



Equipping Navigators to Support Students—and Themselves: A Resource Guide for Success Planning

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About the Education Redesign Lab

Founded in 2014 by Paul Reville, former Massachusetts Secretary of Education and Professor of Practice of Educational Policy and Administration at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, the Education Redesign Lab (EdRedesign) is a university-based actionable research hub. In the pursuit of equity and social justice, we support the field in building cross-sector, community-wide systems of support and opportunity for children from birth to adulthood.

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Success Planning and Navigators

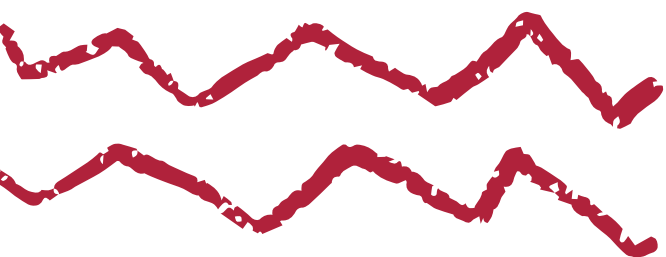
Even before the pandemic, too many children were facing challenges outside of school that impeded their learning and were feeling disconnected from adults within schools. Individualized Success Planning is a flexible process in which each child has an advocate—what we call a navigator—who identifies their individual strengths, interests, goals, and needs and connects them to personalized supports and opportunities. This holistic approach can help schools and other child- and youth-serving agencies address the myriad effects of the pandemic on children and youth as well as provide an ongoing strategy for fostering student wellbeing. While no single Success Planning model exists, navigators fulfill several core functions. They build trusting relationships with each student and family, gather academic and nonacademic information, and jointly develop a plan for action. Multiple types of positions may serve in this role, including counselors, teachers, school support personnel, out-of-school time staff members, and others.

Given that a navigator's position varies, their knowledge, skills, and experiences also differ. In some cases, for example, navigators are trained as social workers and are equipped to address mental health challenges and other acute needs. Other navigators, however, may have limited expertise to address the issues that arise during individual meetings with students. They may also experience secondary trauma from hearing the vast array of challenges that children and families face. Navigators require training both to equip them to effectively support children and youth and to develop healthy coping strategies for their own mental health. They also need access to tiered structures of support to ensure trained professionals are handling children's serious mental health needs.

Since there aren't many resources developed explicitly for training navigators, the Education Redesign Lab (EdRedesign) conducted a scan of materials from relevant fields such as education, social work, and mental health. The following guide features free resources related to several important topics, including mental health, communication, family engagement, and crisis intervention. These resources are intended to assist navigators as they undertake their initial and ongoing work.

Getting Started with Success Planning

- EdRedesign produced a brief [rapid response framework](#) for Success Planning, including an introduction to the navigator role.
- EdRedesign's [Planning for Student Success During Disruption: A Relationship-Based Strategy for Supporting Each Student](#) provides further direction and resources for navigators, including essential skills, training and implementation support, and tips for relationship building.
- As an example, Metro Nashville Public Schools created a comprehensive [Navigator Handbook](#) that includes suggestions for program organization, guidance for connecting with students and families, and adaptable weekly call scripts.



Mental Health Resources

Practitioners who have done this work have found that some navigators experience secondary trauma, in addition to their own stressors while supporting students. These resources are intended to provide strategies to support and preserve their mental health.

- Published in ASCD’s Educational Leadership, [“Coping with Change and Uncertainty”](#) is a COVID-focused article that discusses ways for teachers to re-center themselves during stressful times. The strategies are also generally applicable, especially for the navigator to model healthy coping behavior for students under stress.
- [“The Lowdown on Burnout”](#), also from Educational Leadership, offers educators encouragement and advice for preventing and recovering from the titular issue.
- The National Child Traumatic Stress Network offers a large selection of [resources for educators suffering from secondary trauma](#).
- The CASEL [District Resource Center](#) is a database of free social-emotional learning resources accessed by creating a free account. Navigators may be particularly interested in the [Adult SEL Posters](#) and [Guide to Schoolwide SEL Essentials](#), the latter of which includes educator SEL self-assessment, modeling SEL for students, and tips for engaging families.
- Edutopia compiled a [set of resources for educator mental health support](#); these resources might also be valuable for navigators.
- Shine is an [app-based guided meditation and wellness service](#) with some resources targeted to teachers and students. There are many quality free resources; paid services also available once free resources are exhausted. Shine also created a free [COVID Anxiety Toolkit](#) to help address issues related to anxiety for adults and youth.

Communicating with Students

To be successful, navigators need to be able to authentically connect with students and develop trusting relationships. The following resources include developmental, culturally informed guidance, scripts, examples, and advice for navigators to use when they connect with students during Success Planning.

- Tusla — Child and Family Agency published this [Child and Youth Participation Toolkit](#) for social workers. Based on a framework of child agency and inclusion, the report contains several conversation guides and activities by age group.
- This *Today's Parent* article offers [age-by-age guidance on how to start conversations and begin building relationships with children](#), from preschool to preteen.
- [The Developmental Relationships Framework](#) by Search Institute offers brief guidance on how to support young people.
- The Education Alliance at Brown University identifies [research-based principles for culturally responsive teaching](#), in regard to respecting both students and families.
- A list of items to help [prepare for parent/guardian-teacher conferences](#) from Understood, a nonprofit dedicated to supporting learning differences. The list features embedded resources related to student/family conversations, all of which could be adapted for navigator trainings and resources. Many of the resources are available in Spanish.

Family Engagement

Navigators will engage with families while co-creating individual plans that are personalized and holistic. The following resources include tools, best practices, and examples of engaging with students' families.

- The Parent Teacher Home Visits Program compiles tools for teachers that include home visit tips and sample materials, including model bilingual communications for families.
- Building off of Parent Teacher Home Visits and the Denver Public Schools engagement team, Teaching Tolerance provides a set of best practices and guidelines for communicating with families through home visits.
- The San Francisco Unified School District also offers a Guide to Home Visits with a number of tips and suggestions.
- “Home Visits 101” from Edutopia provides a home visit overview for educators, including several linked resources.
- Edutopia’s “7 Questions to Ask Parents at the Beginning of the Year” is a brief guide to partnering with parents to learn about their child and expectations.
- “The 8 Ps of Parent Engagement”, published in the National Education Association’s *NEA Today*, offers tips and guidance for connecting with both students and their families.

Crisis Intervention

Navigators can't and shouldn't do it alone. If a student is in trouble, navigators can connect them with safe, confidential crisis resources.

- The National Suicide Hotline number is 800-273-8255.
- The Trevor Project hosts a Crisis Resource Call Line for LGBTQ youth struggling with mental health, including contemplating suicide.
- The SAMHSA-sponsored Helpline offers counseling to those affected by human-caused and natural disasters. If a student has been affected by a disaster and needs immediate assistance, please call this toll-free number for information, support, and counseling. You will be connected to the nearest crisis center.
 - 800-985-5990 or Text TN or TalkWithUs to 66746
 - TTY for Deaf/Hearing Impaired: 800-846-8517
- Conexion Americas provides legal aid and other supports for immigrant families.

We plan to continue to update this guide periodically with relevant resources. If you have recommendations for other materials and/or topics that might be helpful, please email edredesign@gse.harvard.edu.

