

A portrait of a woman with long dark hair and glasses, smiling slightly. She is wearing a dark top. The background is a solid teal color.

## From Crisis to Opportunity: Recovering California's Commitment to Equity

### Social Emotional Wellness

**The Challenge:** Before the pandemic, communities of color already had fewer economic opportunities, experienced racist housing practices, and faced discriminatory environments that threaten their safety and contribute to [greater stress and anxiety](#)<sup>1</sup>. Although meant to keep communities safe, school closures left many [students](#)<sup>2</sup>, [families](#)<sup>3</sup>, and [teachers](#)<sup>4</sup> feeling more anxious, overwhelmed, and stressed as they navigate distance learning and their lives at home. A recent [survey](#)<sup>5</sup> of California students by the ACLU of Southern California found that 32% of students who were not receiving mental health services prior to the pandemic feel that they may now require mental health support. In addition to [concerns about their children falling behind academically](#)<sup>6</sup>, many parents experience real fears about how their families will cope during this crisis. [Research](#)<sup>7</sup> shows that students fare better academically when their social, emotional, and mental wellness needs are met. State and education leaders must continue to work swiftly to prioritize social emotional learning (SEL) as they plan for the forthcoming academic year.



The Education Trust–West

# Opportunities for Building Relationships and Nurturing Social Emotional Wellness

### For the Governor, State Leaders, and California Department of Education:

1. **Institute a statewide day of healing.** As [Shawn Ginwright](#)<sup>8</sup> proposes, it is essential to memorialize loss as a result of the pandemic and civil unrest and to restore a sense of well-being for the state.
2. **Create opportunities for families and educators to network, learn, and collaborate** on issues that extend beyond SEL and move toward addressing social, emotional, and academic development (SEAD). These opportunities should explicitly prioritize incorporating an [anti-racist](#)<sup>9</sup> lens to SEAD.
3. **Require that a portion of state and federal coronavirus response funds** be used by districts and schools to support student and adult social emotional wellness. Include flexibility to accommodate the needs of individual district and school communities.

### For School, District, and County Office of Education Leaders:

1. **Institute a day of healing** as a first step to establishing safe and supportive learning environments and memorialize loss as a result of the pandemic and civil unrest. Prioritize an [anti-racist intersectional frame](#)<sup>10</sup> in all conversations centered on healing.
2. **Offer multi-lingual opportunities to engage with families, students, and educators through listening sessions** prior and through the academic year to better understand and prepare for their social emotional wellness needs.
  - Explicitly communicate how information from listening sessions will be used, including follow-up communication on the progress of practice, program, or policy implementation.
  - Prioritize engaging with historically marginalized and racialized stakeholders.
3. **Create safe and supportive environments for students, educators, and families.**
  - **Institute a streamlined process** for students and adults to report mental health concerns as [Davis Joint Unified School District](#) has done.
  - Implement strategies such as creating a **Connection Lists** to ensure each student has, at minimum, one adult in the school building with whom they can build a meaningful and supportive relationship.
  - **Establish educator affinity groups**<sup>11</sup> to support educators of color and engender their retention and leadership in the field.
  - Refer to [CCEE's Distance Learning Playbooks](#), including the section on trauma-informed SEL, as a resource for additional ideas.
4. **Establish meaningful partnerships, centering the needs of historically marginalized groups:**
  - **Work with community-based organizations and mental health providers** to offer direct mental health services to students, families, and educators who do not have access to these services outside of school. Prioritize meeting the needs of Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC), and
  - **Work with institutions of higher education** to support professional learning opportunities—mainly because of their extensive experience with delivering these services remotely—and ensure SEAD is an integral part of teacher preparation programs, administrator preparation programs, and all programs in colleges of education.

<sup>1</sup> Shawn Ginwright, "Coronavirus Underscores Need for Healing America's Racial Divisions," *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 14, 2020, <https://www.sfchronicle.com/opinion/openforum/article/Coronavirus-underscores-need-for-healing-15198316.php>.

<sup>2</sup> Carolyn Jones, "Student Anxiety, Depression Increasing during School Closures, Survey Finds," *EdSource*, May 13, 2020, <https://edsources.org/2020/student-anxiety-depression-increasing-during-school-closures-survey-finds/631224>.

<sup>3</sup> "Education Equity in Crisis: Listening to Parents: The Results of our Statewide Survey of Public School Parents," (Oakland, CA: The Education Trust-West, April 2020), <https://s3-us-east-2.amazonaws.com/edtrustmain/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2017/11/24113810/ETW-K12-Parent-Poll-March-2020.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> Christina Cipriano and Marc Brackett, "Teachers are Anxious and Overwhelmed. They Need SEL Now More Than Ever," *EdSurge*, April 7, 2020, <https://www.edsurge.com/news/2020-04-07-teachers-are-anxious-and-overwhelmed-they-need-sel-now-more-than-ever>.

<sup>5</sup> "Summary of Student Mental Health Survey Results," (Youth Liberty Squad at the ACLU of Southern California, May 2020), <https://www.schoolcounselor-ca.org/Files/Student%20Wellness%20Survey%20Summary%205-08-20.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> "Education Equity in Crisis: Listening to Parents: The Results of our Statewide Survey of Public School Parents," (Oakland, CA: The Education Trust-West, April 2020), <https://s3-us-east-2.amazonaws.com/edtrustmain/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2017/11/24113810/ETW-K12-Parent-Poll-March-2020.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> "School-Based Mental Health Services: Improving Student Learning and Well-Being," *National Association of School Psychologists*, n.d., <https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/mental-health/school-psychology-and-mental-health/school-based-mental-health-services>.

<sup>8</sup> Shawn Ginwright, "Coronavirus Underscores Need for Healing America's Racial Divisions," *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 14, 2020, <https://www.sfchronicle.com/opinion/openforum/article/Coronavirus-underscores-need-for-healing-15198316.php>.

<sup>9</sup> Dena Simmons, "How to be an Antiracist Educator," *Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development*, 61, vol. 10 (October 2019): <http://www.ascd.org/publications/newsletters/education-update/oct19/vol61/num10/How-to-Be-an-Antiracist-Educator.aspx>.

<sup>10</sup> "Using an Anti-Racist Intersectional Frame at CSSP" (Washington, D.C.: Center for the Study of Social Policy, n.d.), <https://cssp.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Antiracist-Frame-12.10.19.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> Farima Pour-Khorshid, "Cultivating Sacred Spaces: A Racial Affinity Group Approach to Support Critical Educators of Color," *Teaching Education* 29 (February 2019): 318-329.

