



ChangeLab Solutions

Leveraging the School Policy Process to Advance Connectedness and Student Health

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Speakers



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CME and CE Information

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Our mission

*Healthier communities
for all through equitable
laws & policies.*



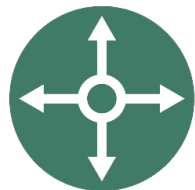
Core strategies



Demystifying law and policy to increase community knowledge, capacity, and power and center equity in decision making to promote health



Connecting across sectors to facilitate organizational learning, create shared understanding among different disciplines, and expand the network of changemakers who are addressing the five drivers



Strengthening the leadership, skills, & capacity of changemakers who advocate for and implement laws, policies, and investments that support people in meeting basic needs



Developing policy and legal tools with an interdisciplinary lens and a focus on reducing the drivers of health inequity, to improve programs, places, and systems that support communities in achieving their full health potential



Elevating practical, evidence-based, and community-centered tools, solutions, and successes to scale interventions that improve health equity



Meeting agreements

- Create space for each other and avoid interrupting those who are speaking. Participate fully and give priority to those who haven't spoken.
- Listen actively, without distractions. Be conscious of body language and nonverbal responses.
- Speak from personal experience instead of generalizing ("I" instead of "they," "we," and "you").
- Do the work of understanding what kind of power dynamics we individually bring into the room, such as organizational title, race, gender, etc.
- Be accepting of hands-on, active facilitation.
- Understand the goal is not to always agree—it is to gain a deeper understanding that can improve our work.



Workshop Overview

1. How Schools Impact Student Health
2. Overview of the Policy Process
3. How School-Based Policy Options Impact Health
4. How Schools Can Support Healthy Outcomes
5. Closeout + Q&A



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How often do you engage with the policy process?



1

2

3

4

5

“Hm... Define ‘policy’ again?”

“Never, but I’m interested in exploring how my work might touch on policy”

“I sometimes work on policy, for example by providing data or information to decision makers”

“I am frequently involved in policy-related projects and conversations”

“Always, policy development is one of my primary roles or responsibilities”

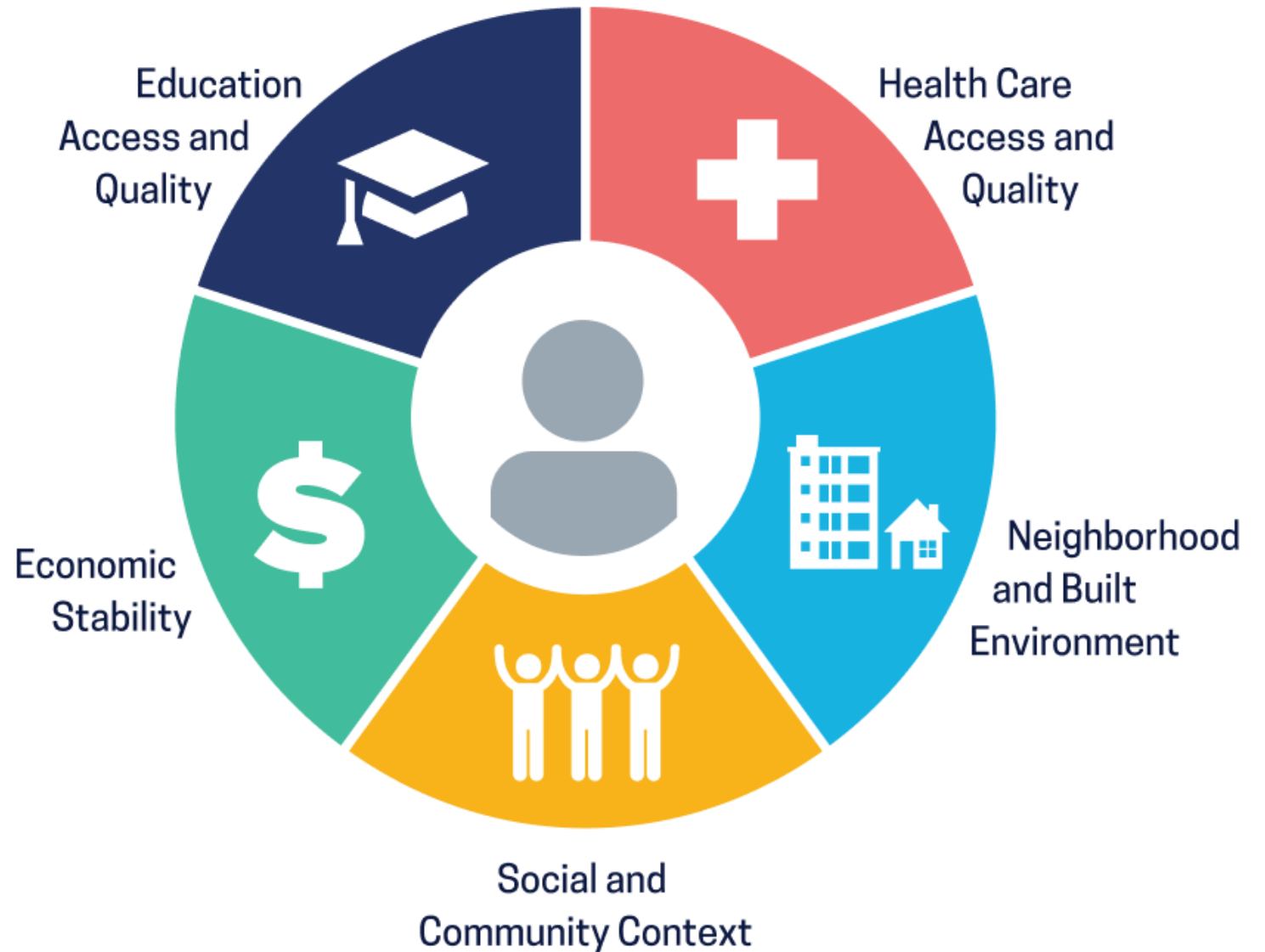
What factors contribute to adolescents' social, emotional, and physical outcomes?

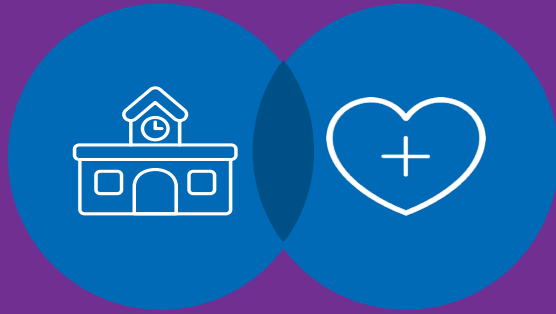
Many environmental factors contribute to adolescent health, safety, and well-being.

A **multidisciplinary approach** is necessary to holistically promote positive health outcomes among adolescents.

Education as a Social Determinant of Health

Source:
Healthy People 2030, U.S.
Department of Health and
Human Services, Office of
Disease Prevention and
Health Promotion





Connection between Education and Health



Social and psychological

Reduce stress, build peer relationships, and social networks



Socioeconomic

Economic stability, access to resources



Health behaviors

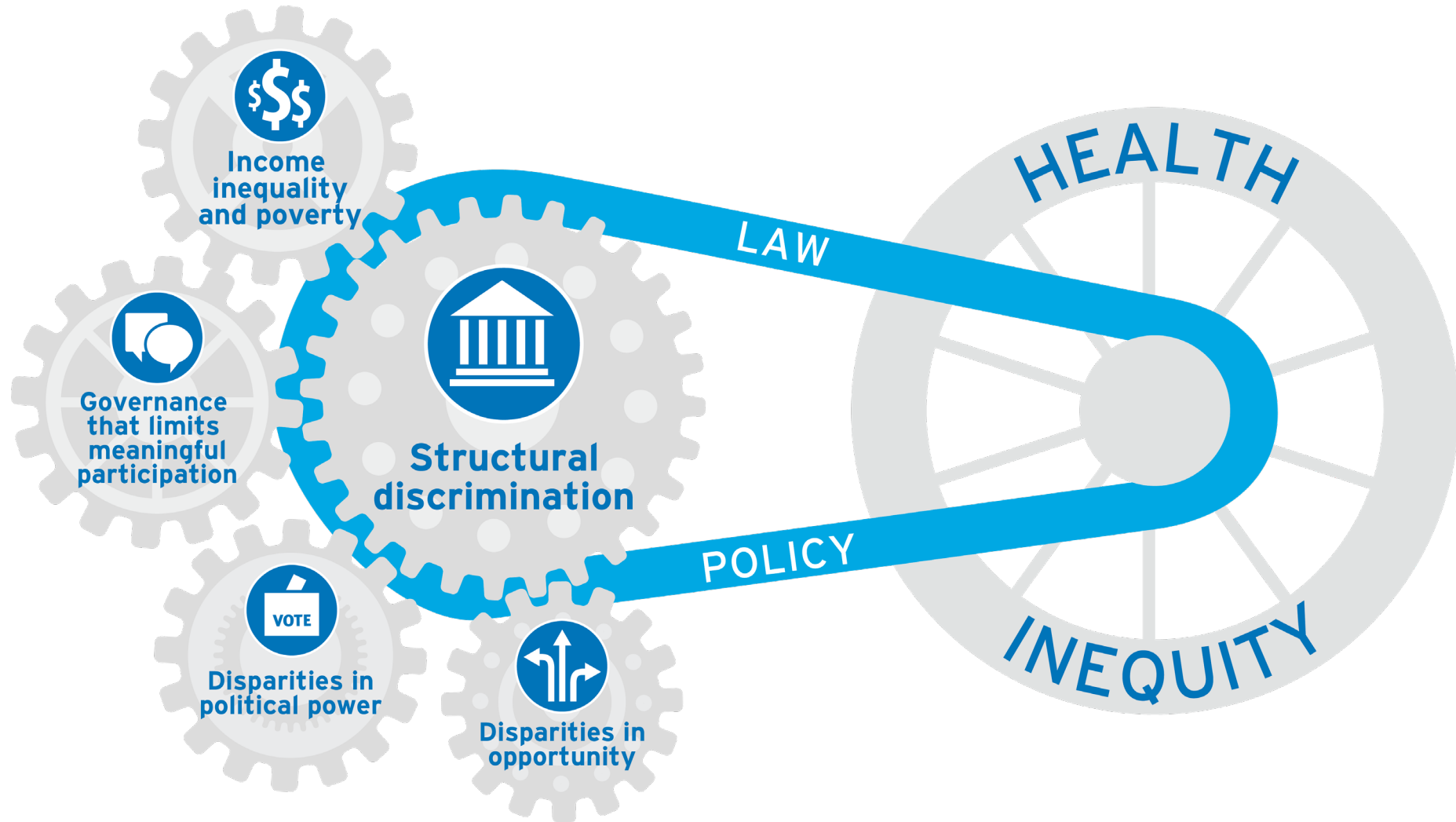
Increased understanding and advocating for health needs



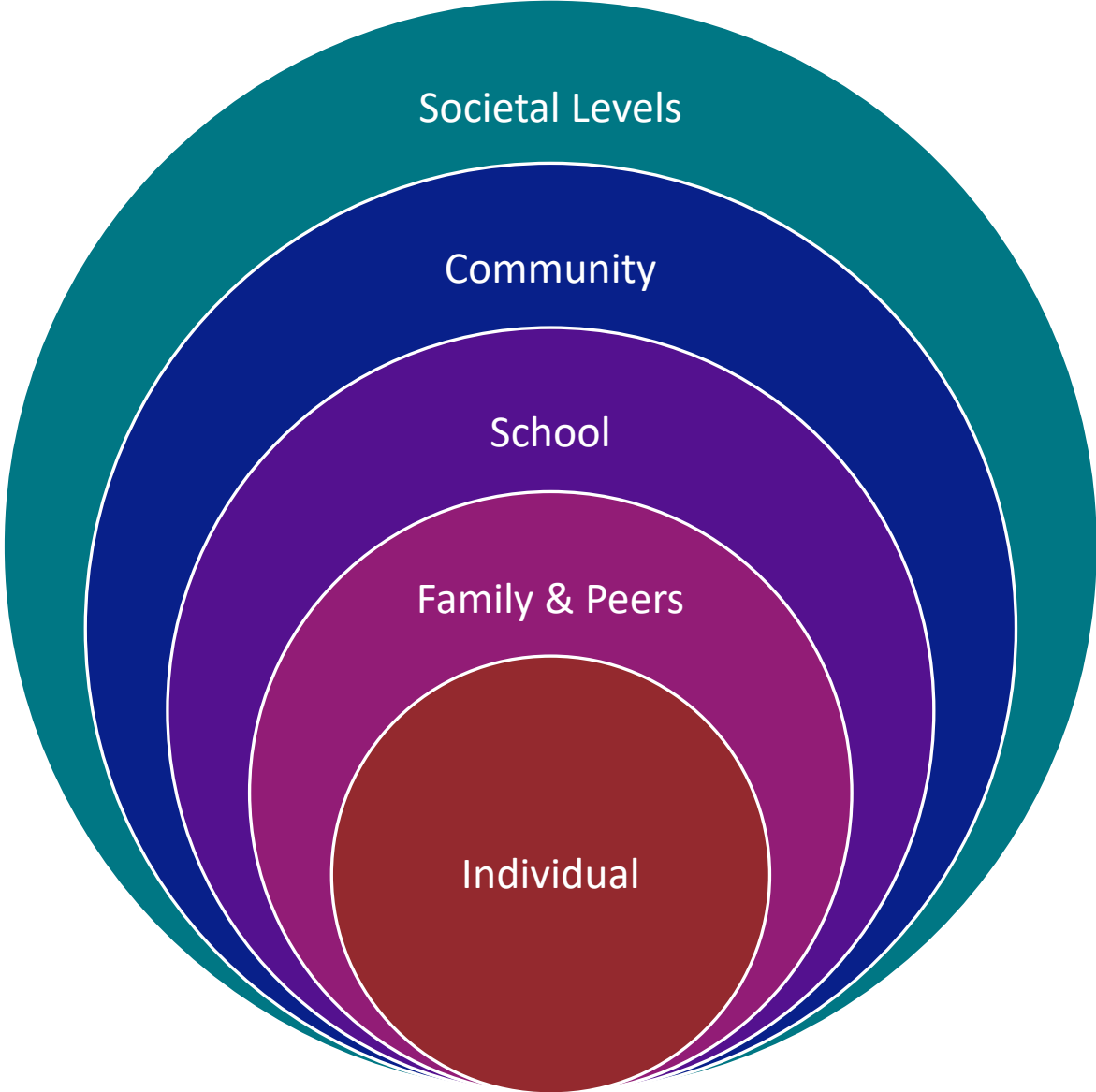
Life Expectancy

By age 25, those with a high school degree can expect to live 11-15 years longer than those who do not

ChangeLab Solutions framework for policy: Five drivers of inequity



Social &
Environmental Influences
on Health
Risk
Behaviors



What are
some ways
schools
promote
adolescent
health?

Promotion of protective factors:



**Providing safe and
supportive school
environments**



**Supporting mental
health**

What is a protective factor?

- **Protective factors** are individual or environmental characteristics or conditions that promote the health and emotional well-being of adolescents. Benefits of protective factors include:
 - Aid in student's engagement in positive health behaviors
 - Help students avoid risky health behaviors
 - Can serve as a buffer for students from potential harmful effects of negative situations

Examples of Protective Factors

Individual Characteristics and Conditions

- Positive self-worth
- High self-efficacy
- Social and Emotional Competence
- Good decision making
- Planning and goal setting

Environmental Characteristics and Conditions

- Parental engagement
- Social Support
- School Connectedness
- Safe and caring communities

Protective Factors for School Health

- Healthy and Supportive School Environments
- Parent Engagement
- School Connectedness
- Community Involvement



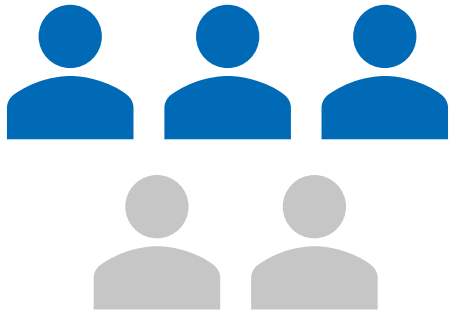


Supporting Mental Health

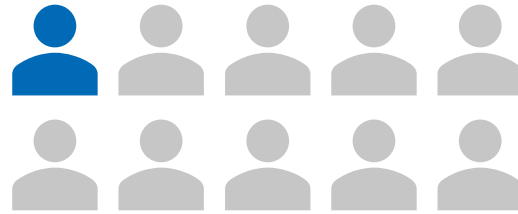
How do
we define
mental
health?

Mental health, like physical health, occurs along a continuum from good to poor and varies over time, in different conditions, and at different ages.

Adolescence & Mental Health



Nearly **3 in 5** U.S. teen girls experienced persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness in 2021



More than **1 in 10** LGBTQ+ students reported they did not go to school because of safety concerns



Youth experienced high and worsening levels of persistent sadness or hopelessness across all racial and ethnic groups

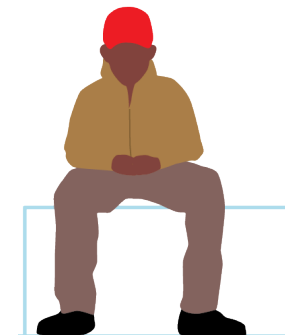
What are some inequities that students who identify as LGBTQ+ experience in schools?

Disproportionate punishment:

Suspensions for public displays of affection, violating gender norms, and even protecting themselves from instances of bullying or harassment at school

Double standards in enforcement:

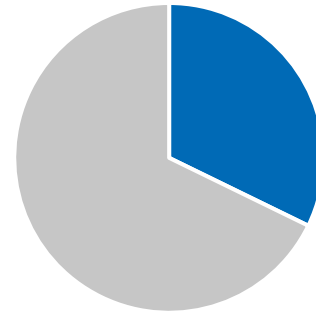
Policies enforced on some students but not others due to nonconforming gender expressions



PRINCIPAL

What are some inequities that students with disabilities experience in schools?

Students with disabilities account for only **17%** of all public school students, yet...



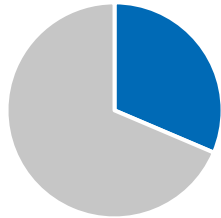
They account for **29% of students who receive one or more** out-of-school suspensions.

(CRDC, 2020-21)



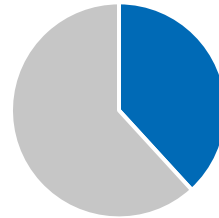
What are some inequities students of color experience in schools?

Black boys account for only **8%** of all K-12 public school students, yet...



They represent **15%** of **in-school suspensions**

(CRDC, 2020-21)



They represent **18%** of **out-of-school suspensions**

(CRDC, 2020-21)

2x

Black preschoolers (girls & boys) are **expelled at a rate more than double** (20%) their enrollment (9%)

(CRDC, 2020-21)

What can schools do to support mental health?

- Increase students' mental health literacy
- Promote mindfulness
- Promote social, emotional, and behavioral learning
- Enhance connectedness among students, staff, and families
- Provide psychosocial skills training and cognitive behavioral interventions
- Support staff well-being



Safe and Supportive School Environment

What is the
school
environment?

- School facilities
- Classroom practices
- School-based health supports
- Disciplinary policies and practices

How does the
school
environment
influence the
health
outcomes of
adolescents?

School environments that are safe and supportive are successful at connecting adolescents to a network of caring peers and adults, including parents, other primary caregivers, and teachers.

Ensuring students are connected to their schools and families is an important protective factor that can reduce students' risk for engagement in risky behaviors and poor mental health outcomes.

Why is school connectedness important?



2 in 3 high school students reported feeling connected to others at school



Students who reported school connectedness had lower prevalence of unhealthy risk behaviors

Student Benefits of School Connectedness

- Increased academic achievement, attendance, and graduation rates
- Increased likelihood of bystander intervention during bullying and seeking assistance after being bullied
- Improved health outcomes in adolescence that likely extend into adulthood
- Less likely to experience poor mental health
- Decreased experiences of violence and substance use
- Less likely to engage in sexual health risk behavior

School connectedness

Youth who report experiencing racism, youth from racial and ethnic minority groups, and youth who identify as LGBTQ+ feel less connected at school.

In the promotion of school connectedness, consider strategies that:

1. Center working to **reduce health and education disparities**
2. Reflect the experiences of **all students**



How can schools
promote school
connectedness?



Classroom management strategies



Inclusive policies and practices



Positive youth development programs

Example of School-Based Health Program

CDC's What Works in Schools Program is an evidence-based approach that schools can implement to improve health behaviors and experiences, support mental health, and reduce suicidality in schools.

CDC's What Works in Schools Program Has Wide-reaching Impact



Impacts of WWIS School-Based Health Program

Schools that participated in WWIS (What Works in Schools) also saw decreases in sexual risk behaviors among students and decreases in students who use marijuana, who miss school because of safety concerns, and who experience forced sex.



Self-Reflection

- What role or roles do you play in promoting student mental health? Or what role are you interested in playing?
- What does connectedness look like at your school? Are there points of connection you'd like to uplift, or certain areas to strengthen connectedness?
- Who are essential key players and partners in promoting student mental health at your school?



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What is a policy?

- A policy is a law, regulation, procedure, administrative action, incentive, or voluntary practice of governments and other institutions.
- Policies provide a foundation for school district practices and procedures.
- In schools, policies provide:
 - Guidance, direction, information, and support for all individuals throughout the school system
 - Reassurance for families, students, and school staff that protective measures for health and safety are put in place

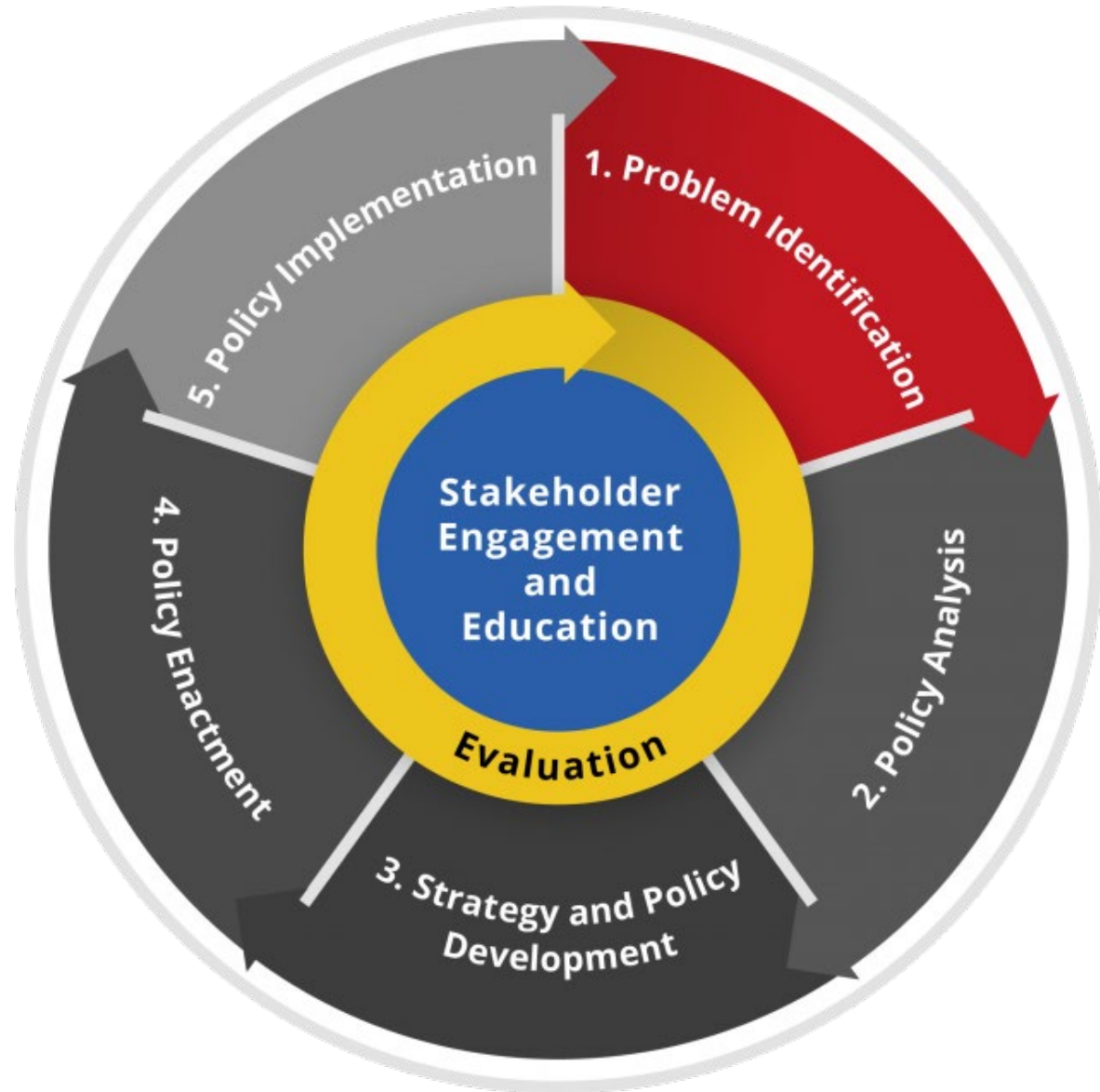
Steps of the Policy Process

The CDC Policy Process is a systematic way to develop policies that can help schools address policy needs and gaps.

At the center of every step is stakeholder engagement, education, and evaluation.



1.
Problem
Identification



2. Policy Analysis



Source: CDC Office of Policy, Performance, and Evaluation

3.
Strategy and
Policy
Development



4.
Policy Enactment



5.
Policy
Implementation



Source: CDC Office of Policy, Performance, and Evaluation

Discussion

In pairs or groups of 3, discuss:

- What is a school district policy in your jurisdiction that is related to student mental health?
- What is your level of involvement in implementing and/or enforcing that policy?
- What does the policy do well? How could the policy be improved or strengthened?



Centering Equity Throughout the Policy Process



Equity Throughout the Policy Process: Centering Community

- Ensure that engagement is inclusive and representative
- Build a foundation of trust
- Adopt a strengths-based approach



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How do health-promoting policies impact adolescent health and well-being outcomes?

- Reduce disparities experienced by varying student demographics
- Improve mental health of students
- Increase school connectedness
- Build safe and supportive school environments
- Improve academic outcomes

Health-Promoting Policy Examples

- According to YRBS data, evidence indicates that school-based LGBTQ supportive health policies and practices contribute to a **positive school climate** and provide resources and support for sexual and gender minorities, as well as heterosexual students.
- Examples of such policies include:
 - Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs)
 - Safe spaces
 - Prohibiting harassment based on sexual and gender identity
 - Providing LGBTQ-relevant curricula or supplementary materials
 - Facilitating access to competent out-of-school health, social, and psychological services

Remember

Policies are only one part of the puzzle and often **work in tandem with other policies, programs, and educational campaigns.**



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How can schools better support adolescents' health and well-being?

- School staff face extensive responsibilities and challenges.
- Implementing health-promoting practices can improve the experiences of students, educators, parents, and other school staff.



#1 Understand the School Environment

- Understand the **school community**
- Develop **collaborative approaches** to strengthening the school community
- Understand the **school climate**



#2 Assess Existing School Policies

- **Review** existing policies, practices, and procedures
- **Support interventions** that focus on developing, repairing, and sustaining relationship
- **Implement health-promoting policies**
- **Train school staff** on inclusive policies and practices



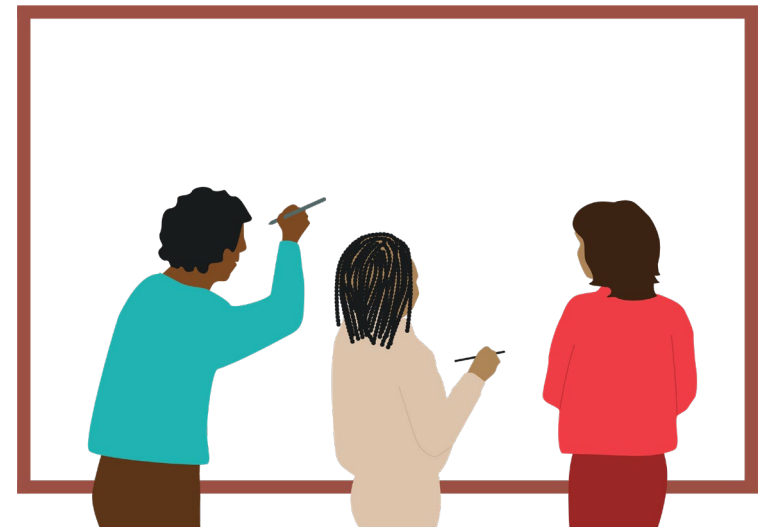
#3 Implement evidence- based school health programs

- Implement positive **youth development programs**
- Establish and enhance **faculty or student-led affinity organizations**



#4 Encourage community involvement in schools

- **Collaboration** within school and local communities
- **Clear and accessible** policies and procedures



Discussion

- What is your experience working with community partners?
- What partnerships and cross-sector collaborations have been successful in your work?
- What are some opportunities to build or strengthen partnerships?
- What are some strategies to build or strengthen partnerships?



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Recap

1. Education is a social determinant of health and students' experiences in school affects other social determinants of health.
2. Students who feel more connected at school do better in school and in the long run in life.
3. School policies, especially those that center community, can have profound impacts on student connectedness and overall student health outcomes.
4. Frameworks such as the 5 Drivers and the Policy Wheel can bolster our understanding of the school policy process.
5. Policies are important but are just one piece of the larger puzzle.

Thank you!

Additional Resources (forthcoming):

- DASH Policy Guide
- Pre-recorded webinar
- School Discipline Fact Sheet for Administrators
- ChangeLab Solutions School Discipline Issue Brief



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