

Whole Child + Whole Educator A Framework for Strengthening Student and Staff Support Systems



Introduction

Every day, educators work to meet the academic, emotional, and behavioral needs of students whose lives and experiences are increasingly complex. At the same time, the adults supporting them are carrying more themselves—higher expectations, greater stress, and systems that don't always work together.

Schools are familiar with frameworks like MTSS, SEL, and trauma-informed practice, yet these approaches often vary widely in implementation and rarely address the needs of educators with the same intentionality given to students.

A more connected approach can strengthen support for the Whole Child and ensure educators have the unified systems, training, and daily supports essential to becoming Whole Educators.

This is where the Whole Child and Whole Educator framework comes in.

This approach is anchored in **eight core needs** that support consistent, connected systems across classrooms, schools, and districts.

STUDENT NEED SNAPSHOT

- 2 in 5 students are behind grade level¹
- Nearly 30% of students experience poor mental health²
- 20% of high school students report suicidal ideation³

This guide will help you:

- ✓ Identify the eight core needs that form the foundation of Whole Child and Whole Educator support
- ✓ Understand how each need shows up through both the student and educator lens
- ✓ Recognize where gaps, overlap, or inconsistencies may exist in your current approach
- ✓ Learn how to create greater clarity, consistency, and connection across supports already in place at your district



Defining Whole Child and Whole Educator Support

Districts are being asked to do more than ever—support students with increasingly complex academic, behavioral, and emotional needs while also ensuring educators have the capacity and tools to respond effectively.

Whole Child and Whole Educator support are central to meeting these expectations, yet they're not always clearly defined or consistently implemented.

Whole Child

Whole Child support goes beyond academics. It addresses students' academic, behavioral, social, and emotional needs in ways that create safe, supportive learning environments.

- Strengthen academic, behavioral, and emotional readiness
- Ensure timely access to Tier 2 and Tier 3 supports
- Create consistent student experiences across classrooms and schools
- Use data to monitor progress and growth



Whole Educator

Whole Educator support recognizes that sustainable student outcomes depend on the adults in the system. It ensures training, tools, and routines are aligned to support effective daily practice and reduce burnout.

- Reduce cognitive overload and competing initiatives
- Build shared skills and language across roles and schools
- Provide practical, embedded learning tied to daily practice
- Ensure educators have the time, data, and tools to follow through



More than 90% of educators report burnout as a major issue⁴

61% of districts cite siloed data as a barrier⁵

Whole System

Whole System support ensures that student and educator efforts are not isolated or fragmented. It aligns frameworks, programs, and data so supports reinforce one another rather than compete for attention.

- Align social-emotional skill development, behavior, mental health, academics, and intervention efforts
- Reduce duplication and conflicting expectations across teams
- Improve visibility across tiers to support better decision making
- Create consistency as students and educators move between settings



The Whole Child + Whole Educator framework comes to life through eight core needs. Each plays a distinct role, but meaningful impact emerges only when they function together as a connected system.



In the sections that follow, we'll explore each core need individually, highlighting how it supports both students and educators while contributing to the strength of the overall system.

Whole School Screening & Support

Early, consistent screening is foundational to prevent academic, behavioral, and emotional needs from escalating. When screening practices are clear and shared, schools can move from reacting to challenges toward anticipating and addressing them early.



Early screening significantly improves outcomes for at-risk students⁶



Student Lens

Students benefit when screening and follow-up routines are predictable and timely. Early identification helps ensure students receive the right level of support sooner, reducing the likelihood that small gaps become persistent challenges.



Educator/System Lens

Clear screening processes give educators confidence in when to act and how to respond. Shared data and routines reduce guesswork, support collaboration, and allow staff to focus on instruction and intervention rather than data reconciliation.

When this need isn't connected



When screening tools, timing, or ownership vary across schools or teams, educators are left with fragmented data and delayed signals. This leads to reactive decision making, inconsistent supports, and missed opportunities for early intervention.

System Tie-Back



When screening is aligned with social-emotional, behavior, intervention, and professional learning systems, it becomes the entry point for coordinated support. Shared screening data strengthens Tier 1 prevention, informs Tier 2-3 placement, and improves continuity across classrooms and schools.

62% of districts use a unified screening process to identify students at-risk⁷

Early warning systems flag at-risk students early so schools can intervene sooner⁸

Social & Emotional Skills

Social and emotional skills help students manage emotions, build relationships, and remain engaged in learning. When these skills are taught intentionally and reinforced consistently, they create the conditions for academic progress and positive behavior.



4 in 10 high school students report persistent sadness⁹



Student Lens

Students benefit when social and emotional skills are taught in clear, consistent ways across classrooms. Predictable routines and shared expectations help students build resilience, regulate emotions, and navigate challenges more effectively.



Educator/System Lens

Shared skill-building practices reduce the need for educators to manage behavior reactively. When expectations and language are aligned, educators spend less time responding to disruptions and more time supporting learning.

When this need isn't connected



When social and emotional skill-building varies by classroom, students experience inconsistent expectations. Educators are left to manage behavior individually, increasing workload and frustration while reducing impact.

System Tie-Back



When social and emotional skills are aligned with behavior supports, mental health practices, and intervention systems, they serve as a preventive foundation that strengthens Tier 1 instruction and reduces escalation into higher tiers.

Social and emotional learning programs improve academic outcomes by 11 percentile points¹⁰

Every dollar invested in social and emotional learning yields an \$11 return¹¹

Trauma-Informed Supports

Many students bring experiences of stress, adversity, or trauma into the classroom, directly affecting learning and behavior. Trauma-informed supports help schools respond with awareness, consistency, and care rather than reaction.



3 in 10 teachers have to help students with mental health challenges daily¹²



Student Lens

Students benefit when adults recognize how stress and trauma affect learning and behavior. Trauma-informed environments help students feel safe, supported, and more able to engage academically and socially.



Educator/System Lens

Educators need practical guidance to recognize and respond to mental health needs without assuming clinical roles. Consistent training and shared approaches increase confidence and reduce emotional strain.

When this need isn't connected



Without alignment, responses to student mental health needs vary widely across classrooms and schools. This inconsistency creates uncertainty for students and increases stress for educators who feel unprepared or unsupported.

System Tie-Back



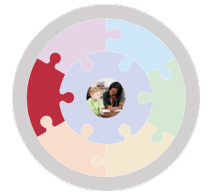
When trauma-informed practices are aligned with behavior supports, screening, and professional learning, schools respond more consistently and effectively, reducing disciplinary incidents and improving student engagement.

80% of children report at least one exposure to violence or victimization¹³

Trauma-informed practice can reduce office referrals by 30-40%¹⁴

Behavior Data & Intervention

Positive behavior skills are most effective when expectations are clear, taught explicitly, and reinforced consistently. Strong behavior systems support both student learning and classroom stability.



1 in 3 schools report weekly student disrespect toward staff¹⁵



Student Lens

Students thrive when expectations are predictable and consistent across settings. Clear behavior systems help students understand boundaries, build social skills, and remain focused on learning.



Educator/System Lens

Shared behavior frameworks reduce the burden on individual educators to manage behavior alone. Consistency across classrooms improves confidence and reduces time spent on discipline.

When this need isn't connected



When behavior expectations differ by classroom or building, students receive mixed messages and educators experience increased disruptions. Inconsistency undermines trust and instructional time.



System Tie-Back

When behavior systems are aligned with social-emotional skill development, intervention supports, and professional learning, schools create safer, more equitable environments.

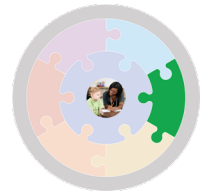
Teachers spend 17% of class time on keeping order in the classroom¹⁶

68% of teachers say student behavior problems disrupt the learning environment¹⁷

Proactive behavior systems can reduce suspensions by up to 22%¹⁸

Tier 2 & Tier 3 Behavior and Wellness Intervention

Targeted behavior and wellness interventions are critical for students who need additional support beyond universal instruction. These supports are most effective when delivered consistently and monitored over time.



Schools using schoolwide behavior frameworks see one-third fewer discipline referrals¹⁹



Student Lens

Students benefit when targeted supports are reliable, coordinated, and sustained. Consistent Tier 2-3 interventions help students build coping skills and regain momentum before challenges become persistent.



Educator/System Lens

Clear intervention structures and shared tools help educators manage caseloads and maintain fidelity. Streamlined systems reduce administrative burden and support follow-through.



When this need isn't connected

Disconnected intervention tools and inconsistent routines lead to gaps in support and limited progress monitoring. Educators struggle to sustain interventions amid competing demands.



System Tie-Back

When Tier 2-3 behavior and wellness supports are aligned with screening, behavior systems, and professional learning, schools improve continuity and effectiveness across tiers.

Tier 2 interventions improve academic outcomes by 0.40⁺²⁰

Implementing MTSS helps teachers feel more effective, healthier, and less burned out²¹

Career & Real-World Skills

Career and real-world skills connect academic learning to life outside the classroom. These skills prepare students to navigate transitions beyond graduation and apply learning in meaningful ways.



Only 30% of high schoolers feel prepared for life after graduation²²



Student Lens

Students benefit when communication, problem solving, and self-management skills are taught intentionally. These skills support confidence, adaptability, and long-term success.



Educator/System Lens

Clear frameworks and shared curricula make it easier to integrate life skills into existing instruction. Educators can reinforce readiness skills without additional instruction planning.

When this need isn't connected



When life skills instruction is inconsistent, students experience uneven preparation for postsecondary pathways. Educators lack clarity on what to prioritize and how to reinforce skills over time.

System Tie-Back



When career and life skills are aligned with academic instruction, behavior supports, and intervention systems, students experience a more coherent pathway from school to life beyond the classroom.

84% of hiring managers say most high school grads are unprepared for the workforce²³

Teaching life skills strengthens students' readiness for college, career, and life²⁴

Special Education

Students bring diverse learning profiles and needs to the classroom. Differentiated learning ensures instruction adapts to learners rather than expecting learners to adapt to instruction.



Teachers spend up to 12 hours a week finding and creating instructional materials²⁵



Student Lens

Students benefit from adaptive materials that reflect their individual needs, pace, and learning styles. Differentiation increases access, engagement, and progress for diverse learners.



Educator/System Lens

Digital, adaptive tools reduce the need for educators to manually create or modify materials. Aligned systems help educators deliver personalized instruction more efficiently and consistently.

When this need isn't connected



Without adaptive tools, differentiation depends heavily on individual effort, leading to variability across classrooms and increased workload. Students receive uneven learning experiences.



System Tie-Back

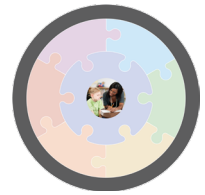
When differentiated learning is aligned with screening, intervention, and professional learning systems, personalization becomes scalable and sustainable.

62% of K-12 educators say it is important to personalize instruction, but only 37% believe they can do it well with current assessments and tools²⁶

Students in adaptive learning systems achieved higher post-test scores in math and reading²⁷

Educator Learning & Readiness

Educator readiness underpins every student support effort. Effective professional learning ensures educators have the skills, confidence, and consistency needed to implement supports well.



1 in 8 teaching positions are vacant or underfilled, affecting 6M+ students²⁸



Student Lens

Students benefit when educators share a common skill base and approach. Consistent practices improve classroom quality and learning stability.



Educator/System Lens

Embedded, ongoing professional learning supports application, not just awareness. Aligned learning reduces initiative fatigue and strengthens implementation over time.



When this need isn't connected

One-off training and disconnected expectations lead to uneven practice and limited impact. Educators struggle to translate theory into daily instruction.



System Tie-Back

When professional learning is embedded across screening, behavior, intervention, and instructional systems, educators are better equipped to sustain Whole Child and Whole Educator support.

Effective teacher professional development leads to measurable student learning gains²⁹

84% of teachers say they lack time to meet all student needs¹²

Closing & Next Steps

Districts don't need to start over to strengthen Whole Child and Whole Educator support. Progress comes from creating clarity, consistency, and connection across the systems and practices already in place.

Districts can move forward by focusing attention where it matters most to build alignment over time.

01 Identify the highest pressure need

Look for the area where strain is most visible—student behavior, mental health, academic gaps, intervention overload, or educator burnout. Start with the need that is creating the most disruption for students and staff.

02 Map current tools and routines to student and educator needs

Inventory existing programs, intervention systems, and professional learning. Clarify what each tool is intended to support, where overlaps exist, and where gaps or inconsistencies are emerging across schools or classrooms.



03 Strengthen consistency before adding something new

Focus on aligning practices, language, and data across classrooms and tiers. Improving implementation fidelity often delivers more impact than launching additional initiatives.

04 Connect student support with educator readiness

Ensure educators have the training, time, and tools needed to deliver supports effectively. Student outcomes improve when educator capacity is built alongside student needs.

05 Build incrementally and scale intentionally

Start where the need is greatest, establish shared practices, then expand over time. Sustainable systems grow through alignment, not urgency-driven adoption.

Start where the need is greatest. Build consistency. Expand with purpose.



See the Whole Child + Whole Educator framework in action

Meet with the **RethinkEd** team to explore strategies for creating more connected systems of support across your district.

[Schedule a Demo](#)



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