental health).
- Schedule a periodic wellness assessment as part of a larger strategy for supporting students' emotional health.
- Create positive and inclusive campus climate. Remember: loneliness damages physical and mental health more than we previously thought.
- Provide a regular avenue for students to share their personal experiences and their inner thoughts.
- The shift away from zero tolerance to restorative justice with the well-being of all parties in mind.
- Hire more counselors and school psychologists of color or who have been trained in SEL and cultural competence to work with students in-person and virtually.
- Partner with local mental health services and social services to support students and their families who may be struggling emotionally.
- Craft a comprehensive system for monitoring student well-being so that a troubled student is never allowed to fall through the cracks completely.

A portrait of Kenneth Wesson, a man with glasses, wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and a red patterned tie. He is smiling and looking towards the camera.

LESSONS LEARNED

Neuroscientist
Kenneth **Wesson**

Click to Play

Introduction:

In education, we often say that one can be either “emotional” or “intellectual,” but seldom both, and certainly not simultaneously. Instead, we see them as two choices in a binary equation. Seldom is the interdependence of emotions and intelligence acknowledged. Emotions drive attention, attention drives learning, and learning determines memory. We do not remember information that we did not previously learn. We do not learn what we had not paid attention to initially. Most importantly, we do not pay attention to matters that are of little or no importance to us personally or emotionally (deemed “trivial” and not worthy of expending our precious brain resources to remember).

Learning commonly refers to those modifications to the brain that come by way of experience, but all learning begins with emotions and relies on the same dynamic interplay between emotions and cognition. All memories are not created or remembered equally -- emotional memories are seated in first class. We easily learn facts, skills, and information that we care about or that we find personally valuable or interesting. However, what is important to one person, may not be so to another individual, particularly in the classroom. The determining factor is one’s personal-emotional connections.

In the world of emotions, we habitually remember our “highest highs” and our “lowest lows” almost effortlessly. Information of little personal relevance that falls between these two end points on the emotional continuum will be considerably more difficult to recall, because it was not adequately encoded for long term memory storage, since it was not deemed it to be important when encountered initially. The most difficult things to remember are those that have no emotional importance at all. Might these facts impact classroom learning?

In the classroom, students learn what they care about, and remember facts, events, stories, and activities where their positive emotions are actively engaged in the process of learning. Negative emotional experiences are incompatible with learning, memory, and academic achievement.

When emotions are enlisted in support of learning

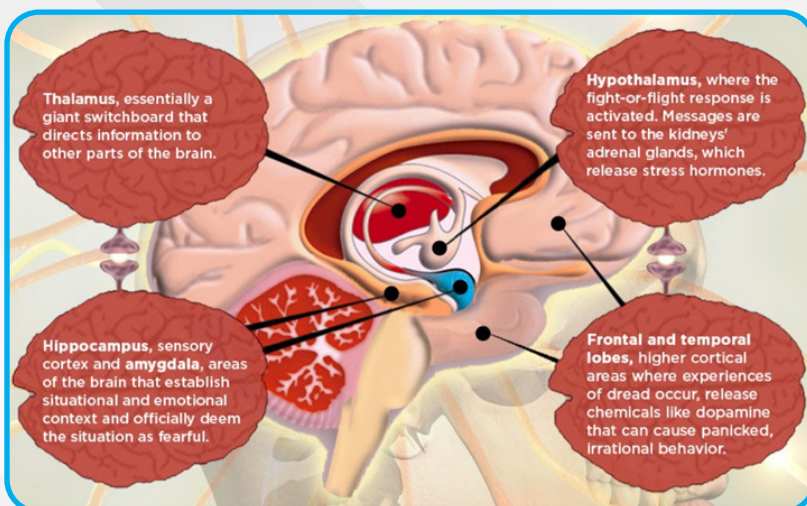
- (1) the content presented has greater probability of longevity,
- (2) it is easiest to retrieve from long-term memory,
- (3) it has the greatest probability of application and transferability.

Nothing short of regional brain damage will dislodge emotional memories from permanent memory storage. (This is why 80-year-old patients can describe their wedding day in great detail, the entire birth of their first child, their experiences during “the war,” etc., yet they cannot tell their nurse whether they took their medications one hour ago).

Just as emotions can serve as powerful learning catalysts and memory boosters, they can also serve as a disruptive force in learning and memory. Fear, the most powerful emotion, makes learning and memory formation extremely challenging. For example, a student is sitting in his classroom trying to learn, but he is repeatedly threatened by a bully seated nearby. He will have trouble learning, not because the content is difficult, but because he is paying attention to the bully, not to the teacher. (Remember emotions drive attention.)

The human body-brain system does not respond differently to physical threats, intellectual threats, social threats, or an emotional threat. Our physiological reaction to fear is identical. We shut down the non-essential bodily systems to rivet our attention exclusively on our survival. Our pupils dilate, heart rate increases sending more blood and energy to the large muscle groups, our lungs increase oxygen intake, our salivary glands dry up (causing “cotton-mouth”), and glycogen is broken down in the liver to increase the availability of instant energy for a fight or a flight. As these high priority physiological processes take place, our concern for intellectual matters takes a back seat (if any seat at all) until the crisis has been settled.

Once a perceived danger has been avoided successfully, the body turn off its stress responses and returns to homeostasis, where answering the question “What is 9 times 7?” becomes feasible again. The challenge for individuals experiencing unrelenting trauma is that the body’s stress responses do not turn off. Consequently, students who endure long-term safety needs also struggle academically with learning and memory difficulties.



Wesson, K., Saber-toothed Tigers, and stressed-out students: An examination of the neuroscience behind safe, secure learning environments. District Administration, May 2018

Excerpts from Session #3 - Advancing Equity in an Era of Crisis. Social Emotional Health and Learning for Sheltering-in-Place: Best Policies and Resources.

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) identifies five SEL competencies:

- Self-awareness
- Self-management
- Social awareness
- Relationship skills
- Responsible decision-making

There are other essential SEL competencies in today's environment, which would justify including the following:

- An assets-based outlook
- Goal setting (with perseverance and resilience)
- A growth mindset
- Optimism
- Cultural competence

Title: Understanding the five competencies of Social Emotional Learning

Synchronous Professional Learning: Discuss the following questions in your small group and report out to the larger body when you reconvene.

Asynchronous professional Learning: Write your individual answers to each of the following questions.

- Which of these competences do your students struggle with the most? Why?
- How can you help your students become more proficient in that competency?
- Which would you identify as your SEL "superpower" (your greatest SEL strength), which benefits students in your classroom? What makes that competency such a catalyst for learning?
- Which of the five competencies do you feel contributes the most to academic success? Why so?
- Of the five CASEL competencies, which do you feel contributes most to success your school workspace? Why so?

Title: What emotional intelligence assets do we want to cultivate in successful students?

Synchronous Professional Learning: Discuss the following questions in your small group and report out to the larger body when you reconvene.

Asynchronous professional Learning: Write your individual answers to each of the following questions.

- In what ways does the list in the video differ from the SEL competencies?
- If you were to place these emotional intelligence goals in the order of their value in educational achievement, what would that order be?
- Emotional maturation occurs overtime. Which would be your top three indicators of emotional maturity in a student?

Title: Jane Elliott's experiment with students and the "self-fulfilling prophecy." (The blue-eyed children and the brown-eyed children).

Synchronous Professional Learning: Discuss the following questions in your small group and report out to the larger body when you reconvene.

Asynchronous professional Learning: Write your individual answers to each of the following questions.

- How do behavioral and academic achievement expectations affect student performance in the classroom?
- How does this statement "Sometimes the thing that is holding you back is all in your head" apply to Jane Elliott's experiment?
- When students display "acting out" behaviors, what are some of the strategies that can be used to help re-direct towards behaviors that enhance their academic growth and development?
- How would you connect the children in this experiment with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs?

Title: What are the consequences of negative emotions on learning and memory?

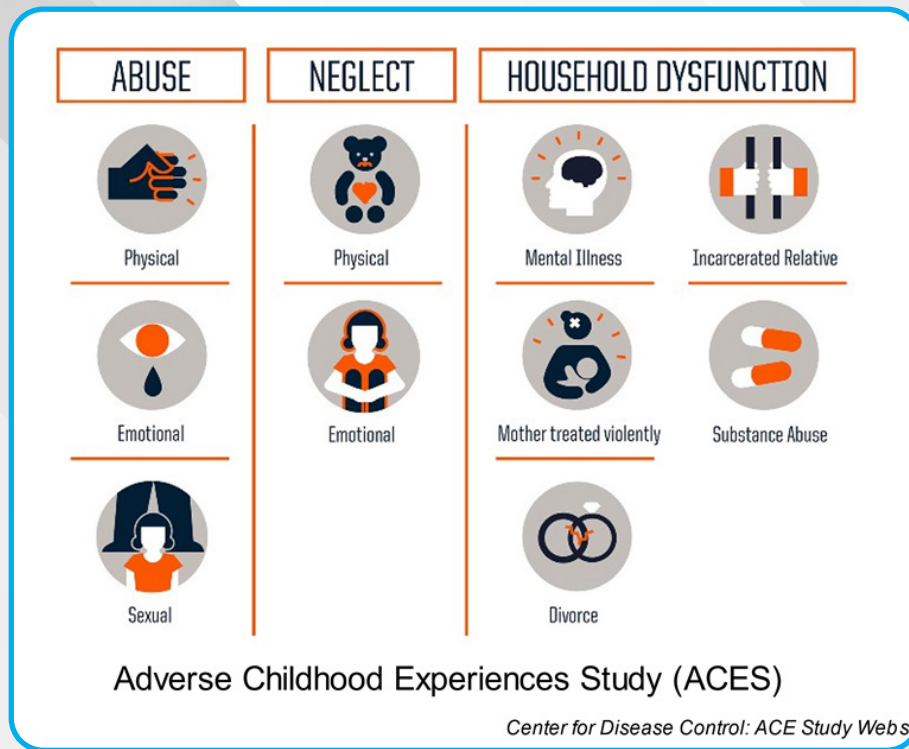
Synchronous Professional Learning: Discuss the following questions in your small group and report out to the larger body when you reconvene.

Asynchronous professional Learning: Write your individual answers to each of the following questions.

- Why might students have difficulty in recalling informational details or retrieving previously memorized information, during a fear response?

- What strategies do you suggest for students in the midst of this experience?
- What role might stress, fear, and other negative emotions play during high-stakes assessments?
- How might “Mindfulness” help students in these situations?

Title: Students and the impact of emotionally adverse experiences. (Dr. Edward Tronick’s “Still face” experiment).



Synchronous Professional Learning: Discuss the following questions in your small group and report out to the larger body when you reconvene.

Asynchronous professional Learning: Write your individual answers to each of the following questions.

- Of the nine “ACES” listed above, which do you think is the most prevalent? Why?
- When a student’s behavior is clearly a cry out for your personal attention, rather than for an academic need, how should you handle that emotionally delicate situation in a positive manner?
- From your experience, how does “Household Dysfunction” affect student achievement?
- When a student shows signs of physical, emotional, or sexual abuse, are you aware of your school district’s policy on how to follow up as an advocate for that child?

Title: In what ways can teachers and students benefit from training in Social Emotional Learning?

Synchronous Professional Learning: Discuss the following questions in your small group and report out to the larger body when you reconvene.

Asynchronous professional Learning: Write your individual answers to each of the following questions.

- Teachers who demonstrate competency in SEL remain in the profession longer. Why might that be so?
- Before a commercial flight begins its journey, airline attendants instruct adults to, "Put on your oxygen mask before helping your child with his/hers." In what way is this advice similar to what you have learned about emotional well-being?
- When a teacher demonstrates a high level of emotional regulation under trying circumstances, what lesson does that communicate to students?
- If you were to craft a 2-minute argument for your local legislator to convince him/her to support SEL, what would be your bullet points for that brief conversation?

Conclusion:

While gradual change is expected over the course of a day, a week or a month, the slow pace of change and mild degree of disruption permits all of us a comfortable adaptation. However, during times of sudden and substantial interference with our "normal," adjustment becomes considerably more difficult. Children, in general, are quite resilient, and some may pick up where they left off in March 2020, once they feel emotionally safe. However, we cannot expect any student to advance academically until their safety, belongingness, and social-emotional health needs are met first.

Over the past 12 months, we have experienced a shared trauma as a result of a rapidly spreading lethal virus that did not differentiate its victims along the lines of color, income, ethnicity or location on the globe. Although the Centers for Disease Control had anticipated a widespread pandemic, the general public was woefully unprepared. The ensuing stress caused by the pandemic did not come as a complete surprise, although it did come at an enormous cost to us – economically, socially, and mentally. As we draw a blueprint for academic restoration, it is imperative that our quest for healing either precedes or coincides with content learning.

Developing a deeper understanding of what has occurred to a majority of our students will help them through recovery in the coming months and years. The researchers Moll and Gonzalez describe students' homes and communities as "funds of knowledge" that offer a wealth of opportunities to link the students' personal lives with relevant and engaging school curriculum.

Our species does not function adequately without interpersonal relationships. It is indeed our person-to-person connections that make our students who they are and what they are destined to

become. The time we devote to connecting with them, helping them develop to their fullest, and caring for them will determine who they will become, and whether they are destined to thrive or merely survive.

What Every Child Needs to Know:

Every student/child needs to know that every parent and every teacher within that child's personal orbit

- wants to be proud of him/her
- wants the best for them in life
- wants him/her to succeed in school
- wants to watch them grow and develop in healthy ways
- wants him/her to make intelligent choices
- wants him/her to be part of a social group that has a positive influence on him/her, and who are supportive and positive
- wants their school to maximize his/her gifts, talents, and strengths
- wants to hear good news about him/her, and not be surprised in the least
- wants to find out what that child has a passion for and nurture it to its fullest
- wants him/her to know that he/she is not "broken" and does not need to be "fixed"
- wants to be a good parent or a good teacher for him/her
- wants each child to know that we will cling to these beliefs in him/her and we will hold the highest hopes for him/her for an eternity (whether we tell him/her every day or not).



As students return to school buildings and traditional face-to-face instruction, it will be imperative that educators want the very best for every child and use the contents of this Field Guide for direction. It contains information on what should and must be done to assist our children in navigating the “new normal” and thriving emotionally under less-than-great circumstances, that can still produce great results.

While the long-term emotional effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on our children are not predictable, we have identified numerous measures that can be implemented by schools, teachers, and parents to reduce the destructive effects of emotional trauma. The evidence-based strategies and solutions presented in this Field Guide can serve as a starting point.

Evaluation-Survey

Did you find this Field Guide helpful? Please Share Your Feedback!

[\(CLICK HERE TO TAKE SURVEY\)](#)

Resources:

- CASEL CARES: So now what? Supporting SEL at home
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W8W-GkIHGX0>
- CASEL CARES: Building resilience to support our sales, others, and our students
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m5nXdoiVml>
- CASEL Awards: Key principles for evidence based SEL
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1D1xUjkK4mg>
- Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL)
<https://casel.org/>
- COVID-19: The psychological impact on children and young people
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CkiOnqqlxac&t=773s>
- COVID-19: Psychological impact, well-being and mental health
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V2L1YPAzyBQ>
- Evidence-Based Practices for Assessing Students’ Social and Emotional Well Being, PACE
<https://edpolicyinca.org/publications/evidence-based-practices-assessing-students-social-and-emotional-well-being>
- Four reasons why SEL is so important right now
https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=4+reasons+why+sel+is+so+important
- How can we design learning settings so all children thrive? Science of Learning and Development Alliance, Linda Darling-Hammond, co-author.
<https://www.soldalliance.org/post/how-can-we-design-learning-settings-so-that-all-students-thrive>
- Mental health impact love COVID-19 lockdown on kids and teens
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=laQOD9UxxW4&t=28s>

- Social and Emotional Learning, California Department of Education
<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/se/>
- The Social Emotional Learning Alliance for California
<https://sel4ca.org/>
- Teaching and learning: social and emotional learning webinars series part one
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=73LphoZubT0&t=488s>

References:

- Advancing Equity in an Era of Crisis. Session #3: Social Emotional Health and Learning for Shelter-in-Place: Best Policies and Resources conducted by Kenneth Wesson, Educational Consultant, Neuroscience. CAAASA (2020)
https://youtu.be/_qeeH1TmfIQ
- Excessive Drinking Rose During the Pandemic. Here Are Ways to Cut Back. The New York Times. April 12, 2021
<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/12/well/mind/covid-pandemic-drinking.html>
- I Was So Nervous': Back to Class After a Year Online. The New York Times. March 9, 2021
<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/09/us/schools-reopen-covid.html>
- Learning during the pandemic: Making social and emotional learning front and center. The economic Policy Institute. February 3, 2021
<https://www.epi.org/blog/learning-during-the-pandemic-making-social-and-emotional-learning-front-and-center/>
- Student anxiety, depression increasing during school closures, survey finds: More than half of students surveyed said they need mental health services since schools closed. EdSource. May 13, 2020
<https://edsource.org/2020/student-anxiety-depression-increasing-during-school-closures-survey-finds/631224>
- Wesson, K., Saber-toothed Tigers, and stressed-out students: An examination of the neuroscience behind safe, secure learning environments. District Administration, May 2018.
- Why mental health is the key to dealing with learning loss. EdSource. April 15, 2021.
<https://edsource.org/2021/why-mental-health-is-the-key-to-dealing-with-learning-loss/653087>

CAAASA presents:

Lifting Our Voices:

*Reimagining Schools for Students of Color Amid COVID-19: Planning Guidelines to Support the **Leading Forward Learning Series***

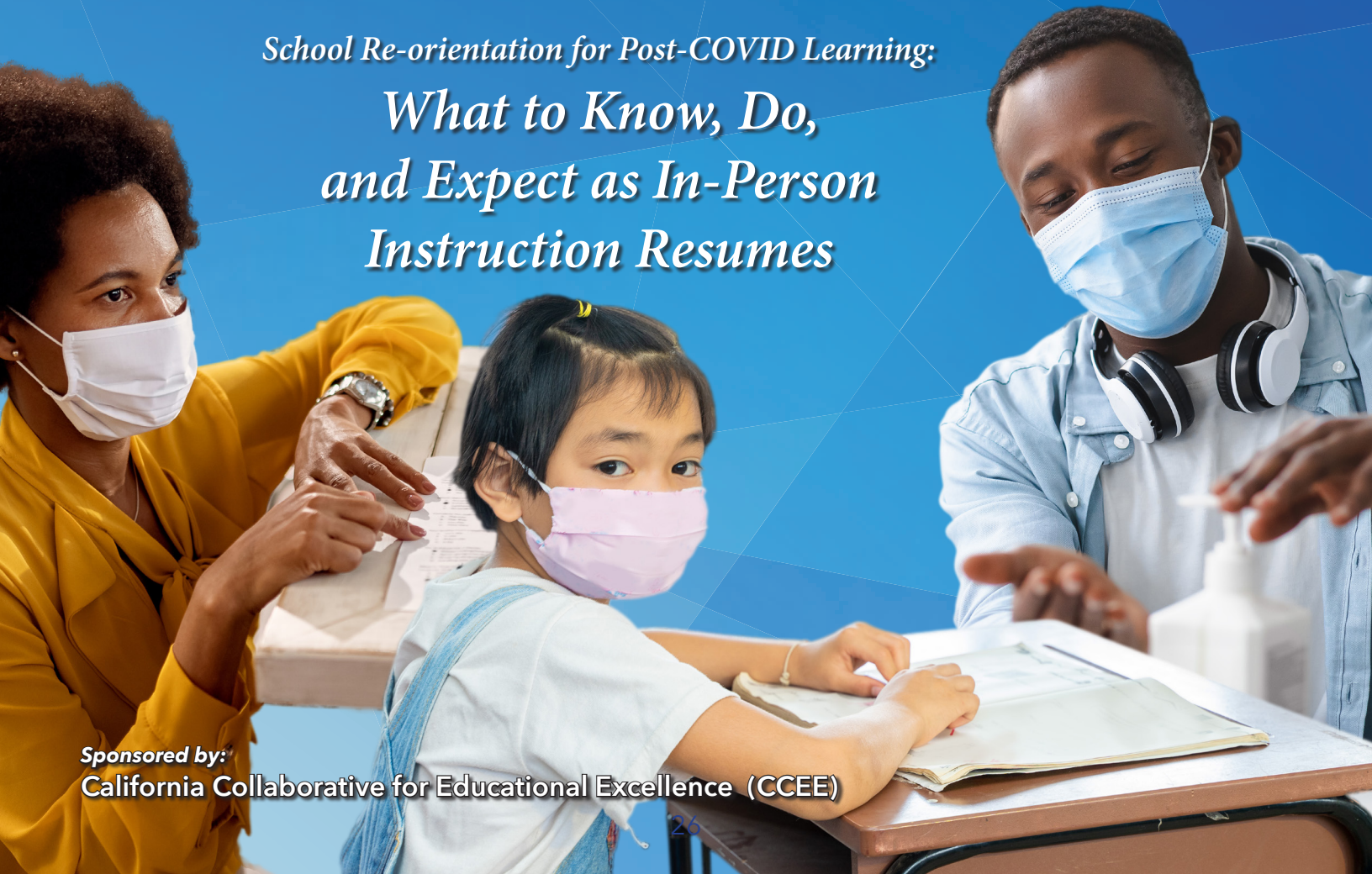


California Association of African-American Superintendents & Administrators



School Re-orientation for Post-COVID Learning:

What to Know, Do, and Expect as In-Person Instruction Resumes



Sponsored by:
California Collaborative for Educational Excellence (CCEE)