

PRAISE FOR THE SCHOOLS WE NEED NOW

The Schools We Need Now resonates deeply with the challenges and responsibilities we face in nurturing students in today's schools. This insightful guide offers a crucial perspective, emphasizing the paramount importance of addressing social and emotional concepts during this pivotal stage of students' cognitive development. It serves as an invaluable tool for administrators, providing practical strategies to guide our school communities toward creating environments that prioritize mental health. As a founding principal of a middle school that opened in July 2022, I highly encourage others to utilize this must-read roadmap for fostering positive, supportive spaces where young minds flourish and thrive.

—Anne Marie Adkins, Middle School
Principal, NC

Each day, headlines about devastating mental health issues in schools for students and staff grab our attention. The impact is far-reaching. Better mental health strategies and supports make a lifetime of difference for everyone—sometimes a life and death difference. Drs. Tim Dohrer and Tom Golebiewski have lived and studied all aspects of mental health in the school setting. They are experienced in real schoolhouse issues, have researched best practices, and have led powerful, meaningful, and practical professional development for many years. The key elements that differentiate these authors are their authentic experiences, leadership, and passion for strengthening mental health in our schools.

—Maureen Cheever, PhD, Senior Professional
Learning Director, Illinois
Principals Association

This book is a paradigm-shifting way to truly understand how to implement the Mental Health Action Plan in K-12 schools. The comprehensive step-by-step approach addresses the development model for the whole child that is so critical to designing mentally healthier schools in this country. It's a road map to transformational change!

—Sabrina P. Gracias, Founder,
Ortus Foundation

This book ensures that educators have systems and practices in place to support the mental health needs of students. It is a gold mine, packed with reflective questions for school teams to discuss

while developing or revising their school plans. It provides many examples of student cases, recent data, and strategies that can be implemented immediately.

—**Jessica Johnson**, District Administrator,
Dodgeland School District, WI

One of the biggest challenges school leaders face is the mental health crisis we're dealing with in schools around the world. Facing such a huge challenge, we can feel overwhelmed by all we need to do. This book gives people exactly what they need, so they can meet the crisis head on and come up with positive, powerful solutions.

—**Jim Knight**, Founder and Senior Partner,
Instructional Coaching Group, Author of
High-Impact Instruction

This is the right book at the right time. Schools are struggling to support students and families who are in crisis and those who are just trying to manage the demands that have led to increased stress and depression, social media addiction, and increased loneliness and isolation. We have to do more and better for our students, and this book provides very helpful templates and suggestions that are actionable immediately.

—**Marianne L. Lescher**, K-8 School Principal,
Kyrene School District, AZ

The Schools We Need Now offers a practical and holistic approach to fostering mental well-being in schools. The authors have masterfully distilled the complex and ever-evolving landscape of mental health support within an educational context into a clear, actionable, and accessible roadmap. This book serves as a quick and comprehensive guide that is both informative and user-friendly, making it an invaluable asset for educators, administrators, and support staff alike.

—**Debra Paradowski**, Associate Principal,
Arrowhead Union High School, WI

While navigating the adolescent years involves some universal developmental experiences for all individuals, we know that each student brings their own experiences, identities, strengths, and challenges to these transformative years. The same can be said for their families, educators, and communities. While we learn from the past and current best practices, we also have an obligation to understand how we can create the schools of the future; those that are designed to be dynamic learning communities of possibilities, joy, and unlimited growth for all. The Schools We Need Now by Tim Dohrer and Tom Golebiewski is an inclusive

and collaborative guide that all community stakeholder groups can use to actively engage in the creation of a mentally healthy school and to use proactive design strategies and a practical roadmap to develop a school where every student, regardless of background or learning style, can thrive.

—**Miriam Pike**, Head of School, Wolcott College Prep High School, IL

In “The Schools We Need Now: A Guide to Designing a Mentally Healthy School,” Timothy Dohrer and Thomas Golebiewski brilliantly blend their extensive expertise in education and mental health to advocate for a transformative perspective on school environments. Their approach, deeply rooted in both classic educational philosophies and contemporary scholarship, emphasizes mental health as an integral, rather than peripheral, component of educational systems. The authors’ commitment to this vision is evident through their engaging narrative, offering readers practical, reflective exercises that seamlessly blend mental wellness with educational content. As a clinical social worker, scholar, and youth suicide prevention expert, I find their reframing of schools through a mental health lens both compelling and necessary, offering a fresh, inclusive viewpoint that will resonate with educators of varied experiences and backgrounds. This concise, insightful book not only challenges the status quo but also equips its readers with the understanding and tools to envision and cultivate schools where mental health is at the heart of education.

—**Jonathan B. Singer, PhD, LCSW**
Professor, Loyola University Chicago,
School of Social Work
Coauthor of
*Suicide in Schools: A Practitioner’s Guide to
Multilevel Prevention, Assessment, Intervention
and Postvention*

In these challenging post-pandemic times, Dohrer and Golebiewski provide leadership in rethinking one of our highest priority social and school improvement topics: the mental health of America’s youth. They offer a comprehensive treatment of this complex domain, including the current social context of mental health, visions of excellence, and priority needs and how to meet them. Their work arises from exceptional scholarship combined with a thoughtful sense of practical reality. This book offers a roadmap to student mental and academic well-being.

—**Rick Stiggins**, Author, *Give Our Student the Gift of Confidence*

In their informative and instructive book, Tim Dohrer and Tom Golebiewski have accurately identified the mental health crisis that all schools are experiencing in the post-pandemic era. This current reality necessitates establishing a supportive, inclusive, and equitable school community for students, their families, and their teachers.

The Schools We Need Now calls us to rethink the purpose of schooling and learning. We must attend to students' social and psychological well-being along with their academic progress. We must prioritize child, adolescent, and adult development and adopt pedagogy that addresses the whole child and culturally responsive teaching. We must understand social and emotional learning domains that create a school culture of care, belonging, and wellness and we must embrace assessment for learning rather than assessment of learning. We must include family mental health education programs and services. Finally, we must create conditions, systems, and structures that maximize support, prevention, intervention, and trauma-informed teaching practices. The Schools We Need Now provides a blueprint to create a multi-tiered school-based mental health action plan that considers childhood trauma, stress, anxiety, grief, loss, transitions, and self-harm.

*—Richard Streedain, Leadership
Coach, Common Foundation*

THE SCHOOLS WE NEED NOW

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THE SCHOOLS WE NEED NOW

A Guide to Designing a
Mentally Healthy School

TIMOTHY DOHRER

THOMAS GOLEBIEWSKI

Foreword by David Adams

 CORWIN

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FOREWORD

I'm an educator at heart and the educators among us know that there is nothing like a great analogy. So, when I was preparing to write this foreword, I went looking for inspiration to better understand how to construct environments where students felt connected, the kind of environment that the recommendations in this book promotes. In short, I went searching for the perfect analogy, and as I scoured literature from psychology to chemistry, I kept finding a recurring theme: bonds matter.

This idea that elements, atoms, and people are driven to connect in order to find an equilibrium is reflected in everything from attachment theory to our most fundamental physics. The more I kept searching, the clearer it became that I could learn a lot from the natural world about the nature of bonds and how they inform our common sense of purpose.

Let's take hydrogen, one of the most abundant elements in the universe and one of the most eager to bond. Left alone, hydrogen is extremely reactive, its single electron sensitive to any opportunity to create a more stable energy configuration. Hydrogen wants to connect. In fact, hydrogen is so eager to bond that some of the world's most interesting resources have hydrogen to thank for their existence. Hydrocarbons, including fuels like gasoline, are hydrogen compounds. Hydrogen peroxide helps disinfect wounds. And of course, the best-known hydrogen compound, H_2O , is the source of all life: water.

It's not all positive though. Hydrogen also bonds with chlorine to make hydrochloric acid, a strong acid known for its corrosive nature and its ability to break down everything from metals to food in our stomach. Useful, but dangerous. So, it's hydrogen's eagerness to bond that puts it into relationships with many other elements, with the resulting compounds manifesting new and exciting properties that have shaped the universe we live in...and I would be remiss if I didn't mention that one of the most stable hydrogen compounds is when hydrogen is in relationship with itself: H_2 .

But you didn't pick up this book for a chemistry lesson. This is a book about school mental health and what educators can do to elevate it for our youth.

One of the defining aspects of adolescence is a shift towards peer groups and away from adults. Our teens are hydrogen atoms eager to bond. The quality of those bonds and their resulting relationships can serve ultimately as risk or protective factors for our students' mental health. It depends on what our students bond to.

Let's first think through our students' relationship with themselves (H_2). In the language of social-emotional learning, this bond is achieved through the domains of self-awareness, the ability to understand who we are, what we need, and how we feel relative to the world around us, and self-management, the ability to manage one's behavior in prosocial ways.

In the domain of self-awareness students excel when they are provided with learning experiences, models, and feedback that result in their ability to demonstrate:

- awareness of their needs and emotions;
- awareness of their personal traits, strengths, and opportunities for growth;
- awareness of their external supports;
- a sense of personal responsibility;
- hopefulness and positive expectations regarding themselves and their abilities in the present and future.

Self-awareness helps facilitate self-management, where students excel when they are provided opportunities that result in their ability to demonstrate:

- the ability to manage one's needs and emotions;
- the use of effective choice-making and decision-making skills;
- increasing levels of independence and the ability to set and achieve goals.

Through these learning experiences, students develop the ability to relate to themselves in constructive ways, paving the way for the type of diatomic bond that leads to strong mental health: the bond with oneself. Schools are a crucial space for this work to happen by teaching students about their emotions, modeling coping skills, and elevating thinking strategies that promote a sense of efficacy and optimism. This is "emotional learning." This is the work of our schools, and this is the foundation of mental health.

However, the true strength of the hydrogen atom emerges from its bonds with others.

Recall that chemical compounds form in order to increase the stability of each of the separate elements. We like to think humans are enormously complex beings – and we are – but not so complex that we can't relate with the humble hydrogen atom, seeking relationships that foster stability in ourselves and others. In the context of social-emotional learning, our ability to relate to

others is captured in the domains of social awareness, or students' awareness of the role and value of others in the greater community, and social management, which is students' ability to interact with others in meaningful and productive ways. Specifically, within domain of social awareness students excel when they are provided with learning experiences, models, and feedback that result in their ability to demonstrate:

- awareness of other people's roles, their emotions and perspectives;
- consideration for others and a desire to positively contribute to their community;
- the ability to respond to and read social or pertinent environmental cues.

And in social management when they have opportunities that result in their ability to:

- demonstrate positive communication and social skills to interact effectively with others;
- develop constructive relationships;
- prevent, manage, and resolve interpersonal conflicts in constructive ways.

The social domain – how students bond to others – is a critical space for schools to invest. Everything from instructional strategies to extracurricular activities to direct instruction help students develop the skills to manage relationships and cement the bonds that will promote mental health and serve as protective factors when our young people struggle. This is “social learning.”

By integrating the domains of self and social, enhancing the competencies of awareness and management, and offering learning experiences for our students, schools create opportunities for students to engage effectively in “social and emotional learning.”

Social-emotional skills and school climate have a bidirectional relationship, with students' (and adults') ability to relate to others constructively helping create a climate where social problem-solving is valued and a sense of belonging is fostered. This belonging, our perceptions of the bonds that help create stability in ourselves and others, is a crucial factor in students' mental health. And educators can foster it.

There's no perfect analogy, but my journey to find one has taught me that whether it's the microcosmic interactions of hydrogen atoms or the expansive relationships of human beings, this fundamental truth remains: connections define existence. “The Schools We Need Now: A Guide to Designing a Mentally Healthy School” is a book that's focused on practical ways to structure schools that build the inter- and intra-personal connections students need to thrive. Authors Tim Dohrer and Tom Golebiewski invite us to pause

and reflect: What data are we collecting to understand our students' strengths and challenges in the social emotional domain? What protective factors and existing structures are available to promote connection and problem-solving? What routines can be incorporated to drive belonging? In what ways are we preparing our teachers to support our students' social, emotional, and academic development?

The principles that drive atoms to seek out stability through bonds are not so different from the social and emotional ties that shape our lives and mental well-being, and as educators we hold a key to shaping these connections. This book prepares us to do just that, because from the atomic to the human level, in every sense of the word, bonds matter.

David Adams
Chief Executive Officer
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New York, NY

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While this text is a culmination of our combined experiences over the past 40 years, we began imagining the book in 2013 in a coffee shop in Evanston, Illinois. We are deeply thankful for the hundreds of people who have walked with us to envision schools that center mental health. Early on, we had incredible support from the Illinois Principals Association, especially Jean Smith, Maureen Cheever, Sue Holmes, Beth Broyles, Arlin Peebles, and Jason Leahy. Dick Streedain, one of the first administrators to manage a school shooting in a U.S. school, spurred us on to “tell our story” and introduced us to Rick Stiggins, who connected us to Corwin Press. We want to thank our colleagues at New Trier High School, Wolcott College Prep, Northwestern University, Northern Illinois University, the School of Social Work at Loyola University of Chicago, and the Institute for Clinical Social Work. Much of this book was written and edited at the Mount Prospect Public Library as well as various places across the country from California to South Carolina! Thanks for graphic design by Jane Tomlinson. The editors at Corwin Press have been wonderful to us and have a deep regard for wellness as a priority in schools and life. Thanks so much to Jessica Allan, Natalie Delpino, Mia Rodriguez, and Lucas Schleicher.

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