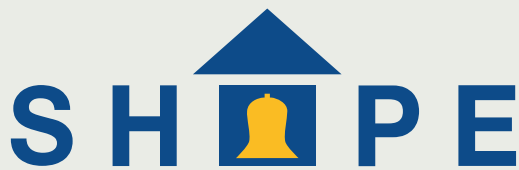


# School Mental Health Quality Guide

## Needs Assessment & Resource Mapping



School Health Assessment  
and Performance Evaluation System



## **School Mental Health Quality Guide: Needs Assessment & Resource Mapping**

is part of a collection of resources developed by the National Center for School Mental Health (NCSMH) at the University of Maryland School of Medicine. The Quality Guides provide information to help school mental health systems advance the quality of their services and supports. This guide contains background information on needs assessment and resource mapping, best practices, possible action steps, examples from the field, and resources.

### **Recommended Citation**

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The mission of the National Center for School Mental Health (NCSMH) is to strengthen policies and programs in school mental health to improve learning and promote success for America's youth.

# What is a **Needs Assessment**?

A process used by a system such as a school, district, or agency to identify strengths and gaps, clarify priorities, inform quality improvement, and advance action planning.

## Value of needs assessments:

- Identify and address mental health needs that are the most pressing.
- Understand how well existing services and supports are meeting student needs.
- Identify and leverage system strengths.
- Inform priorities and actions for school mental health programming.

This process should be **collaborative** and should integrate available data and perspectives from a **wide range** of individuals who are part of or affected by the system.

# What is **Resource Mapping**?

A process to identify, visually represent, and share information about internal and external supports and services to inform effective utilization of assets. In school mental health, resources in schools and the surrounding community can be mapped across a multitiered system of support to better address the needs of the whole child.

A resource map can be a **map** that shows the location and type of available services or a **directory** that lists available services and resources.

## Value of resource mapping:

- Identify valuable local resources.
- Improve awareness and access.
- Reduce duplication and inappropriate use of services.
- Enhance communication and collaboration.

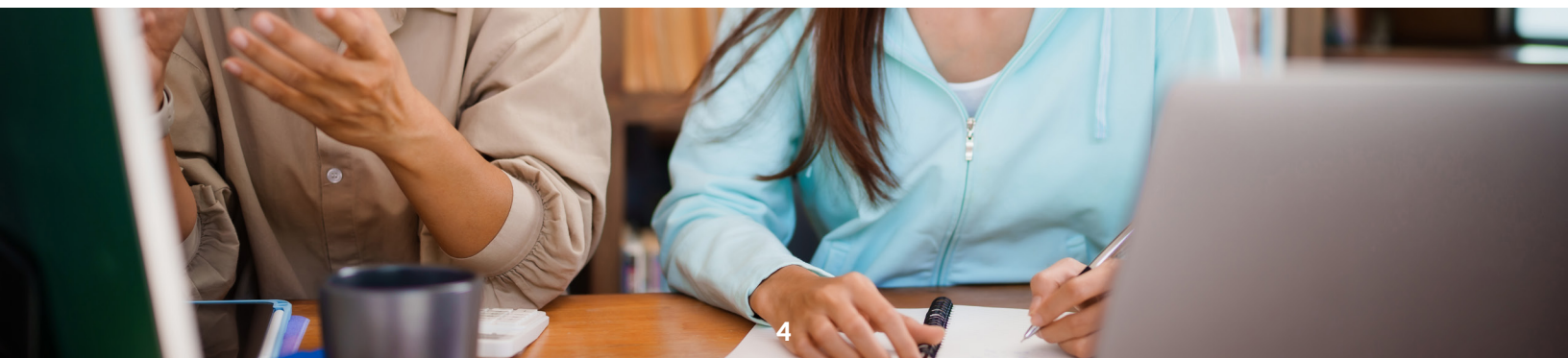
# How Do Needs Assessment and Resource Mapping **Fit Together**?

- **Needs assessment** identifies pressing strengths, needs, and challenges in a system.
- **Resource mapping** offers a clear representation of resource available to address identified needs or enhance identified strengths.



## Best Practices

- **Convene a diverse team to develop and conduct a needs assessment. This team should include representation from several groups (e.g., caregivers, students, community health providers, school mental health providers, school administrators, school staff, community leaders) and reflect diverse demographic characteristics (e.g., age, disability, ethnicity, gender identity and expression, language, national origin, race, religion, sexual orientation, sex, socioeconomic status).**
  - Needs assessment should reflect diverse team members' input and values related to identified needs and strengths.
- **Review existing data (e.g., office referrals, expulsion and suspension rates, attendance and truancy records, nursing and counselor logs, health risk assessments, aggregate data from behavioral health screenings, crisis referrals, emergency petitions, school climate and behavioral surveys, incident reports, homework completion rates, homelessness rates) to identify needs, disproportionalities, and disparities.**
- **Identify additional data, such as student risk assessment, community-level stressors or potentially traumatic events, and school campus physical safety, that might inform student needs and develop a process to gather it.**
- **Use needs assessment tools and processes that are psychometrically sound and culturally relevant.**
- **Include items in needs assessment tools that allow for disaggregation by demographic characteristics (e.g., age, disability, ethnicity, gender identity and expression, language, national origin, race, religion, sexual orientation, sex, socioeconomic status).**
- **Pilot needs assessment with students, families, and other relevant groups for feedback and revisions before large-scale data collection.**
- **Conduct needs assessment through multiple platforms and in multiple languages as appropriate to access all members of the community.**
- **Summarize and review needs assessment data to determine...**
  - The most pressing needs impacting most students (Tier 1), some students (Tier 2), and just a few students (Tier 3).
  - Patterns of needs (e.g., emotional/behavioral, medical, basic [e.g., food, housing], social support, financial needs, family functioning).
  - Whether current services and supports are trauma informed and healing centered.
  - Whether current services and supports are culturally responsive and anti-racist.
  - How well current services and supports are meeting student needs with the use of all disaggregated data.
- **Disaggregate data to identify inequities and disparities for Black, Indigenous, people of color (BIPOC), and other marginalized students.**





## Tips

### When assessing student mental health needs, consider:

- Student stressors and mental health concerns
- Knowledge of mental health supports in school
- Preferences for different types of mental health and wellness services
- Use of and satisfaction with current mental health and wellness services
- Feedback and recommendations about current mental health and wellness services provided in school

### Examples of questions that could be included in a needs assessment:

- What are the two greatest stressors faced by students?
- If you needed counseling related to stress or other concerns, where would you go for help?
- Would you recommend the available mental health services to another student?
- If you have used the mental health services in the school before, on a scale of 1-10, with 10 being the most satisfied, how satisfied were you with the services?
- What are some of the community's strengths?
- What actions would you recommend to improve current services and supports?

### Analyze the resulting data and determine patterns by considering:

- Are there common problems?
- Where are they occurring (e.g., specific grades or a subset of classrooms)?
- What are the most pressing behavioral health issues that affect all or most students (Tier 1), some students (Tier 2), and just a few students (Tier 3)?

### In the context of a child's developmental level and culture, consider:

- Basic needs (e.g., food, housing)
- Emotional/behavioral needs
- Medical needs
- Social support
- Financial needs
- Child strengths
- Family strengths, demands, values, and functioning





## Best Practices

- Convene a diverse team to conduct a strengths assessment. Team should include representation from several groups (e.g., caregivers, students, school mental health and health staff, community-based providers, school administrators, school staff, community leaders) and reflect diverse demographic characteristics (e.g., age, disability, ethnicity, gender identity and expression, language, national origin, race, religion, sexual orientation, sex, socioeconomic status).
- Review existing data (e.g., school climate surveys, focus groups) to identify strengths.
- Collect data to identify student strengths and developmental assets (e.g., school connectedness, social skills, belonging, gratitude, self-determination, grit, self-awareness, self-management, personal responsibility, decision making, community engagement).
- Use strengths assessment tools and processes that are psychometrically sound and culturally relevant.
- Pilot strengths assessment with students, families, and other relevant individuals for feedback and revisions before large-scale data collection.
- Conduct strengths assessment through multiple platforms and in multiple languages as appropriate to access all members of the community.
- Summarize and review strengths assessment data to determine how current supports and services leverage and address gaps in student strengths.
- Disaggregate data to identify inequities and disparities for BIPOC and other marginalized students.



## Tip

### When assessing student mental health strengths, consider:

- Student connectedness to school, school staff, and peers
- Acts of kindness in school
- Positive role models at school
- Student, staff, and family well-being
- Healthy relationships and behaviors

# Use needs assessment to inform decisions about selecting, planning, and implementing appropriate services and supports



## Best Practices

- Develop a comprehensive needs assessment report that is relevant and easily accessible to inform decisions.
- Use needs assessment data to inform how gaps can be addressed with existing or new services and supports.
- Use needs assessment data to prioritize selection of areas of focus, programs and strategies, and action steps.



## Resource

On the ***School Health Assessment and Performance Evaluation (SHAPE) System***, school, district, and entity teams and partners can use the **School Mental Health Profile** and the **School Mental Health Quality Assessment** to assess strengths and needs of their comprehensive school mental health systems.





## Action Step

Conduct a gap analysis, which helps to both identify and prioritize gaps between student needs and available resources.



## Resource

The **Gap Analysis Worksheet** helps your team document needs, current resources, and gaps between needs and resources. This worksheet can also help your team prioritize needs and create a plan for addressing them.





# Conduct resource mapping (or have access to an updated resource map or guide) to identify existing school and community mental health services and supports



## Best Practices

- Use multiple sources to identify community-trusted resources available to students, families, and communities that promote mental health (e.g., SAMHSA's Behavioral Health Treatment Services locator, school mental health and health care/community provider summary of services available, recreational activities) across a multi-tiered system of supports; consider resources that mitigate racism and other inequities and that impact mental health beyond only individual-focused supports (e.g., faith-based organizations, Learning for Justice, American Civil Liberties Union, Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health).
- Identify mental health resources that are trauma informed, healing centered, culturally responsive, and anti-racist.
- Create and foster school-community partnerships to ensure ongoing communication about existing and new programs, services, and supports available to students and families.
- Develop a user-friendly, updated, comprehensive resource map or guide that includes data about each resource, such as:
  - Name of the program/organization
  - Description of service
  - Website
  - Address
  - Phone number
  - Hours of service
  - Eligibility requirements
  - Insurance accepted
  - Cost of service
  - Waitlist status
  - Any other unique considerations (e.g., language, culture, immigration status)
- Include target outcomes and evidence of impact for each service.
- Ensure resource map or guide is easily accessible to diverse groups, including students and families.
- Establish a process and dedicated staff time to regularly evaluate, update, and improve the resource map or guide.





# Action Steps: Sustainable Mapping

## 1. Pre-mapping:

- Determine who will participate in the mapping process. Include a diverse group that understands and represents the community. Consider members from the following groups:
  - Teachers
  - School administrators
  - Administrative staff
  - Youth/students
  - Child welfare
  - Juvenile justice
  - Community leaders
  - Parents/families
  - Parent Teacher Association
  - School health & behavioral health staff
  - Community health & behavioral health providers
- Determine the audience of the resource guide to inform the types of resources and depth of information (e.g. definitions of terms, how the resources are intended to be used). Audiences might include:
  - Administrative staff
  - School nurses
  - Families
  - Students and youth
  - Teachers
  - Behavioral health professionals
- Reference example resource maps.

## 2. Identify the categories of resources to map. These could include:

- Food Resources
- Housing Resources
- Advocacy Programs
- Support Groups
- Mentoring
- Group Therapy
- Recreation Programming
- Day Treatment Programs
- After School Care Programming
- Tutoring Enrichment Activities
- Individual & Family Therapy
- School-Based Mental Health Services
- Outpatient Mental Health Services
- Hospitals
- Inpatient Programs
- Crisis Hotlines
- Mobile Crisis Teams
- Urgent Care Facilities
- Emergency Room Departments

## 3. Outline processes for evaluating the resource mapping. Identify how information will be collected to help evaluate the success of the mapping process.

- Brief questionnaires and focus groups can clarify what is currently being done, whether it is being done well, and areas for improvement related to mapping of school and community resources.
- Yearly or bi-yearly surveys and focus groups can ensure that resource maps remain current.
- Determine the group of individuals within a school that will identify resource mapping successes, challenges, and areas for improvement.
- Develop a process for implementing change based on feedback.

## 4. Maintain, sustain, and evaluate mapping efforts. Develop evaluation strategies to determine whether:

- Resources actually meet needs and that families are following through with and are satisfied with services.
- Feedback from school-based staff and community partners is well-integrated into mapping.



# Resources

- The **FAIRSTART Resource Map** is an example of a detailed resource map that lists providers ranging from outpatient therapists to in-home care agencies.
- **2-1-1**, a *United Way* database, details thousands of federal, state, and local services for those with a variety of health needs.
- **Resource Mapping in Schools and School Districts: A Resource Guide** includes worksheets that can help teams systematically identify and map resources.



## Example from the Field

One midwestern high school with approximately 1,700 students conducted a team-based resource mapping process to assess behavioral health capacity and resources currently available inside and outside the school.

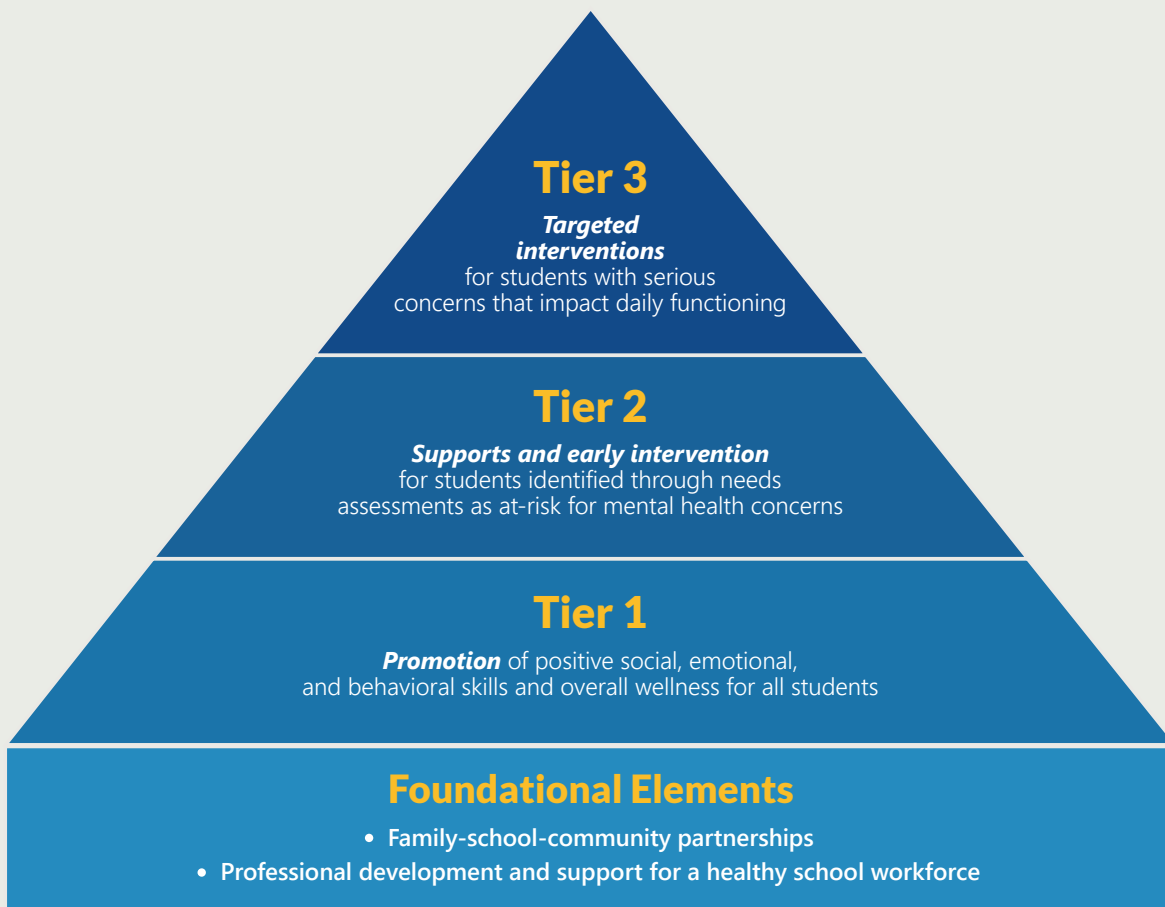
Their process revealed the following:

- A lot of support is available in the school, but students, families, and staff are often unaware of the services and how to access them.
- Tier 1 and Tier 2 services and supports (e.g., social emotional learning, brief group interventions for anxiety) are available but limited.
- Tier 2 and 3 services and supports (e.g., brief substance use interventions, cognitive behavioral therapy for depression) from the school-based health center can be better used.



**Tip** Many schools rely on a multi-tiered framework of support to address the interconnected academic and behavioral health needs of students.

Resources can be categorized across a three-tiered system of support. Align specific resources to each tier and ensure that resources address needs within each tier.



# Use an updated resource map or guide to inform decisions and selection, planning, and implementation of appropriate services and supports



## Best Practices

- Pair needs and strengths/assets assessment data with resource map to consider how needs can be met and strengths used to inform existing school and community supports and services.
- Collaborate with diverse stakeholders to consider reducing or abandoning services and supports that lack evidence of impact for the intended population.
- Prioritize services and supports that are trauma informed, healing centered, culturally responsive, anti-racist, and equitable; abandon or partner to improve services and supports that do not reflect these principles and practices.
- Use resource map to identify areas of need and strength that are not adequately addressed by existing supports and services and seek to identify existing or develop new referral options to meet the need.
- Consider whether services have demonstrated impact within a sample reflective of the school/district population and demonstrated equitable impact.





## Example from the Field

One small school district (8 schools, 6,000 students) in upstate New York developed a resource map template based on feedback from district and school stakeholders.

Resource mapping goals included:

- Increase awareness of school mental health services among school staff and administrators.
- Provide clear information about how to refer students.
- Serve as a reference in Student Support Team meetings for planning student interventions.

The resource map detailed resources both within the community and across the school district. The 12 sections contained information on mental health resources, emergency mental health, parent resources, regional wraparound services, and services for persons with developmental disabilities, as well as services identified within 7 outlying counties that youth either move to or from. The map was disseminated via a workshop-based training. The district identified a team to annually modify and update the map.



### Tip

**When selecting, planning, and implementing new services and supports, consider how existing supports are functioning.**

If the services and supports do not produce desired outcomes or are duplicative, teams should consider abandoning them.



### Resource

The Ector County Independent School District uses a **Strategic Abandonment Tool**, a worksheet that helps teams determine the utility, cost-effectiveness, and necessity of various services and supports.

# Align existing mental health supports and services



## Best Practices

- Use your diverse team (school staff, school mental health and health providers, community partners, caregivers, students) to identify and gather information about current or prospective school mental health supports and services, including:
  - Who is implementing
  - How students are identified
  - Data collected/analyzed
  - The intended target outcome(s)
  - Training and ongoing support involved
- Identify areas of overlap and/or misalignment.
- Make decisions about how to align existing services and supports to avoid duplication.
- Consider reducing or abandoning supports and services that are redundant.
- Develop a team-based process for ensuring complementarity of initiatives.



## Action Steps

1. Gather a team.
2. Create an inventory of initiatives using a triangle to consider where the initiatives would be placed across the tiers:
  - Tier 1: Mental Health Promotion
  - Tier 2: Prevention
  - Tier 3: Intervention
3. Identify areas of duplication/overlap. Make team decisions about strategic abandonment.
4. Identify areas of need. Develop a process to select new initiatives.
5. Plan for monitoring implementation.



## Resources

- The **School Mental Health Initiative Alignment Map** provides a simple template to help teams avoid duplication of initiatives through outlining existing initiatives and informing the selection of new ones.
- In addition to describing initiative alignment strategy, the **Technical Guide for Alignment of Initiatives, Programs and Practices in School Districts** includes the **Alignment Self-Assessment Action Planning Tool** which helps schools identify their priorities and stay organized. The guide also includes several worksheets to help schools align initiatives across tiers and create an action plan.

For more resources,  
visit the **SHAPE Resource Library** at  
[www.theSHAPEsystem.com](http://www.theSHAPEsystem.com)



# School Mental Health Quality Guide *At A Glance:* Needs Assessment & Resource Mapping



- 1 Assess student mental health needs**
- 2 Assess student mental health strengths**
- 3 Use needs assessment to inform decisions about selecting, planning, and implementing appropriate services and supports**
- 4 Conduct resource mapping (or have access to an updated resource map or guide) to identify existing school and community mental health services and supports, including those that address social determinants of health**
- 5 Use an updated resource map or guide to inform decisions and selection, planning, and implementation of appropriate services and supports**
- 6 Align existing mental health supports and services**



## Best Practices

- **Conduct a needs and/or strengths assessment** by convening a diverse team; using tools and processes that are psychometrically sound and culturally relevant; reviewing available data to identify existing needs, disparities, strengths, and assets; and developing a process to collect additional data where needed.
- **Pilot assessment** with students, families and other relevant groups for feedback and revisions.
- **Utilize multiple platforms and translate into multiple languages** as appropriate.
- Analyze assessment data to **determine the pattern and severity of needs among students**; whether current services and supports are trauma informed, healing centered, culturally responsive, and anti-racist; how well current services and supports are meeting student needs; **and how current supports and services leverage student strengths.**
- **Disaggregate data to identify inequities and disparities** for BIPOC and other marginalized students.
- **Conduct resource mapping** or access an updated resource map or guide to identify existing school and community mental health services and supports.
- Use multiple sources to **identify trusted resources available to students, families, and communities** that promote mental health across a multi-tiered system of supports, address social determinants of health, and mitigate structural inequities.
- **Create and foster school-community partnerships** to ensure ongoing communication about programs, services, and supports for students and families.
- **Develop a user-friendly, updated, comprehensive resource map or guide** that includes data about each resource, target outcomes, and evidence of impact for each service.
- Ensure resource map or guide is **easily accessible to diverse groups**, including students and families.
- Establish a process and dedicate staff time to **regularly evaluate, update, and improve** the resource map or guide.
- Utilize comprehensive needs and/or strengths assessment report(s) and updated resource map or guide to **inform decisions about and implementation of appropriate services and supports.**
- Pair needs and strengths assessment data with resource map to **consider how needs can be met and strengths used** to inform existing school and community supports and services.
- Collaborate with diverse stakeholders to **consider reducing or abandoning services and supports that lack evidence of impact for the intended population**, or those that are not trauma informed, healing centered, culturally responsive, anti-racist, and equitable.
- Use your diverse team to identify and gather information to **align existing mental health supports and services and ensure complementarity of initiatives.**



# School Mental Health Quality Guide *At A Glance:* Needs Assessment & Resource Mapping



## Tips

- When assessing student mental health needs, **consider student stressors and mental health concerns**, as well as **usage of and satisfaction with current mental health and wellness services in school**.
- Analyze the resulting data and **determine patterns by considering the prevalence and severity of behavioral health issues** affecting students.
- **Consider multiple types and levels of needs and strengths** in the context of a child's developmental stage, individual circumstances, and culture.
- When assessing student mental health strengths, **consider student connectedness to school staff and peers, positive behaviors in school, and healthy relationships outside of school**.
- **Utilize a multi-tiered framework of support** to address the interconnected academic and behavioral health needs of students and align specific resources to each tier.
- When selecting, planning, and implementing new services and supports, **evaluate how well existing supports are producing desired outcomes**.
- **Consider strategic abandonment** of duplicative or ineffective services and supports.



## Action Steps

- **Conduct a gap analysis** to identify and prioritize gaps between student needs and available resources.
- For **sustainable resource mapping**, engage in pre-mapping by assembling a diverse workgroup, determining the intended audience, and referencing example resource maps.
- **Identify categories of resources to map**, and outline processes for sustaining and evaluating mapping efforts.
- To ensure initiative alignment, **gather a team to create an inventory of current services and supports** and determine which services and supports are applicable to Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3.
- Identify areas of duplication and **make team decisions about strategic abandonment**.
- **Identify areas of need** and develop a process to select new initiatives and monitor implementation.



## Examples from the Field

- **One midwestern high school conducted a team-based resource mapping process** to assess behavioral health capacity and resources currently available inside and outside the school.
- Based on feedback from district and school stakeholders, **one small school district in upstate New York developed a resource map template** containing information on mental health resources, emergency mental health, parent resources, regional wraparound services, and services for persons with developmental disabilities.



## Resources

- [The School Health Assessment and Performance Evaluation \(SHAPE\) System](#)
- [The Gap Analysis Worksheet](#)
- [The FAIRSTART Resource Map](#)
- [2-1-1, a United Way database](#)
- [Resource Mapping in Schools and School Districts: A Resource Guide](#)
- [Strategic Abandonment Tool](#)
- [School Mental Health Initiative Alignment Map](#)
- [The Technical Guide for Alignment of Initiatives, Programs and Practices in School Districts](#)