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Recovering From the Effects of the Pandemic

Improving Student Well-being: A Landscape of Pandemic Recovery Strategies

February 2025

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➤Introduction

The [RESTART Network](#) aims to provide a summary of information on some of the most pressing topics¹ as determined by our key partners and advisors, representing policy leaders, administrators, educators, students, parents, and community organizations. Each topic summary provides information about recovery strategies, highlights evidence that supports these strategies, and provides examples of recovery strategies that have emerging evidence. This synthesis details findings from a systematic review of COVID-19 recovery efforts and supporting evidence related to the topic of student well-being in schools.

➤Why a landscape analysis?

Questions about school leaders' and educators' use of these emergency funds, responses, and innovations to student needs abound. How did schools meet the needs of students? What strategies and innovations were used? And what worked? These questions are important for two primary reasons. First, although schools are back to routine work and not putting out the fires associated with the pandemic, persistent challenges with regard to well-being and academic outcomes are impacting all communities, but certainly some more than others (Annie E. Casey Foundation 2024). Second, understanding strategies that successfully support students during times of whole-community disruption, like the pandemic or other disruptions, can provide critical resources to the K–12 education system.

Federal Investment in Pandemic Response and Recovery. Under the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) fund, states were allocated nearly \$190 billion in federal funding to address COVID-19 emergency relief and recovery in K–12 schools (CCSSO, n.d.). In line with program requirements, 90% of funds were designated for use by local education agencies and approximately 80% of state ESSER spending plans approved by the federal Office of Elementary and Secondary Education include one or more activities to address.¹

This landscape analysis focused on the topic of student well-being, identified by the field as a critical priority to supporting student recovery and success. The analysis provides an overview of strategies and corresponding research conducted between March 2020 (pandemic onset) and March 2024. We found that although there is research on this critical topic, the rigor is minimal. Thus, this analysis provides insights for

¹ The RESTART Network is focused on recovery efforts related to mathematics, English language arts, tutoring, accelerated learning, student well-being, teacher retention, and out-of-school-time activities.

policymakers and funders interested in pursuing more information about potentially effective practices. For the research community, it provides guidance on gaps in the research that may be pursued as part of a research agenda. Overall, it is a call to action for improving our understanding of what works and therefore our ability to respond to the needs of students, educators, and leaders in times of whole-community crisis.

The disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic to teaching, learning, and socialization in schools in our PK–12 education system has had devastating effects on students' academic and nonacademic outcomes, from declines in math achievement (Kuhfeld et al., 2022) to mental health and well-being of students and staff (Hamilton et al., 2021). The fast-changing, uncertain nature of the pandemic necessitated quick decision making on the part of educators and school leadership who may not have had the time or resources to identify strategies to best serve students' needs in these unprecedented events.

During the annual RESTART Network National Forum in May 2023 and April 2024, several practitioners, including superintendents, principals, and educators, from around the country discussed quickly developing new strategies to meet the needs of their students and staff. They discussed incorporating activities to increase student interest, motivation, and belongingness, such as games and competitions, and increasing engagement with community mental health supports, all toward the goal of encouraging student engagement during the school day and fostering a sense of belonging.

Many of the strategies described were grounded in commonly understood and applied student well-being best practices; however, it was less clear the extent to which these practices worked, for whom, and under what conditions. Further, the context of a global pandemic creates a magnitude of need that is unprecedented, thus even evidence-based strategies may be implemented or adapted in new ways to meet the need. The bottom line is more research is needed.

The following questions guided the landscape analysis:

1. What is student well-being?
2. Why is student well-being important?
3. What activities, programs, and interventions related to student well-being are considered best practices in schools?

4. What student well-being practices were used in schools to help recover from the effects of the pandemic?
5. Since the onset of the pandemic, what kind of research was conducted on these student well-being strategies?

ANSWERING THESE QUESTIONS: OUR COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH

The landscape analysis is the result of a comprehensive review of research and policy papers released between March 2020, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, and March 2024. After vetting more than 3,000 articles, we categorized them into topic areas, including student well-being. The results of the review are available and searchable by topic, grade level, and geographic location [here](#).

For the student well-being landscape:

- 36 of the 77 student well-being studies were eligible for inclusion in the landscape analysis.²
- A macro-construct of student well-being guided the review process.
- Each article was coded for eight categories: (a) grade level; (b) study design; (c) sample demographics; (d) targeted populations (e.g., low socioeconomic status, disability status); (e) student well-being target areas; (f) intervention activities; (g) whether there was an intentional, planned evaluation of the activities; and (h) study timeframe.
- Three qualitative coders achieved 96% inter-rater reliability in the process.
- Provisional coding included a priori codes with new codes added as needed and based on emerging data.

►What is student well-being?

Student well-being encompasses several aspects, such as mental, emotional, and physical health, social relationships, and academic engagement. According to the PISA 2015 framework, student well-being is a complex and multifaceted concept that results from interactions among four dimensions: students' cognitive, psychological, social, and physical domains (OECD, 2017). Each of these dimensions is independently achievable and is a factor that influences the achievement of other dimensions (Barnes et al., 2023).

►Why is student well-being important?

Student well-being is fundamental to fostering effective and supportive educational environments that contribute to improved academic performance, attendance, mental

² Most of these studies were published in 2021 ($n = 22$). Four were published in 2020 and 12 in 2022. One third of the articles coded were nationally representative reports.

health, and long-term success (Cipriano et al., 2023; Durlak et al., 2011). Schools that address students' holistic needs help support lifelong learning and positive development. Research consistently shows that student well-being promotes academic success. When students feel emotionally supported, they are more likely to engage in their schoolwork and perform better academically (American Psychological Association, 2014; Klem & Connell, 2004).

- **Improved achievement.** Higher levels of achievement may be attributed to the development of self-regulation, emotional awareness, and interpersonal communication skills necessary for academic success (e.g., Cipriano et al., 2023).
- **Improved attendance.** Chronic absenteeism is often related to underlying emotional or social issues; however, when students feel connected and supported in school and their emotional needs are being met, they are more likely to attend school and graduate (Daily et al., 2020; Healthy Schools Campaign et al., 2024).
- **Improved mental health.** Student well-being is crucial for mental health because poor mental health can hinder students' ability to learn and thrive in school. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, students with persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness are more likely to have poor academic outcomes including lower course performance and higher rates of absenteeism (S. E. Jones et al., 2022).

Schools can create a healthier and more conducive learning environment by supporting student well-being and providing students with strategies to manage stress, develop resilience, and seek help when needed. Well-being is critical in that it mitigates how students are able to access and engage in critical aspects of learning (Niemi, 2020) and

the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions. (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL], 2020, para. 1)

A focus on student well-being helps create a positive school climate where students feel safe, valued, and respected, which, as research shows, facilitates learning and personal growth. CASEL (2024a) highlights that schools implementing student well-being

programs report improved school climate and student–teacher relationships, which are critical for effective teaching and learning. Accordingly, five domains contribute to or are indicators of student well-being (Exhibit 1).

Exhibit 1. Five Domains of Student Well-being

Domain	Definition
Self-management	Managing one’s emotions, thoughts, and behaviors.
Self-awareness	Understanding one’s own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior
Social awareness	Understanding the perspectives of and empathizing with others, including those from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and contexts
Relationship skills	Establishing and maintaining healthy and supportive relationships
Responsible decision making	Making caring and constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions

Source. CASEL (2024b).

Although these are important domains for individuals, the school community ecosystem³ influences an individual’s ability to learn, access, and grow within these domains (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1989; CASEL, 2020).

Prioritizing student well-being is foundational to supporting students’ academic success, mental health, and long-term life outcomes. By focusing on student well-being, schools can foster an environment that serves as a safe space for both educational and personal development.

For the purposes of this narrative, the student well-being strategies focus on mental health and the five CASEL (2022) domains.

³ Students are influenced by their community, their family, their school, and the classroom environment. Understanding how these environments interact, align, or fail to align is critical to understanding the effects of SEL programming.

►What activities, programs, and interventions related to student well-being are considered best practices in schools?

Prior to the pandemic, several programs focused on student well-being demonstrated strong, moderate, and promising evidence of effectiveness for a variety of outcome domains, including behavior; knowledge, attitudes, and values; social outcomes; and social development. The What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) highlights 19 programs geared toward K–12 students wherein one or more studies meet WWC standards with or without reservations and demonstrate strong, positive student or teacher outcomes. For example, WWC details the evidence for two classroom management strategies—[Class-Wide Function-Related Intervention Teams \(CW-FIT\)](#) and [Good Behavior game](#)—both of which demonstrate evidence for improving student behavior and academic outcomes by promoting positive behavior in the classroom. Specifically, CW-FIT has strong evidence for student behavior in Grades K–10 and promising evidence for effects on teacher practice in Grades PK–7. The Good Behavior game has strong evidence for effects on student behavior in Grades K–11, promising evidence for effects on teacher practice in Grades K–4, promising evidence for effects on writing conventions in Grades 1–2, and promising evidence for effects on writing productivity in Grades 1–2.

We provide a comprehensive list of all student well-being interventions with strong, moderate, and promising evidence of effectiveness published by the WWC in Exhibit A1 in the appendix.

WHY ARE WE EXAMINING EVIDENCE PRE- VERSUS POSTPANDEMIC?

We acknowledge immense differences in terms of student need since the onset of the pandemic. This is in both the magnitude in terms of numbers of students in need of support and, we suspect, the level of need among school-age children. Further, the numbers of students in need of support calls for potentially different intervention/strategy implementation formats that may need to be schoolwide rather than targeted or intensive interventions (e.g., chronic absenteeism statistics, mental health statistics). At present, the availability of postpandemic-onset evidence is limited, thus we provide a background on prepandemic evidence-based strategies. There is certainly a need for research on how these and new strategies play out in a postpandemic context.

►What student well-being practices were used in schools to help recover from the effects of the pandemic?

The synthesis uncovered four broad categories under which a diverse set of strategies and initiatives to increase student well-being were identified. Exhibit 2 provides an overview of the study categories.⁴

Thirteen studies reviewed included nationwide samples. Excluding these, we found that most state-specific strategies were concentrated in the New England, Central, Mid-Atlantic, and West regions.⁵ New England states represented included Connecticut (4), Maine (1), Massachusetts (1), New York (2), and Rhode Island (1). Central states included Kansas (1), Missouri (1), Nebraska (1), North Dakota (2), and Wyoming (1). Mid-Atlantic states included District of Columbia (2), Maryland (1), New Jersey (1), and Pennsylvania (1). West regions included California (5). We provide a breakdown of the number of strategies reviewed by state in Exhibit A3 the appendix.

Strategies to address student well-being recovery from the effects of the pandemic fell into four general categories, which are described in detail below (see Exhibit 2).

HOW WE GOT HERE

We scanned research articles, policy papers, publications of best practices, case studies, and survey results published since March 2020 and coded each with a common set of categorizations. This is a comprehensive and intensive review of available research. A full description of the protocol is [here](#). Further, we chose this approach with a plan to provide information to the field on evidence-based strategies to be considered for pandemic recovery throughout the nation. What we found was that limited evidence is available and although there may be unpublished research that is not included in this review, the value of the synthesis is in understanding what U.S. schools did to support students after the onset of the pandemic and support the research community by identifying responses in terms of strategies and areas of coalescence where further research is warranted.

⁴ These categories are not mutually exclusive.

⁵ Region classification is based on Institute of Education Sciences classifications of states (<https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/rel/>).

Exhibit 2. Student Well-being Strategies

Category	Number of studies
Adding curriculum and programming to enhance student well-being throughout the school	21
Providing wraparound services to include supports that optimize well-being and minimize barriers to learning	9
Increasing the number of staff and staff resources focusing on student well-being	8
Integrating strategies into existing student support infrastructure (e.g., multi-tiered systems of support)	5

Adding curriculum and programming

By far, the most common strategy was the addition of student well-being curriculum or programming. Schools and districts added programming to help support students' well-being during the school day in almost 60% ($n = 21$) of studies reviewed. This finding is confirmed by results from the 2021 American Panel Survey, a nationwide study, which revealed that 70% of districts were providing programming to improve student well-being, with 20% of those districts indicating that these were newly added services (Schwartz & Diliberti, 2021). Exhibit 3 presents examples of the student well-being programming featured in the synthesis.

Exhibit 3. Examples of Student Well-being Curricula and Programming

Program name	Target population	Implementation
ReThink Ed	K–12 students and teachers	This curriculum provided teachers with guidance for check-ins with students to collaboratively identify what they needed and offered student well-being modules that teachers could use.
Second Step	Elementary and middle school students	This program focuses on goal setting, emotion management, and problem solving for elementary and middle school classrooms.
Resilience in Students in Education (RISE)	K–12 students	This program includes interactive live broadcast lessons guiding students to acknowledge feelings of anxiety and depression and to use healthy coping skills. In the study, RISE was part of the school's multi-tiered systems of support and was optional for some students and mandatory for others.

Program name	Target population	Implementation
HĀ	K–12 students, teachers, and the community	This competency-building framework engages students in all grades and their broader community to strengthen a sense of belonging, responsibility, excellence, aloha, and well-being. The framework is rooted in Hawai'ian values, language, culture, and history.
Healthy Habits, Healthy Schools	K–12 students, teachers, and staff	Schools use effective systems to support the physical and social well-being of staff and students in order to positively influence teaching and learning.
Leader in Me	PK–12 students	Students develop leadership and life skills to help them succeed in the 21st century, including goal setting, critical thinking, listening and speaking, and working collaboratively in groups.

In some instances ($n = 3$), districts added instructional time to accommodate student well-being programming. This finding is confirmed by results from the 2021 American Panel Survey, which revealed that 20% of districts dedicated additional class time, making it the most common change made among districts that amended their school schedules (Schwartz & Diliberti, 2021).

Providing wraparound services

Wraparound services are comprehensive supports that aim to serve students and their families with mental health, behavior, and basic needs, such as food assistance. Several of the articles reviewed ($n = 9$) described strategies similar to a whole-child approach used by community partnership schools (Choi et al., 2021; Heyward et al., 2021; F. A. Jones & Chambers, 2021; Kress, 2020; McKittrick & Tuchman, 2020; Pollack et al., 2021; Schwartz & Diliberti, 2021; Tremmel et al., 2020). These interventions focused on providing robust wraparound support for students and their families. Attention to whole-child development was the focus of these schools because they believed students did not have the capacity to properly engage in school if they were experiencing a more unstable home life. In these environments, students and their families are eligible to receive food assistance, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits, and goods and services related to housing, employment, and mental health (Kress, 2020; Pollack et al., 2021).

Increasing the number of staff and staff resources

Hiring additional staff

Eight of the 36 studies discussed hiring additional staff members to support student well-being, such as psychologists, social workers, administrators, mental health facilitators, and SEL coordinators (e.g., Diliberti & Schwartz, 2021; Heyward et al., 2021; Kress, 2020; Marshall, 2022). According to the American School District Panel Survey, in spring 2022, districts reported plans to expand the hiring of school counselors (49%), social workers (47%), and school psychologists (34%; Diliberti & Schwartz, 2022).

Enhancing student well-being and crisis training for staff

Six studies discussed hiring new or additional staff and enhancing teachers' skills through trainings on student well-being to assist in identifying and supporting students' mental and emotional needs (e.g., Diliberti & Schwartz, 2022; Heyward et al., 2021; Trombly et al., 2022). For example, one district trained staff and counselors for 1 hour each month to address the emerging and ongoing needs of students (Tremmel et al., 2020).

Providing resources for educators

In addition to providing increased staff, training, and supports for teachers and staff, a few studies ($n = 3$) illuminated general resources for educators to enhance student well-being. These resources were produced by a range of organizations including state education agencies and nonprofits. Exhibit 4 provides a summary of the identified resources.

Exhibit 4. Summary of Identified Student Well-being Resources

Resource	Target population	Description
New Jersey Department of Education Learning Acceleration Guide	Students, teachers, and administrators	This guide compiled a compendium of student well-being learning resources, principles, and practices to help prepare local education agencies to reopen for the 2021–2022 school year (New Jersey Department of Education, 2021).
TRAILS Coping With COVID-19^a	Students and mental health professionals	The Transforming Research into Action to Improve the Lives of Students (TRAILS) program in Michigan produced a guide for social workers and counselors to deliver cognitive behavioral therapy–based mental health services across Michigan schools (and has been used in many other states; Rodriguez-Quintana et al., 2021).

Resource	Target population	Description
<u>ABRITE's framework for Individualized behavior and Board Certified Behavior Analyst support services</u>	Students receiving special education services	The ABRITE Organization's framework for individualized behavior and Board Certified Behavior Analyst support services advocated for, created, and implemented an intervention model that would allow students receiving special education services to access the behavior-analytic education supports that were available prepandemic in a remote environment (Frederick et al., 2020).

^a The specific resource reviewed (TRAILS Coping With COVID-19) is no longer available. The entry is linked to the general SEL curriculum developed by TRAILS.

Integrating strategies into existing student support infrastructure

Multi-Tiered Systems of Support

Five studies in our review noted integrating student well-being practices into their multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) continuous improvement framework to collect and monitor student data, identify gaps, and create solutions. By using universal screenings and data monitoring, schools enhanced their ability to provide targeted supports, interventions, and accommodations in both academic and behavior domains to students. For example, one district incorporated a student well-being curriculum into its MTSS framework that was either optional or mandatory for students, depending on the tier of support in which they were grouped (McKittrick & Tuchman, 2020). Further, the Hawaii Department of Education (2021) reported statewide use of the Hawai'i MTSS, which utilizes systems, data, and evidence-based practices to increase well-being and academic success for students.

STRATEGY SPOTLIGHT: ASSISTING RETURNING STUDENTS THROUGH TIERED SUPPORTS

Berner-Wallen (2022) conducted a case study to examine how one school approached returning students to the classroom, building relationships, and fostering resiliency by taking the following actions:

- amended orientation practices for newcomers by connecting them to a support team aimed at helping students adapt to the school environment, build relationships, and set students up for success
- connected with parents and caregivers of students during the summer prior to the start of the school year, gathering information on supports needed for their students
- monitored student progress and met regularly to discuss and determine best strategies for those needing extra support, which could include restructuring students' schedules, seeking additional services, counseling, and monitoring students for service referrals

Individual check-ins and home visits

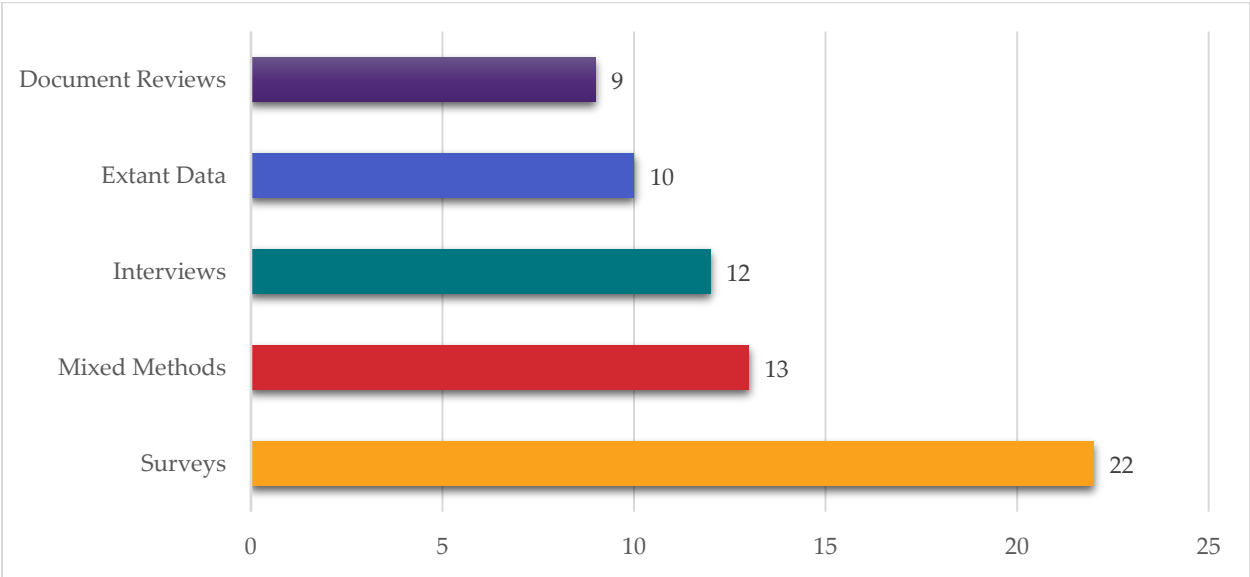
Monitoring and addressing student well-being through targeted supports was the second most prominent theme among articles reviewed (see Table A2 in the appendix for a list of all studies reviewed for this synthesis). Two of the most common targeted approaches were individual student well-being check-ins, such as additional conferences with parents and caregivers or weekly meetings between families in need of additional help and an assigned case worker (see, e.g., Pollack et al., 2021), and home visits from teachers, school counselors, family liaisons, and social workers to, for example, reach chronically absent students to understand the barriers keeping them from attending their classes (see, e.g., Choi et al., 2021).

➤ **Since the onset of the pandemic, what kind of research was conducted on these student well-being strategies?**

Across all the categories, findings show that included studies drew on a multitude of sources

including survey responses, interview and focus group data, extant data, and document reviews (Exhibit 5).

Exhibit 5. Research Methods Used in Studies Reviewed for the Landscape Analysis



Research findings were primarily descriptive, and the majority of reports did not include a planned evaluation. Seventeen of the 36 reports reviewed indicated or anticipated positive outcomes associated with strategies implemented to support student well-being. Five of the reviewed reports noted academic benefits, and four reports indicated improvements to students’ well-being, as summarized in Exhibit 6.

Exhibit 6. Findings on Student Well-being Strategies and Interventions

Finding	Reports
Academic benefits Reported improvements in student performance, engagement, and/or graduation rates	5
Student well-being - Focus on benefits for students’ well-being outcomes and school climate - Findings related to measurements of depression and anxiety and quality of life scores	4

➤What strategies worked and for whom?

We do not know. Although many states, districts, and schools reported focusing on student well-being in response to the pandemic, we found very few studies of the effectiveness of student well-being strategies during our comprehensive review; none of

the studies rise to the rigor of promising evidence as defined by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA; see Exhibit 7).

Exhibit 7. Criteria for the Four Every Student Succeeds Act Tiers of Evidence

ESSA evidence criterion	Strong (tier 1)	Moderate (tier 2)	Promising (tier 3)	Demonstrates a rationale (tier 4)
Study design	Well-designed and -implemented experimental	Well-designed and -implemented quasi-experimental	Well-designed and -implemented correlational	Well-specified logic model
Significant positive outcome	+	+	+	An evaluation is planned or underway
No overriding negative outcomes^a	+	+	+	N/A
Large, multisite sample^b	+	+	Not required	Not required
Context overlap	Population and setting	Population or setting	Not required	Not required

^a From other well-designed and -implemented experimental or quasi-experimental studies.

^b A large sample is considered to be 350 or more students, and a multisite sample is considered to be more than one school or college campus.

There are likely many reasons for this result. First, there was no provision for evaluating pandemic responses in the federal Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) investment. Second, district and school leaders and educators faced immense levels of stress as they pivoted to online, hybrid, and other learning formats during the pandemic. In the midst of an emergency, the focus, rightly, was on safety, health, and adapting to the changing environment—seeing this as a learning opportunity was not the focus. Third, conducting research, especially rigorous research, requires thoughtful planning and collaboration or engagement of leaders, educators, students, and families. There simply was not

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS GOAL

The overarching goal of the RESTART Network's landscape analysis is identifying the needs and activities related to COVID-19 recovery efforts across the country. Central to our search is identifying and documenting evaluations of the strategies and activities being implemented in schools in order to understand what strategies were working, for whom, and under what conditions.

enough time. Even in cases where relationships existed in researcher practitioner partnerships, like our [core research teams](#), engagement of research participants was very challenging.

➤What research are we keeping an eye on?

Although the current scan did not uncover rigorous studies of student well-being strategies, the American Institutes for Research® and the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) have partnered to evaluate Learning Renewal, as part of the RESTART Network.

The Learning Renewal program adopted by ISBE is a multicomponent approach to accelerate learning and recovery from the pandemic. Student well-being is a critical first step to ensure other investments in instruction are well received by students and staff who may be stressed or disengaged. Learning Renewal comprises (1) seven SEL Hubs across the state that provide professional development, training, and support to districts and schools; (2) Resilience Education to Advance Community Healing (REACH), which provides training on trauma-responsive schools; and (3) Community Partnership Grants, which provide funding for mental health and trauma-responsive practices to promote well-being for students, staff, and families.

The ISBE website provides detailed information about the Learning Renewal program, the REACH program, and a map of the seven SEL Hubs housed within six Regional Offices of Education across Illinois.

➤Want to share your research?

The RESTART Network aims to discover, synthesize, and amplify strategies implemented to help students, staff, and schools recover from the devastating effects of the pandemic in terms of lost learning time and isolation. To this end, the RESTART Network continues to gather studies and evaluations on pandemic recovery in a [registry](#) to support policymakers, leaders, and practitioners in their efforts to accelerate learning and recovery. We are interested in planned, ongoing, and completed evaluations focused on pandemic recovery efforts using any type of research design, at any stage of completeness, conducted by any evaluators, and regardless of the funding source or dissemination plans.

The information gathered from the scanned and coded articles and approved state ESSER spending plans were used to create an [interactive map](#) of recovery efforts across all 50 states, providing information on recovery strategies across seven topic areas and the grade levels and target population for which the strategies are being implemented. Because the scan is ongoing, more strategies and activities will be added throughout the grant period.

The screenshot shows a web-based interactive map interface. At the top, there are three tabs: 'Topic', 'Population', and 'Grade'. Below each tab is a search bar with a placeholder text and a clear button (X). The 'Topic' tab is currently selected. Below the search bars is a map of the United States with state abbreviations. A legend at the bottom left indicates that the map shows 'Select a state or territory from the map or below'. Below the map is a 'Clear state' button and a 'Select a state' dropdown menu. There is also a 'Clear map' button.

➤ A call to action

The federal government poured an unprecedented amount of funding into the nation's educational system to assist it in recovering from the effects of the pandemic-related school closures. Many are asking how these funds were used and whether this investment achieved its aim. However, we simply don't have good answers to these questions yet. Evaluation of these investments was optional, unlike competitions such as the Education Innovation Research (EIR) and Supporting Effective Educator Development (SEED) grant programs. Further, rigorous research takes time, methodological rigor, content expertise, and resources to fund the work.

We know a lot about what worked, for whom, and under what circumstances before the pandemic, and now we need more research to understand what works postpandemic. Not just in terms of recovery efforts, but in terms of what innovative strategies worked at different phases of school closures, including what strategies worked (and did not work) when most of the country was fully remote, what worked for a safe return to buildings, and what worked and continues to work to help students make up lost learning time and properly address student and staff well-being now that the majority of the country is back in the classroom.

This evidence will be critical to understand how best to serve students who experience disrupted learning due to any number of factors. With natural disasters becoming more frequent and severe (Vernick, 2024), the need for rigorous evidence extends beyond whether there will be another pandemic.

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Appendix

Exhibit A1. Student Well-being Interventions That Meet the What Works Clearinghouse Standards

Intervention name	Program description	Grade level	Outcome domain (grade level, tier of evidence)
<u>Reducing Behavior Problems in the Elementary School Classroom (Practice Guide)</u>	Offers preventions, implementation, and schoolwide strategies that can be used to reduce problematic behavior that interferes with students' ability to attend to and engage fully in instructional activities.	K–6	Recommendations: • Identify the specifics of a problem and the conditions that prompt and reinforce it (promising evidence) • Modify the classroom learning environment to decrease problem behavior (promising evidence) • Teach and reinforce new skills to increase appropriate behavior and preserve a positive classroom climate (promising evidence) • Draw on relationships with professional colleagues and students' families for continued guidance and support (promising evidence) • Assess whether schoolwide behavior problems warrant adopting schoolwide strategies or programs and, if so, implement ones shown to reduce negative and foster positive interactions (promising evidence)
<u>Building Decision Skills</u>	Raise students' awareness of ethics, help them gain experience developing core values, and give them strategies for dealing with ethical dilemmas.	12	• Knowledge, Attitudes, & Values (12, Promising Evidence)
<u>Caring School Community</u>	A multiyear school improvement program that promotes core values, prosocial behavior, and a schoolwide feeling of community.	K–6	• Academic Achievement (K–6, Promising Evidence) • Behavior (K–6, Promising Evidence) • Knowledge, Attitudes, & Values (K–6, Promising Evidence)

Intervention name	Program description	Grade level	Outcome domain (grade level, tier of evidence)
<u>Check & Connect</u>	A dropout prevention strategy that relies on close monitoring of school performance, mentoring, case management, and other supports.	9–12	• Staying in School (9–12, Promising Evidence) • Progressing in School (9, Promising Evidence)
<u>Class-Wide Function-Related Intervention Teams (CW-FIT)</u>	A classroom management strategy designed to help teachers create a positive learning environment by decreasing disruptive behavior and improving social skills and prosocial behaviors among students.	PK–10	• Student Behavior (K–10, Strong Evidence) • Teacher Practice (PK–7, Promising Evidence)
<u>Connect with Kids (Character Education)</u>	Promotes prosocial attitudes and positive behaviors by teaching core character values.	3–12	• Behavior (3–12, Promising Evidence)
<u>Early Risers (Children Identified With or at Risk for Emotional Disturbance)</u>	A multiyear prevention program for children demonstrating early aggressive and disruptive behavior; the model includes two child-focused components and two parent/family components.	K–2	• Academic Achievement (K–2, Moderate Evidence) • External Behavior (K–2, Moderate Evidence) • Social Outcomes (K–2, Moderate Evidence)
<u>Facing History and Ourselves (Character Education)</u>	Promotes core character education values and helps middle and high school students develop moral reasoning skills.	8	• Knowledge, Attitudes, & Values (8, Promising Evidence)
<u>Fast Track: Elementary School (Children Identified With or at Risk for Emotional Disturbance)</u>	A comprehensive intervention program designed to reduce conduct problems and promote academic, behavioral, and social improvement for students identified as at risk for long-term antisocial behavior.	K	• Emotional/Internal Behavior (K, Promising Evidence) • External Behavior (K, Promising Evidence) • Reading Achievement (K, Promising Evidence) • Social Outcomes (K, Promising Evidence)

Intervention name	Program description	Grade level	Outcome domain (grade level, tier of evidence)
<u>First Step to Success (Children Identified With or at Risk for Emotional Disturbance)</u>	An early intervention program designed to help children who are at risk for developing aggressive or antisocial behavioral patterns.	K–3	- Emotional/Internal Behavior (K, Promising Evidence) - External Behavior (K–3, Promising Evidence) - Other Academic Performance (1–3, Promising Evidence) - Social Outcomes (1–3, Promising Evidence)
<u>Functional Behavior Assessment-based Interventions</u>	An individualized problem-solving process for addressing student problem behavior.	K–12	- Problem Behavior (K–12, Promising Evidence) - School Engagement (K–12, Promising Evidence)
<u>Good Behavior Game (Study Review Protocol)</u>	A classroom management strategy that aims to improve social skills, minimize disruptive behaviors, and create a positive learning environment.	K–11	- Student Behavior (K–11, Strong Evidence) - Teacher Practice (K–4, Promising Evidence) - Writing Conventions (1–2, Promising Evidence) - Writing Productivity (1–2, Promising Evidence)
<u>Lessons in Character (Character Education)</u>	Promotes knowledge about core character education values and, through that knowledge, shapes positive behaviors and supports academic success.	4–5	- Academic Achievement (4, Promising Evidence) - Knowledge, Attitudes, & Values (4–5, Promising Evidence)
<u>Lovaas Model of Applied Behavior Analysis (Early Childhood Education for Children with Disabilities)</u>	A type of behavioral therapy.	PK	Cognition (PK, Promising Evidence)
<u>Positive Action (Character Education)</u>	Teaches the philosophy that you feel good about yourself when you do positive actions and there is always a positive way to do everything.	K–6	- Academic Achievement (K–6, Promising Evidence) - Behavior (K–6, Promising Evidence)

Intervention name	Program description	Grade level	Outcome domain (grade level, tier of evidence)
<u>Social Skills Training (Early Childhood Education for Children with Disabilities)</u>	Not a specific curriculum, but rather a collection of practices that utilize a behavioral approach to teaching age-appropriate social skills and competencies.	PK	Emotional Development (PK, Promising Evidence)
<u>Too Good for Drugs (TGFD) (Character Education)</u>	Promotes life skills, character values, resistance skills to negative peer influence, and resistance to the use of illegal drugs, alcohol, and tobacco.	3–6	- Behavior (3–4, Promising Evidence) - Knowledge, Attitudes, & Values (3–6, Promising Evidence)
<u>Too Good for Drugs and Violence (TGFD & V) (Character Education)</u>	Promotes prosocial skills, positive character traits, and violence- and drug-free norms.	9–12	Knowledge, Attitudes, & Values (9–12, Promising Evidence)
<u>Too Good for Violence (TGFV) (Character Education)</u>	Promotes character values, social-emotional skills, and healthy beliefs.	3	- Behavior (3, Promising Evidence) - Knowledge, Attitudes, & Values (3, Promising Evidence)

Note. After filtering for the topic, results were selected if they had at least a Tier 3 rating for their “Highest Evidence Tier.” Outcome domain, grade level, and strength of evidence gathered from the evidence snapshot for intervention reports and the recommendations for practice guides.

Exhibit A2. Studies and Corresponding Intervention Types

	Adding curriculum and programming	Integrating well-being strategies into existing systems		Increasing staff/resources			Wraparound services
		Multi-tiered systems of support	Individual check-ins	Hiring of additional staff	Student well-being/crisis training for staff	Providing resources	
Banghart et al., 2021					•		
Brown, 2021	•						
Berner-Wallen, 2022			•				
Carbonari, 2022	•						
Choi et al., 2021			•				•
DeArmond et al., 2021	•						
Diliberti & Schwartz, 2021				•			
Diliberti & Schwartz, 2022			•	•	•		
Fernandez et al., 2021							•
Frederick et al., 2020						•	
Gao et al., 2021	•						
Goerler, 2022	•						•
Hawai'i State Department of Education, 2021			•				

	Adding curriculum and programming	Integrating well-being strategies into existing systems		Increasing staff/resources			Wraparound services
		Multi-tiered systems of support	Individual check-ins	Hiring of additional staff	Student well-being/crisis training for staff	Providing resources	
Heyward & Gill, 2021	•						
Heyward et al., 2021			•	•	•		•
Jones & Chambers, 2021							•
Kress, 2020			•	•			•
Mann, 2021	•						
Marshall, 2022			•	•			
McGuine et al., 2022							•
McKittrick & Tuchman, 2020	•		•				•
Meredith, 2022			•				
National Academy of Education, 2020							•
New Jersey Department of Education, 2021						•	
Nistler, 2022			•				•
Opalka & Lollo, 2021	•			o			

	Adding curriculum and programming	Integrating well-being strategies into existing systems		Increasing staff/resources			Wraparound services
		Multi-tiered systems of support	Individual check-ins	Hiring of additional staff	Student well-being/crisis training for staff	Providing resources	
Pollack et al., 2021			•				•
Rochester & Sanders, 2023	•						
Rodriguez-Quintana et al., 2021			•			•	
Schwartz & Diliberti, 2021	•						•
Shibre & Woodworth, 2021							•
Tillery et al., 2022			•				
Tremmel et al., 2020			•		•		•
Trombly et al., 2022					•		
Whalen et al., 2021							•
Yanoski et al., 2021			•				

Exhibit A3. Strategies by State

State	Number of strategies identified
Nationwide	13
California	5
Connecticut	4
District of Columbia	2
Georgia	1
Hawaii	1
Illinois	1
Kansas	1
Maine	1
Maryland	1
Massachusetts	1
Michigan	2
Missouri	1
Nebraska	1
New Jersey	1
New York	2
North Dakota	2
Pennsylvania	1
Rhode Island	1
South Carolina	2
Tennessee	1
Texas	2
Virginia	3
Washington	2
Wisconsin	1
Wyoming	1
Not Available	2



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The research reported here was supported by the Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, through Grant R305X220009 to the American Institutes for Research. The opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not represent views of the Institute or the U.S. Department of Education.