

Project Overview

The **Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)** is providing significant funding to the state of California, through the Department of Health Care Services (DHCS), to implement CalHOPE, a comprehensive response to COVID-19. **Sacramento County Office of Education (SCOE)** is coordinating **\$6.8 million** from FEMA and DHCS to facilitate a statewide Social Emotional Learning Community of Practice (SEL CoP) in 2020–2021.

More than 80% of the funding will be directly passed through to the 58 county offices of education (COEs) to support building SEL capacity and supporting districts this year. Each COE will receive \$100,000 to implement an SEL CoP with a special focus on building capacity for social emotional competency and crisis response in the districts they serve. SCOE and the Orange County Department of Education (OCDE) are partnering with DHCS, FEMA, Mental Health Oversight Accountability Commission (MHSOAC), and UC Berkeley's Greater Good Science Center to create this statewide Social Emotional Learning Community of Practice (SEL CoP).

This FEMA grant will provide the opportunity to leverage a unique and expanding partnership between and among many county offices of education. Educators throughout the state will be prepared to be first-line responders providing a strong foundation for a sophisticated and sustainable system of multi-tiered behavioral health promotion in schools to respond to this ongoing disaster.

Background

Prior to COVID-19, youth in communities throughout the state were experiencing escalating rates of depression, anxiety, substance use, and suicide. As a result of the pandemic, students are experiencing further threats to their physical safety, their psychological well-being, and their economic security. This increase in adverse childhood experiences is due to a combination of factors:



- Isolation from peers and trusted adults
- Unmitigated exposure to bullying through social channels
- Extreme family stress due to stay-at-home orders, unemployment, and social unrest
- Premature autonomy and child neglect as families navigate competing priorities during school closures
- Fear of illness for oneself and the worry of losing a loved one



This level of disruption has the potential to result in cascading developmental effects across the life course, with profound health, social, and economic consequences. As COVID-19 has disproportionately impacted communities of color and areas of low socio-economic status (SES), our focus will be to empower the educators working most closely within these communities. Fortunately, California has an existing network of SEL Communities of Practice that is poised to train teachers and staff to deliver psychological disaster response as the new school year unfolds and evolves.

Goals

1. Prepare educators to be first-line responders to protect, build and/or restore the psychological well-being of children and youth during the 2020–2021 academic year.
2. Support teachers and staff as they strengthen their own mindsets and address any existing personal traumas in order to build and strengthen their capacity to address the diverse needs of students.
3. Build upon the strong foundation provided by existing SEL CoPs to quickly and efficiently share training, promote evidence-based practices, and encourage cultural adaptations which address opportunity gaps and disproportionality.
4. Use a virtual platform to bring all 58 counties to scale.



A System of Support

During distance learning, and as students transition from social isolation to a blended in-person school day, their social-emotional needs may be overwhelming. Teachers and staff will require training and support to address student needs as front-line responders to mass trauma. California’s system of K-12 education is organized into 58 county offices of education, which in turn support 977 local school districts, serving 6,299,451 students. California’s local education agencies (LEAs) and county

offices of education (COEs) already work across localities in *Communities of Practice* to share training, evidence-based practices, and cultural adaptations which address opportunity gaps and disproportionality.



The Northern California regional response will be coordinated by the SCOE, while the Southern California regional response will be coordinated by the OCDE. This will ensure funding is quickly disseminated to other LEAs and COEs to allow for urgently needed training and technical assistance to take place.

Schools are uniquely positioned to reach every California child, leveraging the daily social contact between schools and students to address, or otherwise triage, student needs. SEL CoP Student Support identifies three tiers of psychological

disaster response and support for students in need of SEL intervention as a result of COVID. At Tier 1, all teachers and staff are well-positioned to nurture student resilience. Tier 2 interventions identify and support children experiencing more serious social emotional difficulties. Tier 3 support connects students directly to the community mental health system. The SEL CoP will provide support/training for the first two tiers of psychological disaster response.

Tier 1 – Social and Emotional Learning

Tier 1 establishes a foundation of Social and Emotional Learning for all children, using the science of positive emotions (e.g., compassion, gratitude, happiness) to build and reinforce psychological resources for resilience in the context of ongoing disruption. This strength-based, skills-promoting, universal approach, is appropriate given:

- the variety of individual experiences of the pandemic,
- our intention for a broadly implemented intervention that indirectly touches every child,
- the ongoing and evolving nature of a disaster-in-progress, and
- the desire to integrate strategies into the core mission and structures of schools.



Supports for delivering SEL will be customized, with the most intensive supports provided to schools where children have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19, including areas serving low socio-economic status (SES) students and communities of color.

The plan for universal supports is to extend upon the evidence-informed models of psychological first aid (PFA) and Skills for Psychological Recovery (SPR) that are common in disaster behavioral health responses. UC Berkeley's Greater Good Science Center (GGSC) will lead the development and distribution of Tier 1 content statewide. The GGSC is unique in its commitment to both science and practice. They sponsor

and track groundbreaking scientific research on social and emotional well-being and disseminate and apply this research widely. The GGSC will:

- repurpose and refine their existing resources,
- create supplemental content, and
- deliver a high-quality, virtual professional development experience to California educators in order to meet this challenge without delay.

The GGSC is uniquely experienced and prepared to provide statewide virtual professional development in response to a prolonged or recurrent need for social distancing.



Tier 2 – Culturally Relevant Crisis Counseling Training

Tier 2 supports will focus specifically on the needs of foster youth, youth in poverty, and youth of color, who have been disproportionately burdened by the pandemic and resulting financial fallout. Communities of Practice will ensure that programs are adapted for cultural relevance and affirmation. Racial disparities in education, health, and employment that have been exacerbated and made increasingly visible by the pandemic will guide the implementation of the intervention. Targeted Tier 2 supports extend and build evidence-informed Youth Mental Health First Aid approaches that are common in disaster behavioral health responses.

Key Activities and Milestones

The grant period will extend for nine months from the start date.

The delivery model has two layers/components:

1. Statewide – County leadership representatives (leads) come together to plan, spotlight what’s working.
2. County-level Communities of Practice supported by their leads – The plan for the county-level CoPs is to identify and establish expectations, norms, hope, and dreams during an initial meeting before the end of the year. The actual professional development (PD) and delivery of “tools” will begin in January.



Data Analysis and Next Steps

UC Berkeley will assess the impact of their work for continuous quality improvement purposes and to contribute to our knowledge base of best practices in disaster behavioral health responses for children and youth.

The Communities of Practice in the 58 counties will be surveyed at the end of their trainings to:

1. Gather information to inform upcoming sessions and gain an understanding of the current status of the initiative.
2. Better understand the statewide capacity of SEL leadership and expertise as we look to create sustainability and capacity.

PD modules and related resources that are developed will be available beyond the 9-month grant period.

For More Information

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