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GLOBAL MODEL WHO 2025

ANNOTATIONS OM

MENTAL HEALTH, YOUTH, AND LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

The text referred to as "Anchor" above each annotation in this document can be found in the document titled, "How Schools Can Manage Health and Well-Being" that is uploaded as a separate document on your simulation webpage. The highlighted text in that document and the annotations are color-coded to assist you in linking each annotation with the appropriate text in the original document.

(Anchor: "Schools play a key role in providing safe, nurturing learning environments")

Did You Know That...

Schools influence nearly every aspect of a young person's development—from diet and exercise to social relationships and emotional regulation. When schools are designed to be nurturing and inclusive, they can buffer children against the effects of poverty, family stress, and trauma. Evidence from multiple countries shows that learners in supportive school environments demonstrate higher academic performance, lower dropout rates, and better long-term well-being.

Things to Think About

How can schools balance academic goals with the equally important responsibility of promoting well-being? Should governments hold schools accountable for emotional health outcomes in the same way they are for literacy and numeracy?

Interesting Facts

Children spend nearly one-third of their waking hours in school during their developmental years—making it one of the most influential health environments outside the home.

Glossary

Learning environment — The physical, social, and emotional conditions in which education occurs, shaping how students feel, behave, and perform.

(Anchor: "Health-promoting schools (HPS) are schools with strengthened capacity to be healthy settings for living, learning and working.")

Did You Know That...

The concept of health-promoting schools (HPS) goes beyond providing school nurses or physical education classes—it involves redesigning the school system itself to foster lifelong well-being. HPS integrates physical, mental, and social health objectives into every part of school life, from classroom learning to community engagement. This approach builds resilience, encourages student participation, and creates a positive feedback loop between health and academic success.

Things to Think About

How might a "health-promoting school" differ from a traditional school in its daily operations? Would teachers need new training or support to take on health-related roles?

Interesting Facts

Countries that have implemented HPS frameworks report improved attendance, reduced bullying, and greater teacher satisfaction alongside better student health outcomes.

Glossary

Health-promoting school (HPS) — A school that systematically integrates health into all aspects of its culture, policies, curriculum, and community partnerships.

(Anchor: "A comprehensive school health programme aims to make every school a health-promoting school.")

Did You Know That...

Comprehensive school health programs take a systems approach—aligning ministries of health and education to make well-being a shared priority. They include structured components like nutrition standards, physical activity policies, and mental health literacy. When embedded across a system, these efforts reinforce each other: healthy eating supports focus, exercise improves mood, and positive peer relationships reduce risky behavior.

■ Things to Think About

Should ministries of education treat health outcomes as part of school performance? What data might help policymakers track the health impact of school environments?

Interesting Facts

The WHO's Global Standards for Health-Promoting Schools call for integration of health into governance, curriculum, resources, teacher development, and evaluation systems.

Glossary

Health-Promoting Education System— A coordinated strategy that embeds health objectives into all layers of governance, policy, and practice within an education system.

(Anchor: "few countries have implemented HPS at scale.")

Did You Know That...

Despite decades of advocacy, most countries have implemented HPS initiatives only in pilot schools rather than nationwide. Barriers include fragmented governance, insufficient teacher training, and limited budget allocations for preventive health. Scaling up requires integrating health promotion into core education standards so that it becomes routine rather than project-based. The success of HPS depends as much on institutional reform as on enthusiasm from educators.

Things to Think About

Why do good ideas like HPS remain limited to pilot projects? What incentives could motivate education ministries to sustain them system-wide?

Interesting Facts

Only about one in five countries currently includes health-promoting school standards in national education policy frameworks.

TOPIC BRIEF: MENTAL HEALTH

(Anchor: "Mental health is not simply the absence of illness")

Did You Know That...

This definition reframes mental health as a positive state of functioning—not merely the avoidance of disorders. It emphasizes that emotional resilience, learning capacity, and the ability to form healthy relationships are core components of mental well-being. This view aligns mental health with lifelong development and participation in society. Promoting positive mental health therefore requires attention to skills like coping, empathy, and problem-solving, not only clinical treatment.

Things to Think About

If mental health is about thriving, not just surviving, how should schools redefine their role—from preventing problems to actively building strengths?

Interesting Facts

WHO estimates that half of all mental health conditions begin by age 14, but most remain undiagnosed and untreated until adulthood.

Glossary

Mental health — A state of well-being in which individuals realize their abilities, can cope with stress, and contribute to their community.

(Anchor: "Social and emotional well-being can include connection to land, spirituality, ancestry and culture")

Did You Know That...

Cultural identity and belonging are powerful protective factors for mental health. For Indigenous and local communities, connection to land, ancestry, and spirituality supports resilience and intergenerational healing. Ignoring these dimensions can make health programs feel irrelevant or even harmful. Effective approaches to student well-being recognize local traditions, languages, and community networks as key mental health resources.

Things to Think About

How can schools incorporate cultural practices and local wisdom without tokenizing them? Should mental health education differ across cultural contexts?

Interesting Facts

In several countries, integrating traditional storytelling, ceremonies, or local language learning into curricula has been linked to lower school dropout and improved self-esteem.

Glossary

Social and emotional well-being — A holistic concept encompassing relationships, belonging, and cultural identity as foundations for health.

(Anchor: "Most mental health conditions begin during the school years")

Did You Know That...

The adolescent brain undergoes rapid development, making it highly sensitive to social and emotional experiences. Early interventions in schools can change life trajectories by preventing long-term conditions. Programs that teach emotional regulation, help-seeking, and coping skills have been shown to reduce depression and anxiety rates later in life. Schools therefore represent one of the most strategic entry points for early mental health care.

Things to Think About

If schools are often where mental health problems begin to surface, what kinds of support structures should be in place to respond effectively and sensitively?

Interesting Facts

Nearly 70% of adolescents with mental health needs do not receive care, even in high-income countries.

Glossary

Stigmatization — the action of describing or regarding someone or something as worthy of disgrace or great disapproval.

(Anchor: "Good mental health and well-being are associated with better school engagement")

Did You Know That...

Students with strong emotional well-being attend school more regularly and participate more actively in class. Mental health impacts concentration, motivation, and memory—all essential for learning. Programs that strengthen emotional intelligence have shown measurable academic benefits, including higher grades and fewer behavioral disruptions. Supporting mental health is therefore an educational investment, not just a health intervention.

Things to Think About

Should academic performance indicators include well-being measures? How might schools balance testing and mental health priorities?

Interesting Facts

Meta-analyses of social—emotional learning (SEL) programs show average academic gains equivalent to an 11-percentile-point improvement in achievement.

Glossary

Social and emotional skills — abilities that help people understand and manage their emotions, set positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions

(Anchor: "Poor mental health contributes to underachievement, absenteeism, disruptive classroom behaviour")

Did You Know That...

Unaddressed mental health issues create a cycle of educational disadvantage. Students with untreated depression or anxiety are more likely to miss school, fall behind academically, and experience social isolation. Over time, this increases dropout rates and limits career opportunities, perpetuating inequality. Breaking this cycle requires schools to treat emotional well-being as foundational to learning outcomes.

Things to Think About

How can schools identify and support struggling students before they disengage entirely? Should teachers be trained to recognize emotional distress alongside academic difficulties?

Interesting Facts

Students with moderate to severe depression are more than twice as likely to be chronically absent from school.

Glossary

Absenteeism — Frequent or prolonged absence from school, often linked to underlying physical or psychological issues.

WHY ARE SCHOOLS IDEALLY PLACED FOR SUPPORTING MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING?

(Anchor: "Most children and adolescents spend much of their time at school.")

Did You Know That...

Schools are second only to families in shaping children's mental and emotional health. Because nearly all children pass through the school system, it offers an unparalleled opportunity for universal mental health promotion. Research shows that interventions delivered in schools—like mindfulness, peer support, or teacher mentoring—are among the most cost-effective public health strategies. By embedding mental health in daily routines, through universal intervention (see definition below) schools can reach even those who would never seek clinical help.

Things to Think About

If every school is a potential health setting, what changes would make classrooms emotionally safer and more inclusive? Should mental health education be treated as a core subject, like mathematics or science?

Interesting Facts

Worldwide, over 1.5 billion students spend about 180 days per year in school—equivalent to roughly 12,000 hours of exposure to the school environment before adulthood.

Glossary

Universal intervention — A preventive approach that targets all individuals in a population, not just those identified as at risk.

(Anchor: "Negative experiences at school, such as bullying, violence among peers or discrimination...")

Did You Know That...

Toxic school environments can damage developing brains and reinforce cycles of trauma and exclusion. Chronic bullying and social rejection increase risks of depression, anxiety, and self-harm. Conversely, creating a sense of belonging through positive peer relationships protects mental health. WHO encourages schools to replace punitive discipline with restorative approaches (see definition below) that build empathy and accountability.

Things to Think About

What systems can schools put in place to detect early signs of bullying or exclusion? Should student-led initiatives have a role in maintaining inclusive school climates?

Interesting Facts

Children who experience bullying are twice as likely to develop anxiety disorders and three times as likely to attempt suicide later in adolescence.

Glossary

Restorative approach — A disciplinary method focused on repairing harm and rebuilding relationships rather than punishment.

(Anchor: "Positive experiences such as feeling connected to teachers and peers...")

Did You Know That...

Social connection acts as a psychological buffer against stress. Students who feel supported by teachers and peers develop stronger self-esteem and resilience. A single trusted adult relationship can significantly lower the risk of suicide and school dropout. Fostering connection requires consistent teacher training, student participation, and safe spaces for dialogue.

Things to Think About

How can schools ensure that every student has at least one trusted adult to talk to? Should mentoring programs be integrated into the curriculum rather than treated as extracurricular? How can governmental bodies better support interconnectedness between students (see below)?

Interesting Facts

According to OECD studies, students who feel a strong sense of belonging at school are 55% less likely to experience chronic stress symptoms.

Glossary

Connectedness (as it relates to schools)— A student's perception that peers and adults in their school care about their learning and well-being.

WHAT ARE THE CURRENT GAPS?

(Anchor: "Few schools sustainably embed such programmes or approaches in an HPS and systems framework.")

Did You Know That...

While many schools run short-term wellness initiatives, few integrate them into broader education systems. Fragmented programs often collapse when project funding ends or staff change. Embedding mental health in school policies ensures continuity and accountability. Sustainable (see definition below) improvement requires consistent leadership, cross-sector collaboration, and monitoring mechanisms that track both well-being and academic outcomes.

Things to Think About

Why do school health programs often remain temporary? How can governments design incentives for long-term integration rather than one-time projects?

Interesting Facts

Studies show that fewer than 20% of countries have a national framework linking mental health and education policies.

Glossary

Sustainability (as it relates to program implementation) — The capacity to maintain health programs over time through institutional support, resources, and policy alignment.

(Anchor: "The multiple determinants of mental health require solutions that span many systems and sectors.")

Did You Know That...

Mental health is influenced by factors beyond the classroom—housing, food security, family support, and social justice all play a role. Schools cannot address these issues alone. The Health-Promoting Schools model encourages partnerships among ministries of health, education, and social services. Integrating data systems across sectors enables coordinated responses to student needs.

Things to Think About

Should ministries share data about child welfare, attendance, and mental health to target support? How can schools collaborate with communities without overwhelming teachers?

Interesting Facts

Cross-sector collaboration can triple the impact of school-based mental health programs compared to isolated interventions.

Glossary

Systems approach — A method that integrates policies, resources, and actors across multiple levels to achieve coordinated and lasting results.

ACTIVATING SYNERGIES IN INTERVENTIONS

(Anchor: "Insufficient and/or poor-quality sleep is associated with... depressive and anxiety symptoms")

Did You Know That...

Sleep is essential for learning, memory, and emotional stability. Chronic sleep deprivation impairs focus, increases irritability, and worsens symptoms of anxiety and depression. Adolescents are particularly vulnerable because biological changes delay their sleep cycles while school schedules remain early. Promoting healthy sleep habits—including later start times and sleep education—can improve both academic and mental health outcomes.

Things to Think About

Would shifting school start times improve student well-being and performance? How can teachers model and promote better sleep hygiene without invading privacy?

Interesting Facts

Teenagers need 8–10 hours of sleep nightly, yet nearly 70% get fewer than seven hours on school nights.

Glossary

Healthy sleep — Habits and environmental conditions that promote good quality sleep, such as consistent routines and limiting screen time.

(Anchor: "Unhealthy diets are linked to poorer development and mental health trajectories")

Did You Know That...

Nutrition profoundly affects brain development and mood regulation. Diets high in sugar and processed foods increase inflammation, which is linked to depression and attention problems. Food insecurity can also lead to stress and behavioral challenges. Schools that provide nutritious meals and integrate food education into the curriculum not only improve health but also foster social equality and concentration in class.

Things to Think About

Should governments treat school meals as part of mental health policy? How could local agriculture be linked to school feeding programs to make them sustainable?

Interesting Facts

Students who eat balanced school lunches score 18% higher on standardized tests than peers with nutrient-poor diets.

Glossary

Food insecurity — Limited or uncertain access to adequate and nutritious food for normal growth and development.

WHAT ARE HEALTH-PROMOTING SCHOOLS AND SYSTEMS?

(Anchor: "The eight global standards are a system of interconnected elements")

Did You Know That...

The eight global standards form a blueprint for integrating health into every part of school life—from policy and curriculum to community partnerships. These standards recognize that physical spaces, leadership, and governance are as crucial to health as lessons or counseling. Together, they establish accountability structures that ensure well-being isn't left to chance or dependent on individual schools' motivation. A strong system links school culture with national priorities, making health promotion sustainable rather than optional.

Things to Think About

If health and learning are interconnected, should ministries of education and health share oversight of school systems? How can schools assess their progress across all eight standards fairly and transparently?

Interesting Facts

The WHO's global standards for health-promoting schools were developed jointly with UNESCO and UNICEF to harmonize health and education strategies.

Glossary

Global standards — Agreed-upon benchmarks that define essential components of effective, equitable, and sustainable school health systems.

(Anchor: "A systems approach ensures that policies, mechanisms and resources for health and well-being are sustainably promoted in all aspects of school life.")

Did You Know That...

A systems approach moves beyond isolated programs to embed health in the entire educational infrastructure. It integrates mental health with physical safety, nutrition, and inclusive education, ensuring that each reinforces the other. By linking policies with funding, monitoring, and leadership, this approach institutionalizes well-being so it persists through political or staff changes. Systems thinking also promotes shared responsibility among administrators, teachers, families, and communities.

Things to Think About

How can schools ensure that health promotion is viewed as everyone's job, not only the counselor's or nurse's? What might help districts or ministries sustain these programs after leadership transitions?

Interesting Facts

Countries using systems approaches—like Finland and Singapore—consistently rank high in both student well-being and academic performance.

Glossary

Capacity-building — the ongoing process of improving the skills, knowledge, systems, and resources of individuals, organizations, and communities to enhance their ability to achieve goals and adapt to change

(Anchor: "Cross-sectoral collaboration, participatory processes, models of distributed leadership...")

Did You Know That...

Distributed leadership empowers teachers, students, and community members to take ownership of health initiatives rather than relying solely on top-down directives. Cross-sectoral collaboration connects schools with local health centers, social services, and parent organizations to create wraparound support. Participatory processes make students co-creators of their school culture, improving engagement and accountability. When decision-making is shared, programs are more inclusive and better tailored to real needs.

Things to Think About

How can school systems balance centralized guidance with local flexibility? Should students have formal representation in school health committees?

Interesting Facts

Research shows that schools with active student participation in health planning report 25% fewer bullying incidents and better teacher–student trust.

Glossary

Distributed leadership — A governance model where decision-making and responsibility are shared among multiple actors rather than concentrated in a single authority.

(Anchor: "Fig 1. The eight global standards for health-promoting schools and systems")

Did You Know That...

The eight standards cover every layer of school operation—from national policy to the classroom experience. They include: government and school-level policies; governance and leadership; community partnerships; curriculum; social—emotional and physical environments; and health services. These categories create an interconnected framework that prevents health promotion from being siloed. Together, they ensure consistency, accountability, and adaptability across diverse contexts.

Things to Think About

How could your school evaluate itself using these eight standards? Which areas—like mental health services or teacher training—might require the most investment? What capacity, if any, do schools in your assigned country have to adopt these standards?

Interesting Facts

The "social-emotional environment" standard is unique in recognizing relationships and school culture as health determinants equal in importance to nutrition or hygiene.

HOW CAN WE STRENGTHEN MENTAL HEALTH USING A HEALTHPROMOTING SCHOOLS AND SYSTEMS APPROACH?

(Anchor: "Develop national policies to promote and protect learners' and teachers' mental health within schools")

Did You Know That...

National policies establish the legal and institutional frameworks that allow mental health programs to flourish. Without clear mandates, schools rely on individual initiatives that rarely last. Policies that protect teachers and learners from abuse, discrimination, and unsafe conditions create a foundation for positive mental health. Aligning education and health ministries also ensures that resources and accountability are shared across sectors.

Things to Think About

How can ministries ensure that mental health policies translate from national plans into real classroom practices? Should teacher well-being be measured alongside student outcomes?

Interesting Facts

More than 60 countries now include school-based mental health in their national education strategies, though implementation quality varies widely.

Glossary

Safe to Learn standards — Global benchmarks promoting safety, inclusion, and protection from violence in educational settings.

(Anchor: "Have an equitable budget and human resources to support HPS, including mental health and psychosocial support services")

Did You Know That...

Funding determines whether policies move from paper to practice. Equitable budgeting prioritizes schools serving marginalized or rural populations, where mental health services are least available. Partnerships with local NGOs or community-based mental health centers can fill critical service gaps. Sustainable resource allocation also requires training school staff to manage small budgets and report spending transparently.

Things to Think About

How can countries ensure that funding for school mental health does not disappear when donor projects end? Should community volunteers be formally included in national resource planning?

Interesting Facts

In many low- and middle-income countries, less than 2% of total education spending is directed toward health and well-being programs.

Glossary

Equitable budgeting — Distributing resources based on relative need, not uniform per capita formulas.

(Anchor: "Support training and professional development in wholeschool approaches to mental health")

Did You Know That...

Teachers are often the first to notice signs of emotional distress in students, yet most receive little formal training in mental health. Continuous professional development builds confidence and helps staff create safe, inclusive classrooms. Training in crisis management, bullying prevention, and referral systems enables early intervention. Online platforms can extend access to teachers in remote areas and foster peer learning.

Things to Think About

What incentives could motivate teachers to prioritize mental health training amid heavy workloads? Should mental health modules be compulsory in teacher certification programs?

Interesting Facts

Countries that embed mental health into teacher education report up to a 40% reduction in classroom behavioral incidents.

Glossary

Whole-school approach — A framework integrating health promotion across all school operations, policies, and relationships.

(Anchor: "Have school policies that promote inclusion and value diversity")

Did You Know That...

Inclusive policies help students feel safe and respected regardless of background, ability, or identity. Anti-bullying and anti-discrimination measures are cornerstones of emotional safety. Schools that celebrate diversity—through multilingual signage, cultural festivals, or flexible learning supports—foster stronger community ties. Inclusion also extends to teachers and staff, promoting equity across the whole school environment.

Things to Think About

How can schools ensure that inclusion is practiced daily rather than remaining a policy document? Should students play a role in drafting or monitoring inclusion charters?

Interesting Facts

UNESCO reports that students in inclusive schools demonstrate 30% higher rates of empathy and social participation.

Glossary

Inclusion — Ensuring that every learner, regardless of ability or identity, can participate fully in the educational environment.

(Anchor: "Establish an HPS committee to plan, implement and evaluate mental health initiatives")

Did You Know That...

An HPS committee turns broad goals into coordinated action. It brings together teachers, parents, students, and local leaders to design context-specific programs. Regular review meetings help ensure that mental health remains a visible and evolving priority. Committees also serve as channels for feedback, helping national authorities understand real challenges at the school level.

Things to Think About

Who should chair such a committee—teachers, administrators, or students? How can schools prevent token participation from undermining meaningful collaboration?

Interesting Facts

Schools with dedicated health committees are twice as likely to maintain long-term well-being programs after leadership changes.

Glossary

HPS committee — A multi-stakeholder body that coordinates, monitors, and evaluates school health and well-being initiatives.

(Anchor: "Include cooperative learning and strengths-based approaches to build learners' self-esteem and confidence")

Did You Know That...

Strengths-based education shifts focus from deficits to capabilities. By highlighting what students do well, teachers build confidence and intrinsic motivation. Cooperative learning, where students work in diverse groups, promotes empathy and teamwork. This environment nurtures both cognitive and emotional growth, preparing students for collaborative adult life.

Things to Think About

What strategies help teachers recognize and reinforce individual strengths? Could grading systems include social—emotional development as part of assessment?

Interesting Facts

Students exposed to cooperative learning show 20–30% higher self-efficacy and better peer relationships than those in competitive environments.

Glossary

Strengths-based approach — An educational philosophy that identifies and cultivates individual talents and positive attributes rather than focusing solely on deficits.

(Anchor: "Set up peer support programmes")

Did You Know That...

Peer programs empower students to support each other through transitions, stress, or crises. Peer mentors often bridge communication gaps between learners and adults, fostering trust and empathy. When properly trained and supervised, peer supporters can identify early signs of distress and encourage professional help-seeking. These initiatives create a culture where students feel seen and valued.

Things to Think About

How can schools train and supervise peer mentors to ensure both effectiveness and safety? Should peer programs be voluntary or integrated into student leadership structures?

Interesting Facts

Peer mentoring initiatives have reduced reports of loneliness and bullying by up to 40% in participating schools.

Glossary

Peer support — A structured form of mutual assistance where students help each other manage stress, belonging, and well-being.

(Anchor: "Facilitate access to mental health services")

Did You Know That...

Easy access to mental health services ensures that mild distress doesn't escalate into severe disorders. Schools that partner with local clinics or use telehealth models expand coverage for students and families. Confidential referral systems reduce stigma by normalizing help-seeking. When schools act as gateways rather than gatekeepers, more young people get timely care.

Things to Think About

How can confidentiality be balanced with parental involvement when students seek help? Should mental health services be housed on campus or externally for privacy?

Interesting Facts

Telehealth counseling during the COVID-19 pandemic increased youth access to mental health professionals by 30% across WHO pilot regions.

Glossary

Referral pathway — The structured process for connecting students in need to professional support services within or beyond the school.

CASE STUDIES

(Anchor: "Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) – USA")

Did You Know That...

CASEL's decade-long initiative in U.S. school districts shows how long-term, system-level SEL implementation transforms educational outcomes. Its model integrates social—emotional learning into curricula, staff training, and district policies. The focus on sustainability ensures SEL survives leadership transitions and becomes part of organizational DNA. This demonstrates that systemic culture change, not just classroom programs, drives lasting results.

Things to Think About

What lessons can low-resource countries draw from CASEL's emphasis on policy integration and professional development? Could SEL frameworks be adapted for cultural relevance in non-Western contexts?

Interesting Facts

After 10 years, participating districts reported better attendance, fewer behavioral issues, and higher student morale—even amid staff turnover.

Glossary

Social—emotional learning (SEL) — The process through which learners acquire and apply skills for managing emotions, building relationships, and making responsible decisions.

(Anchor: "Adolescent Mental Health and Suicide Prevention (AMHSP) Programme – Kazakhstan")

Did You Know That...

Kazakhstan's AMHSP program demonstrates the power of data-driven, intersectoral collaboration. By combining digital monitoring with in-person counseling, it created one of the most comprehensive adolescent support systems in Central Asia. The program trained over 100,000 school staff and reduced suicidal ideation among at-risk students. Its success rests on government leadership, continuous data collection, and capacity-building for sustainability.

Things to Think About

How can other countries adapt Kazakhstan's approach without overreliance on technology? What safeguards are needed to protect data privacy in digital mental health tracking?

Interesting Facts

The program's data-informed advocacy helped secure long-term support from multiple ministries, setting a precedent for national scaling.

Glossary

Digital monitoring system — An electronic platform for identifying, tracking, and referring individuals at risk of mental health crises.