

# 5 Practical Ways Schools Can Promote Mental Health

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A simple guide to designing school spaces that can improve students' mental outlook post COVID.





As the full impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on student mental health emerges, it's become clear that students of all ages are in a mental health crisis. A 2020 survey by the non-profit Active Minds revealed that 20% of students say their mental health has "significantly worsened" due to the pandemic. And both children and college students report feeling more anxious, depressed, fatigued and distressed.

As school districts use their ESSER and EANS funds to address their students' needs post-pandemic, it's worth considering how physical spaces like classrooms, common areas and even cafeterias can be outfitted to promote better mental health.

Here are 5 practical ways schools can use their ESSER and EANS funds to design spaces that promote better mental health.

# Give access to refuge & personal space

Tranquility rooms, breakout rooms and individual nooks are all spaces that can offer students a reprieve from anxious or stressful situations. These spaces are often dedicated quiet spots that offer privacy or access to calming devices such as fidget spinners, stress balls and coloring books to aid in de-escalation.



## Tranquility rooms ▶

- Offer a variety of soft seating like oversized bean bag chairs and plush floor rockers to help keep students comfortable.
- Decorate with cool-toned colors like blues, greens and greys for a peaceful feel.
- Spacious tabletops allow students to journal, color or partake in other de-escalating activities.



## Breakout rooms ▶

- Use a convenient location so students can access the room quickly in moments of embarrassment or stress.
- Tinted glass or portable room panels allow for instant privacy.
- Offer storage space for personal belongings like backpacks or devices.



## Individual nooks ▶

- Individual nooks in libraries or common areas allow students to get away from the crowd without being totally alone.
- Mobile study carrels offer private workspace that students can move as needed.
- Moveable, sound-absorbing room partitions can instantly reconfigure a space and provide a quiet spot to study or decompress.

# Give access to light & nature

Time spent outdoors is highly beneficial for students' mental, physical and social health. When students learn outdoors, for example, they are often calmer, better able to focus and more enthusiastic, thanks to an immediate boost in serotonin from sunlight. Prioritizing the time students spend outdoors learning, socializing or playing is a sure-fire way to boost mental health.



## Outdoor dining or rest areas ►

- Generously space out benches or picnic tables to offer students more quiet personal space.
- Access to shade structures like umbrellas or canopies help keep students comfortable on hot days.
- Furnishings made with durable, weather-resistant materials like recycled plastic withstand the test of time outdoors.



## Outdoor Classrooms ►

- Lightweight seating options like stumps or stacking stools are easy for students to arrange on the fly.
- Consider incorporating sensory stations like sandboxes, water tables or activity panels.
- Picnic tables with smooth plastic tops allow students to work and are a cinch to clean.



## Playgrounds ►

- Consider incorporating designated age areas or energy level sections to ensure each student has space for their level of play.
- Include multiple types of play, such as active play, sensory play and creative play.
- Use an inclusive design to ensure students of all abilities can use the playground.

# Promote social interaction

It's no secret that social interaction is critical to mental and physical well-being, regardless of age. Studies show that socializing fends off feelings of loneliness and depression, improves self-esteem and even sharpens memory and cognitive skills. Promote student interaction by outfitting centralized common areas, comfortable activity spaces and flexible dining rooms.



## Common areas ▶

- Outfit your common area in an unused, centralized space – like a large hallway, entryway or locker area.
- Use structured soft seating to give students comfortable, portable hang out spots.
- Add whiteboard tables to encourage impromptu brainstorming and notetaking.



## Clubs & activity spaces ▶

- Add a variety of flexible seating like wobble stools or mobile chairs to encourage quick collaboration.
- Keep the space tech-friendly with mobile charging carts for tablets, laptops and other devices.
- Collaborative tables can be pushed together or pulled apart as needed for games and other activities.



## Dining areas ▶

- Offer a variety of seating options like bench tables, booths or café sets to give students a feeling of ownership over where they sit.
- Add access to power and other media for a dining space that's multi-purpose.
- Outdoor dining options offer students the mental health benefits of sunlight and fresh air.

## Allow access to caring adults

Studies show that students who have access to caring adults in school – like a counselor, tutor or nurse – engage in less risky behavior, have increased levels of motivation and higher psychological well-being. Be sure your school's resource room, counselor's room or nurses' office is equipped with the furnishings necessary for successful visits.



### Resource rooms ►

- Often a multi-purpose space designed for small group work, tutoring sessions, counseling and more.
- Offer mobile activity tables to make collaboration a cinch.
- Add a mobile charging cart to keep laptops and tablets up and running.



### Nurses' office ►

- Consider using kid-friendly wall art, stickers or coloring books to make students feel more at ease during a visit.
- Vinyl treatment beds provide a place for students to rest comfortably.
- Use a mobile stool for quick and easy maneuverability.

# Allow students to explore self-efficacy

Learning spaces that allow students to embrace their autonomy can boost their self-esteem and leave them feeling empowered to take on more challenging goals. Makerspaces, music rooms and art rooms are all examples of spaces that promote the growth of self-efficacy through risk-taking, creativity, experimentation and more.



## Makerspaces ►

- Ample, heavy-duty workspaces allow students to build and experiment comfortably.
- Restricted areas can help keep students safe from potentially dangerous machines.
- Use mobile storage carts with removable bins to keep supplies accessible and organized.



## Music rooms ►

- Offer music chairs specifically designed to support students' posture and breathing as they practice.
- A music-lined, mobile markerboard provides space for students to write and share music notes.
- Consider adding a colorful, music-themed rug to brighten the space.



## Art rooms ►

- Incorporate seating that's colorful and flexible (like plastic stacking stools or adjustable-height stools) to create a space that's warm and inviting.
- Use multiple bulletin boards to proudly display student work.
- A portable sink makes it quick and easy for students to wash up after messy projects.

### Sources:

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8747859/>

<https://www.healthcentral.com/article/mental-health-effects-of-covid-19-on-students>

## Furnishings we recommend



### Mobile school chairs ▶

Offer students flexibility and independence to learn where they're most comfortable.



### Collaborative Desks ▶

With unique shapes and casters, these desks make student teamwork a breeze.



### Soft seating ▶

Available in a variety of sizes and shapes, soft seating keeps students comfortable and spaces flexible.



### Whiteboard tables ▶

Encourage impromptu drawing or notetaking, plus reduce the need for paper handouts.



### Room dividers ▶

Carve out quiet, private areas in large spaces like gymnasiums or common areas.



### Cafeteria furniture ▶

Cafeteria furniture offers students a comfortable place to dine, work, socialize and play.





### Outdoor Furniture ▶

Allow students to reap the benefits of sunshine and fresh air during school hours.



### Makerspace furniture ▶

Keep makerspaces fun, functional and safe with sturdy makerspace furnishings.



### Classroom storage ▶

Sturdy classroom bookshelves and cabinets keep learning spaces organized and clutter free.



### Study Carrels ▶

Available in different configurations, study carrels offer students private, cozy workspace.



### Charging Carts ▶

Mobile charging carts ensure classroom devices are always charged and ready for use.

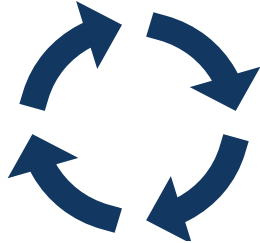


### PPE & Cleaning Products ▶

Help students and staff stay safe from unwanted bacteria, germs and viruses.

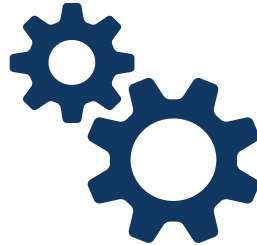
# Kick-start your ESSER funds project with our expert service.

Our specialists are ready to help you adapt your school spaces for safer, healthier learning with enterprise-level project services:



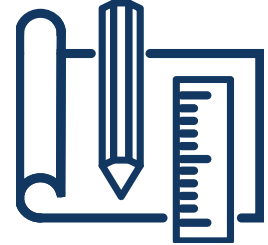
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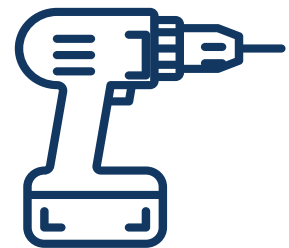
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