



Wellness & Healing-Centered School Re-Opening Recommendations

Black and brown students and families in New York City continue to face the harshest, devastating impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The previous inequities in the school system only revealed themselves and worsened. Students cannot afford to return to the 'normal' where marginalized students suffered and faced further trauma when receiving their education.

This document shares wellness and healing-centered school reopening recommendations. We share guidance for the first month of reopening and approaches and practices for the entire school year to center wellness and healing through a culturally responsive-sustaining lens. We encourage this new normal for all schools moving forward.

Definition of Wellness

“Wellness is the harmonizing of mind, body, emotion and spirit. It is cultivated and sustained through healthy relationships that are responsive to the lived experiences and the historical and material conditions that shape them. Community responsive wellness strengthens the sacred link between self-actualization and community actualization in three domains:

- ❖ 1. **Innerself:** a strong sense of culture, identity, and agency;
- ❖ 2. **Interpersonal:** a rootedness and commitment to showing empathy toward family, community, and peers; and
- ❖ 3. **Interconnectedness:** positive interrelatedness to ancestors, place, land, and the natural world. This grows ecosystems where people and communities experience place, power, purpose, awareness, resilience, empathy, hope, love, and joy.”

Tintiangco-Cubales, Duncan-Andrade, Macatangay 2020

Recommendations for the First Month & School Year

First 1-3 weeks

- ❖ Instead of formal instruction and structure, all classrooms, instruction, and school



climate should focus on healing, socioemotional learning, and mental health as much as possible

- ❖ Gradual teacher instruction should be integrated
- ❖ There must be time, space and commitment from schools to know and understand what students and families dealt with since schools shut down
- ❖ There should be strong connections made, deep communication, healing and listening practices and community circles
- ❖ There must be honoring and appreciating community heroes: the people who worked on the frontlines giving out food, staffing the RECs, cleaning the schools
- ❖ There must be an acknowledgement of the grief and loss that has been experienced during COVID-19, including loss of Black and Indigenous community members to police violence, through
 - Creating memorials
 - Bringing in community organizations
 - Holding space for students to feel and process their emotions
- ❖ Social workers counselors, community healers and practitioners are from the community and of color. They are readily available
- ❖ Joy is centered (e.g. school wide field days)
- ❖ Schools use the arts, music, theater and meditation to establish rituals and routines.
 - Families must be full participants in the circles, conversations, art projects, healing practices and field day. This can happen remotely with parents video-calling into the classroom, or social distancing at the 9:1 recommended ratio.

Weeks 3-4

- ❖ Weeks 3-4 continue with the structure of the first three weeks and integrate student-directed projects
- ❖ Teachers help students come up with the topics they want to learn and make a plan for how to pursue that
- ❖ They coach them on executing student-directed projects
- ❖ Teachers support families on how to support those projects
- ❖ Schools establish new databases, texting services, and effective ways to communicate with families
- ❖ Schools ensure that students and families are proficient and confident in accessing and using the technology for remote learning



Regularly for the rest of the school year

- ❖ Provide socioemotional support to students, parents and families
- ❖ Ongoing ritual and routines that promote connection, flexibility, predictability and empowerment
 - Morning meetings, healing circles, advisories, restorative justice, peer support groups, unstructured play & recreation, community art projects
 - Circles happen once a week
- ❖ Student-directed learning & youth leadership
 - Students are encouraged to bring in their cultural healing practices and community knowledge. They are invited to lead on this.
 - Schools can hire alumni to mentor and support current students and thrive social-emotionally
 - Build up the skills of young people to continue to play these role
- ❖ Students have a healing period/ healing class scheduled on their school day for the entire school year. This class can look like:
 - Healing practitioners hold space for students. If schools do not have the funds for a somatics practitioner, Central or each district hires a BIPOC practitioner to lead sessions on Zoom; these sessions can be watched on projectors in classrooms.
 - These sessions can include somatics, art therapy, meditation, yoga, etc.
- ❖ Schools create a space where parents and families have an active role in students' learning. For example, parents can read stories to classes or be involved in supporting community art projects.
- ❖ Students are given options to be paired with a Caring Adult in the building to keep an eye out for them. This person can also have virtual check-ins with students on days they are not in person.
- ❖ Commitment to removing punitive discipline practices as part of acknowledging the additional trauma students are bringing to school and the ways that may manifest in the classroom
 - A model of healing circles, restorative justice, peer defenders

For staff

- ❖ Staff have time to experience the healing time over the summer. Staff need to be able to firsthand experience and be trained in this work in order to do it for students.
- ❖ Staff are provided with professional learning, resources and materials to engage in to ensure the wellness and healing-centered reopening is facilitated



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authentically and in a genuinely healing manner.

- ❖ Staff figure out adult strengths and using them in targeted ways
 - Identify key staff (e.g. teachers, school counselors, school psychologists) equipped to implement healing-centered practices, and bring in outside practitioners for the rest
 - If short on capacity, schools can use the most engaging teachers for instruction; most empathetic teachers for connection and support, etc.
- ❖ Staff learn practices from community-based healers and practitioners to implement on their own. Schools partner with trusted community members, community-based organizations, and groups to identify and bring in the healers.
- ❖ Staff make regular check-in phone/video calls from school staff to families—calls without any agenda other than connecting and building relationships.

For more resources on culturally responsive-sustaining education, visit crehub.org.