



**NEW LONDON**  
PUBLIC SCHOOLS



*Mental Health Services Department*  
*March 25, 2024*



*united in excellence*

# Goal of Department

## To support the positive mental health development of students and staff

- Mental health includes the promotion of wellness, social-emotional and behavioral health but also encompasses wellness promotion; social, emotional, and behavioral health; and the ability to cope with life's challenges.
- A comprehensive school mental health system is built on the foundation of a full complement of school and district professionals, including specialized instructional support personnel who are well-trained to support the mental health needs of students in the school setting.
  - Psychologists
  - Social Workers:
  - In tandem with
    - School Counselors
    - Behavior Interventionists
    - Wellness Interventionists
    - Attendance Motivators

# Focus Areas

- Social-Emotional Learning
- Counseling Services
- Partnerships
- Staff Supports
- Trauma Informed Practices
- Family Engagement
- Crisis Mitigation and Support
- Positive Behavioral Approach
- Evaluation Systems
- Trainings/Professional Development

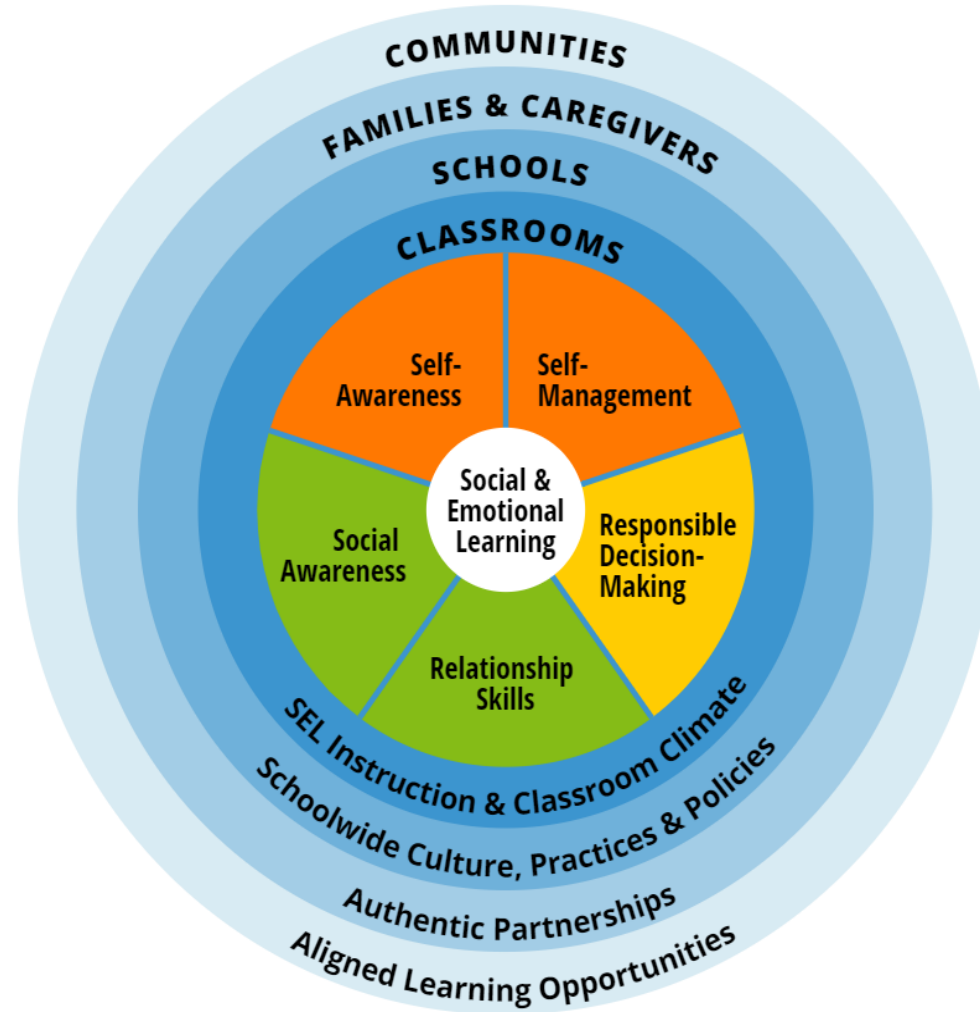
# *What does this have to do with education?*

- Improved classroom behavior
- Increased ability to manage stress, depression, anxiety, etc.
- Better attitudes about themselves, others, and school including enhanced self-efficacy, confidence, persistence, empathy, connection and commitment to school, and a sense of purpose
- Improved test scores, grades, and attendance
- Increased high school graduation rates, readiness for postsecondary education, career success, positive family and work relationships, better mental health, reduced criminal behavior, and engaged citizenship
- Help students realize their full potential and work productively

# Social-Emotional Learning

- Social-emotional learning (SEL) is the process of developing the self-awareness, strong social-emotional skills are better able to cope with everyday challenges and benefit academically, professionally, and socially.
- NLPS follows the CASEL framework of social-emotional skill development.
  - self-awareness
  - self-management
  - social-awareness
  - relationship skills
  - responsible decision-making skills
- Tier 1 supports promote behavioral, social, and emotional development to prevent challenges from emerging and ensure students have the skills needed for meeting expectations.
- At Tier 2 and 3, intensive evidence-based supports which may include wraparound supports or intensive instruction facilitated by qualified support staff, community partners, or other professionals.

# Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)



# *Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) Curriculum*

- Elementary
  - Second Step
  - Calm Classroom
- Middle School
  - Second Step
  - Calm Classroom
- High School
  - School Connect

# Social-Emotional Learning Curriculum

## SEL PreK-8th Grade Curriculum

- Students in grades PreK-8 utilize Second Step as their primary SEL curriculum. Second Step provides evidenced based instruction in social and emotional learning with units on skills for learning, empathy, emotion management, friendship skills, and problem solving. Second Step uses four key strategies to reinforce skill development: brain builder games (to build executive function), weekly theme activities, reinforcing activities, and home links. Second Step also connects new skills to other areas in the curriculum (e.g., literacy, arts, dramatic arts) and provides a structure for each day of the week.
- Students also participate in daily techniques through Calm Classroom. Calm Classroom is a research-based program that builds students' self-awareness, mental focus, and emotional/behavioral regulation skills through daily mindfulness practice. Mindfulness is the cornerstone of mental health and lays the foundation for the development of core social-emotional competencies.

## SEL Grades 9-12 Curriculum

- Students in grade 9-12 utilize School Connect as their primary SEL curriculum. School Connect is an evidence based multimedia curriculum designed to improve high school students' social, emotional, and academic skills and strengthen relationships among students and between students and teachers. The program consists of four modules based on CASEL's Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Competencies identified by researchers as critical to success in school, the workplace, and life in general: social awareness, self-awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision making.

# Tiered Counseling Supports

- Small group, problem focused counseling
- Social skills development
- Individual counseling based on student's specific needs
- Trauma therapy- Cognitive Behavior Intervention for Trauma in Schools (CBITS), Bounce Back and STRONG
- In-building agency supports through Child and Family Agency and Safe Futures
- Referrals to community agency partners
  - NLPS Resource Map constantly updated and shared
- Centervention & 211 partnerships
- SRBI/MTSS Referrals
- Music Therapy

# Partnerships

## Safe Futures

- NLPS is committed to their partnership with the team from Safe Futures to bring important classroom lessons to our middle and high school students. Some of these topics include: conflict resolution, problem solving, boundaries & healthy relationships, identifying communication styles & self-regulations.

# Partnerships

## 211 and 988

- 2-1-1 is a free, confidential information and referral service that connects people to essential health and human services 24 hours a day, seven days a week online and over the phone. 2-1-1 is fully certified in crisis intervention by the American Association of Suicidology and is certified by The Alliance of Information and Referral Systems (AIRS).
- The 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline (formerly known as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline) offers 24/7 call, text and chat access to trained crisis counselors who can help people experiencing suicidal, substance use, and/or mental health crisis, or any other kind of emotional distress. People can also dial 988 if they are worried about a loved one who may need crisis support.

## School Based Health Center

- All New London Public Schools have a School-Based Health Center on site.
- A School-Based Health center is different from the school nurse's office and your community primary care doctor, but works in collaboration with them. Students must be signed up for School-Based Health Center services by a parent/legal guardian. Health insurance is billed for services provided, but there is no cost to the family (no co-pays, deductible costs, or out-of-pocket expenses).
- Each School-Based Health Center has a Nurse Practitioner (APRN) and a Masters level Mental Health Clinician.

# Partnerships

## Music Therapy

- New London Public School is partnering up with the Eastern Connecticut Symphony Orchestra to bring this opportunity to our students.
- The mission of the Eastern Connecticut Symphony Orchestra (ECSO) is to inspire, educate, and connect our communities through live orchestral music.
- For selected participants, this multi-week program is designed to use music to promote health and wellness, including mindfulness and listening to foster resilience and give students tools to deal with challenges.
- We are very excited to present this program to our students and to be able to continue the work surrounding social and emotional learning in our schools.

## Centervention

- Centervention provides game-based stories that gather data to monitor progress and reinforce learning with supportive lessons.
- All lessons are online and interactive and work to help students in grades K-8 improve their social and emotional skills to help support success in the classroom.

# *Additional Current/Future Partnerships*

- The Cove – training and support in grief counseling.
- Project Courage – training and support in substance abuse and mental health.
- ALICE – training and partnership with the NLPS to review and revise safety procedures, drills/scenarios & protocols.
- TEAMSS (UCONN) - training and partnership to work with current 5th graders that would benefit from being a part of a supportive group during their transition into the 6th grade.
- Scott Driscoll – internet safety presentation for families, staff and students.
- The National Center for Safe Supportive Schools (NCS3) & The National Child Stress Network (NCTSN) - 2-year national learning collaborative that accelerates and spreads innovation and improvement in the advancement of culturally responsive and trauma-informed school mental health systems.
- Urgent Crisis Center - UCFS Healthcare's Mobile Crisis Intervention Services (MCIS) & Child and Family Agency of SECT's (CFA) & Urgent Crisis Center (UCC) are statewide, voluntary mental/behavioral health and substance use crisis stabilization programs for youth and their families experiencing a mental health, behavioral, and/or substance use crisis.

# Staff Supports & Training

- Ongoing professional development in all department areas
- In-classroom coaching as needed with curriculum implementation & behavioral management
- Teacher mental health support and referrals, as needed
- Ongoing SRBI/MTSS partnership
- Upcoming/recent trainings
  - LEAP Visits (District Attendance)
  - Safety Care (District)
  - NARCAN (Mental Health & Admin)
  - VLS – Mental Health Grant
  - BounceBack
  - CBITS
  - STRONG
  - Updates to Transgender and Gender Identity Law

# Trauma Informed Practices

- NLPS is committed to the ongoing learning and implementation of trauma informed practices across all our school buildings.
- In a trauma-informed school, all children feel safe physically, socially, emotionally, and academically.
- The adults in the school community are prepared to recognize and respond to those who have been impacted by traumatic stress. Those adults include administrators, teachers, staff, and parents.
- The goal is the full integration of knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices so that all students can succeed.
- NLPS has been a trauma informed district for several years.
- Most recently NLPS mental health staff led a K-12 Paraprofessional training in Trauma Informed Practices.

*Trauma is any experience that leaves a person feeling hopeless, helpless, and fearing for their life/survival or safety. Students who have been impacted by trauma operate at a continual high level of stress.*

Trauma Informed Practices are a mindset or culture of practice, rather than a curriculum.

- Includes awareness of the impact of trauma on the brain and learning, shift in understanding of behavior, environmental and adult behaviors that influence responses, and strategies that can support adaptive classroom practices

# Virtual Learning Sessions (VLS)

## Topics and Objectives

VLS 1: Foundations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Name the core features of comprehensive school mental health systems</li><li>• Understand what research says about the impact of school mental health on students and school outcomes</li><li>• Reflect on strengths and areas for growth for comprehensive school mental health systems</li><li>• Develop at least one action step to advance a comprehensive school mental health system framework</li></ul>
VLS 2: Understanding Trauma and Adversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Define trauma and identify at least 3 types of traumatic exposure</li><li>• Describe how traumatic exposures impact the brain development and learning</li><li>• Describe the connection between structural racism, inequity, and childhood trauma</li></ul>
VLS 3: Defining CARE (Cultural Responsiveness, Anti-Racism, Equity)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Understand the importance of CARE in schools</li><li>• Learn key definitions related to CARE</li><li>• Understand how inequities play a role in schools and other systems</li></ul>
VLS 4: Cultural Humility and Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Define 2-3 foundational terms related to cultural humility and awareness</li><li>• Reflect on your own personal identity, values, and beliefs</li><li>• Develop an understanding of why cultural humility is important for promoting safe supportive schools</li></ul>
VLS 5: Engaging Students, Families, and Communities as Partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Describe why authentic student, family, and community voices are critical for safe supportive schools</li><li>• Name two best practice strategies for engagement of students, families, and communities</li></ul>
VLS 6: Educator Well-Being	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Define individual, collective, and organization (school) well-being</li><li>• Identify reasons to promote school staff well-being</li><li>• Describe the impact of burnout, compassion fatigue and secondary traumatic stress</li></ul>
VLS 7: Teaming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Understand how school/district teams contribute to safe and supportive schools</li><li>• Describe 2-3 best practices for building effective teams</li><li>• Describe how teams can advance culturally responsive, anti-racist, equitable (CARE) practices</li></ul>
VLS 8: Needs Assessment and Resource Mapping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Describe how to conduct a Needs Assessment (NA) and Resource Mapping (RM) of a comprehensive school mental health system</li><li>• List at least 3 ways to integrate cultural responsiveness, anti-racism, and equity practices into NA and RM progress</li></ul>

# Virtual Learning Sessions (VLS)

VLS 9: Best Practices for Mental Health Screening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Understand the best practices in trauma-informed and culturally responsive mental health screening</li> <li>Describe the key tasks and activities involved in the process of creating a district/school mental health screening plan</li> <li>Anticipate 1-2 possible barriers to implementing mental health screening and identify strategies to mitigate those challenges</li> <li>Utilize the Psychological First Aid (Listen, Protect, and Connect; PFA-LPC) model to respond to students in need of help</li> </ul>
VLS 10: Promoting the Well-Being of All Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Understand the meaning and purpose of promoting student well-being</li> <li>Review Tier One frameworks and strategies for promoting student well-being</li> <li>Reflect on strengths and challenges of existing Tier 1 supports within the district</li> </ul>
VLS 11: Trauma Informed, Healing Centered Schools: Building the Foundation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Understand the difference between a traditional and trauma-informed approach used in schools</li> <li>Identify characteristics of schools along a “trauma-informed” school continuum</li> <li>Describe 2-3 strategies for creating a safe environment using NCTSN’s Trauma-Informed Schools System Framework</li> </ul>
VLS 12: Supporting BIPOC and Newcomer Youth in School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify specific professional learning strategies to enhance your ability to support BIPOC and newcomer youth</li> <li>Identify 3 systems level strategies that promote equity in your districts/schools</li> <li>Apply at least 3 classroom level strategies that enhance safety and belonging for BIPOC and newcomer youth</li> </ul>
VLS 13: Recognizing and Referring Students Experiencing Adversity and Distress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Understand the role of educators in identifying and responding to students in distress</li> <li>Learn signs of healthy child and adolescent development</li> <li>Recognize signs of student distress and how to determine if a student needs help</li> </ul>
VLS 14: Classroom Strategies to Support Students Experiencing Health Concerns and Distress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reflect on how student behavior is connected to their emotions and unmet needs</li> <li>Learn principles for creating a safe space for supporting students in distress</li> <li>Utilize the Psychological First Aid (Listen, Protect, and Connect; PFA-LPC) model to respond to students in need of help</li> </ul>
VLS 15: Best Practices for Tiers 2/3 Mental Health Services and Supports in Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Define Tier 2 and Tier 3 school mental health supports</li> <li>Identify best practices for referral, screening, and monitoring of fidelity and effectiveness of interventions</li> </ul>
VLS 16: School-Based Early Intervention and Treatment for Trauma	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Name some common components of evidence-based early interventions for trauma</li> <li>Identify 3 best practices for referral, screening, and monitoring progress for students enrolled in trauma interventions</li> <li>Describe the importance of engagement of families and youth in all phases of planning and implementing trauma interventions</li> </ul>
VLS 17: Support BIPOC, Newcomer and LGBTQ+ Youth at Tiers 2 and 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Understand the importance of implementing culturally responsive and identity-affirming tier 2 &amp; 3 practices</li> <li>Learn culturally responsive and identity-affirming practices that can be applied to all tier 2 &amp; 3 interventions to support BIPOC, newcomer, and LGBTQ+ youth</li> <li>Identify 2 culturally responsive, identity-affirming and evidence-informed interventions to support youth at Tiers 2&amp;3</li> </ul>
VLS 18: Funding and Policies to Advance Safe, Supportive Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify funding mechanisms to maintain and improve your school mental health system over time</li> <li>Identify recruitment and retention strategies to maintain and grow school mental health workforce</li> <li>Identify at least two policy levers to advance safe supportive schools</li> </ul>



## STRONG

### Supporting Transition Resilience of Newcomer Groups

**Supporting Transition Resilience in Newcomer Groups (STRONG)**, an evidence-informed, school-based intervention for immigrant and refugee youth (K-12<sup>th</sup> grades). **STRONG** aims to build resilience and address psychological distress associated with the newcomer experience. STRONG is intended for delivery by school mental health clinicians and is comprised of 10 group sessions, one individual student session, and teacher and parent education sessions. Elementary (K-5<sup>th</sup> grade) and Secondary (6<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade) versions are available.

#### Core components of STRONG include:

- Resilience Building Skills
- Understanding and Normalizing Distress
- Cognitive Behavioral Intervention Skills
  - Relaxation
  - Cognitive Coping
  - Exposure
  - Goal Setting
  - Problem Solving
- Journey Narrative
- Peer, Parent, and Educator Support

*"Schools could provide **an ideal setting to implement interventions** to address the mental health needs of refugee children... In disrupted environments, schools are often one of the earlier institutions to be introduced and, throughout the world, most children can attend school... Schools can facilitate **early identification** and provide interventions to **maximize cognitive, emotional and social development.**"*

Tyrer, R. A., & Fazel, M. (2014).  
School and community-based interventions for refugee and  
asylum seeking children: a systematic review.

# Family Engagement

- Families are a child's first teacher and an essential factor in the cultivation of social and emotional competencies throughout a child's life.
- In collaboration with families, we can build strong connections that reinforce social and emotional skill development and encourage constant communication between mental health providers and families.
- Various events and learning opportunities on mental health literacy, SEL, suicide prevention, internet safety and supporting healthy emotional development.
- We hope to always have a mental health table at our NLPS events.

# *Crisis Mitigation and Supports*

- **Organized response to crisis, which is any traumatic incident that impacts school functioning**
- **Goal is to respond quickly and efficiently so that supports are provided as needed and to minimize the impact of the crisis**
- **All school teams have ongoing extensive training in crisis response, as well as a lead in each building**
- **Examples include:**
  - Suicide prevention, training, and intervention
  - De-escalation and physical safety management
  - Threat assessments and interventions
  - Self-harm behaviors
  - Support with staff/student/family deaths
- **Larger crises are supported by the Core Team**

# Positive Behavioral Approach

## Restorative Practices

- Restorative Practices is a social science that studies how to improve and repair relationships between people and communities. The purpose is to build healthy communities, increase social capital, decrease crime and antisocial behavior, repair harm and restore relationships. Within the NLPS district, school staff engage in practices such as Restorative Circles, Restorative Conferencing, and Affirmative Statements. In addition, district trainers provide ongoing professional development for all staff.

## PBIS

- PBIS is an evidence-based three-tiered framework to improve and integrate all of the data, systems, and practices affecting student outcomes every day. It stands for Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports. The goal of PBIS is to create a positive school climate, in which students learn and grow. A number of factors affect school climate, including school location, neighborhood culture, instructional methods, student diversity, and school administration. Each school in NLPS uniquely defines their positive behavioral expectations and utilizes PBIS to monitor progress.

# Monitoring Systems

## Anonymous Alerts

- Students and families are also encouraged to submit anonymous concerns through Anonymous Alerts, NLPS's anonymous reporting app. All reports are followed up by school and district personnel.

## GoGuardian

- GoGuardian is constantly filtering and scanning what students are searching on their Chromebooks. If there is a concern in one or more of the searches about harm to self or harm to others, the school admin and mental health team receive an alert, as well as members of CORE.

- The School Mental Health Quality Assessment School Version (SMHQA-S) is designed for school teams to assess the comprehensiveness of their school mental health system and identify priority areas for improvement. The SMHQA-S covers seven domains of comprehensive school mental health, which includes a full continuum of supports for the wellbeing of students, families, and the school community.

The DESSA-mini provides a measure of social and emotional competence, which can be used to support positive youth development and social and emotional learning (SEL) initiatives.

There are four unique forms of the DESSA-mini, each consisting of eight items.

As part of a data-driven SEL system, the DESSA-mini:

- Provides a sound, brief, strength-based measure of students' social and emotional competence.
- Helps identify students at risk of developing social and emotional problems before those problems emerge.
- Helps determine which students should be provided interventions that will strengthen social and emotional competencies.
- Provides a method for monitoring students' progress in developing social and emotional competence.
- Provides a method for evaluating outcomes.

The DESSA-mini plays an important role within an MTSS approach to SEL and SEL programming.

# Competencies - DESSA/CASEL

## Self-Awareness

Self-Awareness is divided into two distinct constructs. We define **Self-Awareness** as how we view ourselves and our emotions, and in turn, how we interact with the world around us. **Optimistic Thinking** specifically refers to having a sense of optimism and hope for the future, speaking positively about oneself and others, and belief in the ability to attain future goals. We highlight Optimistic Thinking as its own competency due to this characteristic being a key aspect of resilience.

## Self-Management

**Self-Management** is our ability to regulate our emotions and behaviors, and is a crucial stepping stone to developing relationships in school and work, in addition to developing adaptability when things don't go the way we want or expect them to. **Goal-Directed Behavior** takes that concept one step further as the ability to plan our actions, complete tasks, and persist as we strive for the things we want to achieve.

## Social-Awareness

Another key competency is **Social-Awareness**, or an individual's capacity to interact with others in a way that shows respect for their ideas and behaviors and uses cooperation and tolerance in social situations.

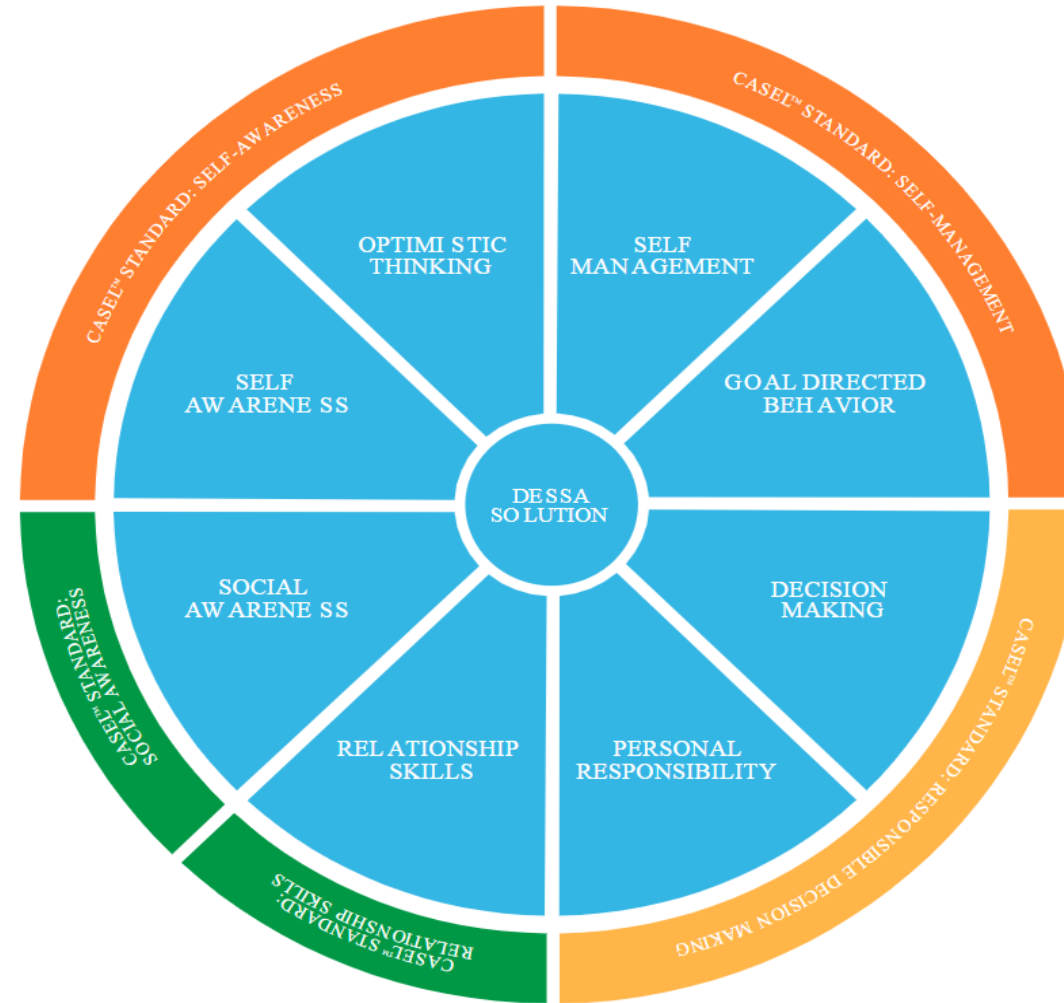
## Relationship Skills

**Relationship Skills** refer to an individual's consistent performance of socially acceptable actions that promote and maintain positive connections with others. This includes offering help and exhibiting kindness to others.

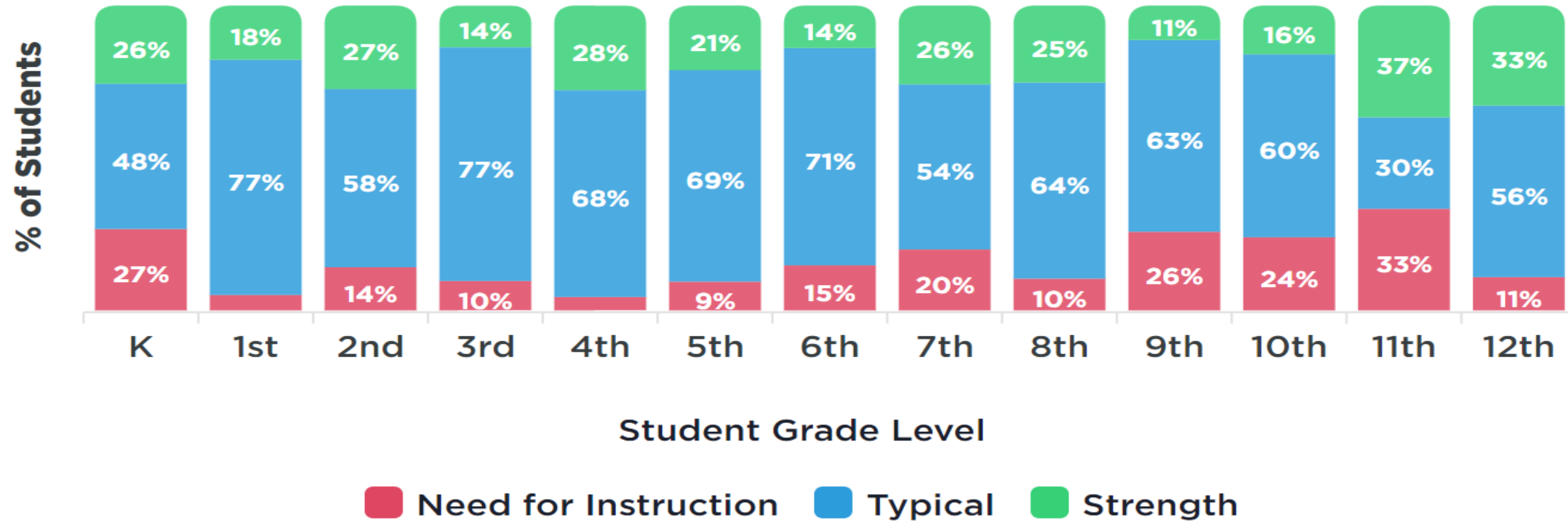
## Responsible Decision-Making

**Decision-Making** is the approach taken to problem-solving and includes learning from others and previous experience, using values to guide action and accepting responsibility for decisions. **Personal Responsibility** is the tendency to be careful and reliable, in addition to contributing to group efforts. These capacities, like the other competency areas, develop with us as we mature and grow.

# Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA)



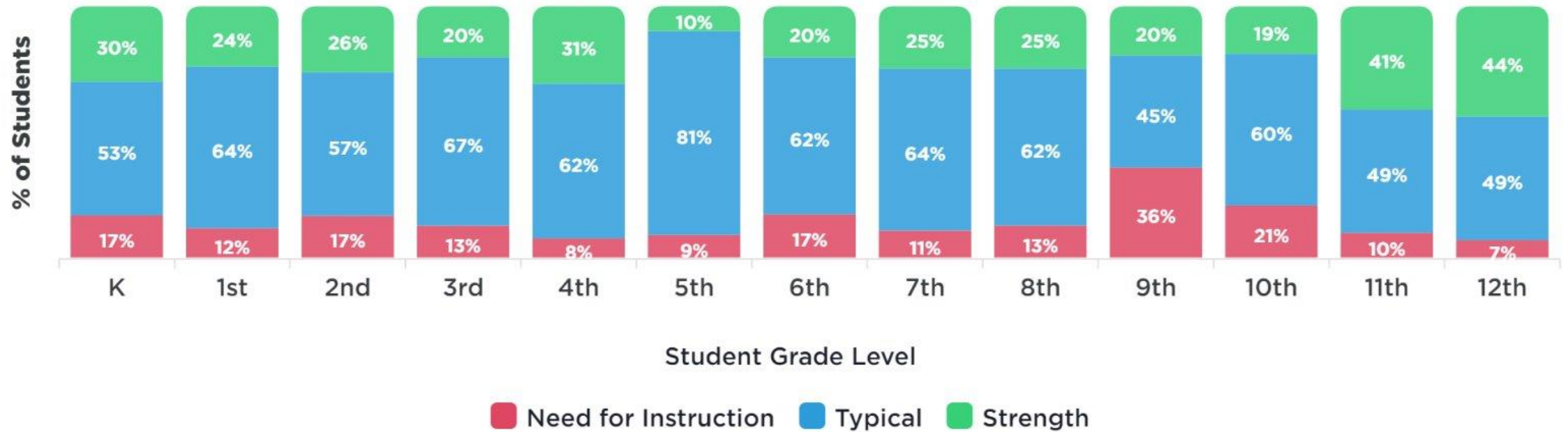
# DESSA Data - Fall



# DESSA Data - Spring

## Grade Level Comparison 2023-2024 Mid

[View Details](#)



- Complete additional training
- Complete the DESSA mini for the third assessment window (K-12)
- Continue working with the mental health staff on the use of the data within each of the buildings
- Share resources, found on the Aperture portal, with staff and parents/guardians
- Using the next level DESSA assessment for students who are identified in the need for instruction category and/or students identified in the SRBI/MTSS process and/or help with accommodations/modifications (504/IEP)
- Continue increasing the fidelity of implementing Second Step and School Connect, while expanding SEL instruction
- Incorporate 8 competencies into monthly goals moving forward

# NLPS Support Staff

## *Central Office*

- Erin McGuire, Assistant Director of Mental Health, [mcguiree@newlondon.org](mailto:mcguiree@newlondon.org)

## *Winthrop STEM Elementary School*

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## *CB Jennings International Elementary Magnet*

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# *Thank You*

**Thank you for always supporting  
the mental health of our  
students and for always  
supporting our mental health  
staff!**

