



**arche XR™**  
Evidence-based mental health care for youth

# The U.S. Department of Education's Seven Strategic Recommendations for Social Emotional Learning and Mental Health:

## Can VR be part of the Solution?

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A young man with short dark hair, wearing a dark blue t-shirt, is smiling broadly while holding a white VR headset. The headset features the Arche XR logo on its front. The background is a blurred indoor setting, possibly a library or classroom, with bookshelves and windows.

**T-Mobile™**

## Executive Summary

In response to the growing youth mental health crisis (CDC, 2025; McGorry et al., 2025; Thomson, 2024), the U.S. Department of Education (DOE) released seven strategic recommendations to guide schools in promoting students' social, emotional, behavioral, and mental well-being (U.S. Department of Education, 2022). These recommendations offer a national framework for improving equity, wellness, and academic success through multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS).

Despite the urgency and importance of these goals, most schools face significant barriers to implementation. The National Association of School Psychologists recommends a ratio of one psychologist per 500 students, and the American School Counselor Association recommends one counselor per 250 students. Yet only 8 percent of school districts meet the psychologist-to-student ratio, and just 14 percent meet the ideal ratio for counselors (American School Counselor Association, 2025; Riser-Kositsky, 2022). Many districts also operate with limited budgets, staffing shortages, and outdated infrastructure. A 2022 RAND Corporation survey found that less than half of educators feel adequately prepared to support students' mental health or provide effective SEL instruction (Diliberti & Schwartz, 2023).

Schools require scalable, evidence-based solutions that alleviate staff burden and significantly enhance student outcomes. Mental health and SEL are not peripheral to learning; they are central to academic achievement, school climate, and lifelong well-being. These priorities require practical tools that are developmentally appropriate, research-informed, and engaging for youth.

Arche XR is a virtual reality (VR) platform designed to meet this challenge. Grounded in developmental science and co-developed with educators, youth, and mental health professionals, Arche XR supports the DOE's recommendations through immersive, self-guided programming that strengthens mental health and social-emotional skills. It offers a cost-effective, turnkey solution, supported by a national partnership with T-Mobile for high-speed connectivity, that integrates easily into school settings and adapts to students' needs without requiring clinical staff or advanced infrastructure. Arche XR enables schools to implement high-quality mental health and SEL programs that are accessible, sustainable, and aligned with federal priorities.

***“Only 14% of districts meet the recommended student-to-counselor ratio. Just 8% meet the psychologist ratio.”***

(NASP, 2025; ASCA, 2025)



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## Introducing Arche XR

Arche XR is a turnkey VR platform designed to strengthen youth mental health, resilience, and SEL through immersive, research-based programming. Grounded in developmental science, the platform was co-developed with educators, youth, and mental health professionals to ensure content is both evidence-based and responsive to the lived experiences of students. The Arche XR suite offers brief, self-guided VR sessions that seamlessly integrate into school routines. Each module is aligned with multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS), with programs that serve as universal Tier 1 supports, targeted Tier 2 interventions, and supplemental content for Tier 3 services. Modules are developmentally tailored and build core skills, including emotional regulation, self-awareness, empathy, and decision-making.

Designed for flexibility and equity, Arche XR requires no internet access, IT infrastructure, or clinical staff to run. Programs can be deployed across various settings, including classrooms, counseling offices, libraries, community centers, and juvenile justice facilities. The platform supports students in both rural and urban districts, expanding access where traditional services are limited. Youth consistently rate Arche XR as engaging and emotionally relevant, with a strong preference for VR over traditional delivery methods. This buy-in enhances participation, especially among students who may be reluctant to engage in conventional SEL or mental health programming. By combining immersive delivery with practical skills training, Arche XR empowers schools to implement scalable, student-centered interventions that reduce staff burden while supporting the DOE's strategic vision for comprehensive school mental health.

### Scalable Mental Health Support

Arche XR delivers evidence-based programming aligned with multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS). With modules for universal (Tier 1), targeted (Tier 2), and intensive (Tier 3) needs, it equips schools to expand SEL access without needing more staff, making high-quality support scalable and sustainable.

### Designed with and for Youth

Built with youth advisory groups, Arche XR reflects the voices, interests, and experiences of today's students. Youth rate the programs as engaging, meaningful, and preferable to traditional therapy, resulting in greater buy-in and impact.

### Turnkey and Flexible Delivery

Arche XR is ready to use out of the box with no clinical training, internet connection, or IT infrastructure required. The platform fits easily into classrooms, counseling offices, libraries, or community centers. Sessions are brief, self-guided, and adaptable to any school schedule.

### Evidence-based

Arche XR was created by leading psychologists and developmental scientists with over 1,200 research publications. Funded by the National Institute of Health and the CDC, the platform is rooted in research and built to meet the highest standards.



## Bridging Strategy and Practice: How Arche XR Aligns with the DOE’s Mental Health Priorities

The U.S. Department of Education has outlined seven strategic recommendations to address the most pressing challenges in school-based mental health and social-emotional learning (SEL). These challenges include growing student needs, implementation gaps, fragmented systems, and workforce and funding shortages. Arche XR was designed to directly meet these needs by offering a turnkey, research-driven solution that enhances student well-being while reducing strain on school personnel and infrastructure. The table below summarizes how Arche XR aligns with each of the DOE’s strategic challenges and solutions, providing a clear framework for how this platform can help schools meet national goals in a scalable, effective, and equitable manner.

Challenge	DOE Recommendation	How Arche XR Addresses It
<b>1. Rising mental health needs and disparities</b>	Prioritize wellness for every child, student, educator, and provider by fostering safe, supportive environments and trauma-informed practices.	Arche XR builds emotional regulation, resilience, and peer relationships through immersive SEL programming. Content is developmentally appropriate, trauma-informed, and flexible for diverse settings, helping students and educators create calmer, more supportive classrooms.
<b>2. Stigma and barriers to access</b>	Enhance mental health literacy and reduce stigma through culturally responsive education and accessible services.	Arche XR reduces stigma by allowing students to explore mental health privately and without judgment. Youth report high emotional relevance and engagement, particularly those underserved by traditional mental health systems.
<b>3. Gaps in effective implementation</b>	Implement a continuum of evidence-based practices within a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS).	Arche XR delivers content aligned with Tier 1 (universal), Tier 2 (targeted), and Tier 3 (intensive) interventions. Modules include SEL, resilience, mindfulness, and clinical mechanisms (e.g., emotion recognition), making it suitable across MTSS levels.
<b>4. Fragmented delivery systems</b>	Establish an integrated framework across educational, social, emotional, and behavioral supports.	Arche XR serves as a unifying tool across departments and systems. It supports integration with IEPs, behavior plans, and wellness initiatives, while being accessible in schools, juvenile justice, and community-based organizations.
<b>5. Policy and funding barriers</b>	Leverage existing funding streams (ESSER, Title IV-A, Medicaid) to sustain mental health services.	Arche XR qualifies under curriculum, technology, and mental health funding streams. Its low-cost, turnkey design makes it ideal for federal, state, and philanthropic grants. Optional evaluation services help schools demonstrate impact to funders.
<b>6. Insufficient workforce capacity</b>	Expand and train a diverse, prepared workforce to support all tiers of mental health services.	Arche XR can be delivered without clinical staff or technical expertise. It supports existing personnel by increasing student engagement and complementing interventions, especially at Tiers 2 and 3.
<b>7. Limited access to usable data</b>	Use disaggregated, actionable data to inform equitable implementation and continuous improvement.	Arche XR provides usage dashboards and optional pre/post evaluations. Schools can disaggregate data to monitor engagement, identify gaps, and tailor supports. Outcomes can also inform funding applications and internal planning.

***“SEL programs can lead to an 11 percentile point gain in academic performance.”***

(Durlak et al., 2011)



# 1. Prioritize Wellness for Each and Every Child, Student, Educator, and Provider

## DOE Recommendation Explained

The U.S. Department of Education calls for schools to foster whole-school environments that promote physical and emotional safety, belonging, and wellness as essential conditions for learning. This includes using trauma-informed practices, strengthening relationships, and ensuring access to wellness resources across all school roles and settings.

## How Arche XR Supports Whole-School Wellness

Arche XR supports this priority by delivering immersive, developmentally grounded VR experiences that build mental health and social-emotional skills in students. Programs target emotional regulation, empathy, relationship-building, and coping strategies, promoting resilience and reducing behavioral disruptions. Each session is brief, self-guided, and designed to run without clinical staff, internet, or IT infrastructure, making them accessible across classrooms, counseling offices, and community settings.

Recent findings show Arche XR improves student relationships with peers and teachers, and enhances overall engagement (Thomson et al., 2025). The platform reinforces protective traits such as emotional regulation, interpersonal connection, and future orientation, which are key to long-term well-being and school success. Because it is self-directed, Arche XR reduces the strain on staff while expanding access to high-quality support.

For educators and providers, the companion program Lumen VR offers 4-minute mindfulness and reset sessions explicitly designed for time-constrained professionals. Studies show Lumen VR reduces educator burnout by up to 85% (Herman et al., 2020), contributing to more sustainable school climates.

Arche XR fosters wellness for both students and staff. They help schools meet the DOE's first recommendation by making emotional safety, skill-building, and wellness support practical, scalable, and sustainable without adding burden to school systems already under pressure.

***“Arche XR increases social-emotional development and improves school behavior.”***

(Thomson, Kevorkian, et al., 2025; Thomson, Perera, et al., 2025)



## 2. Enhance Mental Health Literacy and Reduce Stigma and Other Barriers to Access

### DOE Recommendation Explained

The DOE emphasizes the need to increase mental health literacy among students, staff, and families. This includes providing age-appropriate education, reducing stigma, and ensuring services are accessible across diverse cultural, linguistic, and geographic contexts. The goal is to improve understanding of mental health while removing psychological and systemic barriers to care.

### How Arche XR Expands Access and Understanding

Arche XR strengthens mental health literacy by delivering psychoeducation through immersive, interactive virtual experiences that are developmentally appropriate and emotionally engaging. Unlike traditional approaches, VR allows students to privately explore complex emotional topics without fear of judgment. This self-paced design gives youth agency over their learning, which is critical for overcoming internalized stigma and building emotional safety.

Evidence from peer-reviewed research shows that students, including those with conduct disorder, rate Arche XR's programming as highly engaging, feasible, and emotionally realistic (Thomson et al., 2025). These youth, who often avoid conventional services, expressed a preference for the VR format because it felt private, nonjudgmental, and more aligned with their real experiences. These features helped reduce stigma and increase willingness to engage in mental health content.

Arche XR was developed with input from youth advisory groups representing diverse racial, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds. This collaborative design process ensured the platform would feel culturally sensitive and emotionally authentic. In a recent study, Latin American and Spanish-speaking youth highlighted the value of VR's immersive, nonverbal learning environment as a culturally responsive format that fostered trust and emotional relevance (Kevorkian & Thomson, 2024).

Beyond content, Arche XR also addresses structural barriers to access. It is cost-effective and requires no clinical staff, internet, or IT infrastructure. Programs can be implemented in classrooms, libraries, counseling offices, or in settings such as hospitals, detention centers, and rural communities. This flexibility ensures students can access quality mental health education regardless of location or resources.

Together, Arche XR meets the DOE's second recommendation by increasing mental health literacy through relatable, youth-informed learning experiences while reducing stigma and ensuring equitable access across student populations.

***“Youth report Arche XR as culturally sensitive and relevant.”***

(Thomson et al., 2025)



### 3. Implement a Continuum of Evidence-Based Prevention Practices

**DOE Recommendation Explained:** The DOE calls for schools to implement a continuum of supports within a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS), ranging from universal wellness promotion (Tier 1) to more targeted (Tier 2) and intensive (Tier 3) interventions. Each level should be developmentally appropriate, culturally responsive, and informed by universal screening and data-based decision-making.

#### **How Arche XR Aligns with MTSS Frameworks**

Arche XR was developed to align directly with MTSS frameworks by offering a full suite of evidence-based programming that adapts across all three tiers of support. At Tier 1, Arche XR provides universally accessible SEL modules focused on emotional regulation, mindfulness, empathy, and resilience. These brief, engaging experiences are designed to promote wellness and emotional literacy across the student body, improving classroom climate and reducing behavioral disruptions.

For students requiring additional support, Tier 2 modules address elevated risk factors such as impulsivity, peer conflict, and early signs of substance use. These sessions offer targeted, repeatable skill-building without the stigma often associated with pull-out or referral-based interventions. The flexible delivery allows students to receive additional support without being singled out.

At Tier 3, Arche XR offers specialized interventions such as Impact VR, which focuses on transdiagnostic issues common among youth with conduct problems, trauma exposure, and emotional regulation challenges. These modules can be used in conjunction with behavior intervention plans or integrated into clinical services for students with more intensive needs.

The platform's design ensures fidelity across tiers without requiring extensive staff training or supervision. Content is developmentally grounded, culturally inclusive, and trauma-informed, promoting student engagement and reducing resistance to participation. Arche XR can be implemented in classrooms, counseling services/spaces, after-school programs, or community settings.

By adapting to a range of needs and delivery contexts, Arche XR fulfills the DOE's third recommendation by providing scalable, tiered prevention supports that promote equity, efficiency, and accessibility, without adding strain to school systems already stretched thin.

***“When educators feel like they have the resources to do their job well, they feel less stressed and can better meet the needs of their students”***

(Grayson & Alvarez, 2008)



## 4. Establish an Integrated Framework of Educational, Social, Emotional, and Behavioral-Health Support for All

### DOE Recommendation Explained

The DOE urges schools to move beyond fragmented services and toward integrated systems that unify education, mental health, and community supports. Frameworks like MTSS and the Interconnected Systems Framework (ISF) emphasize cross-sector collaboration, shared goals, and inclusive planning that centers student wellness as a core function of school operations and not a peripheral add-on.

### How Arche XR Bridges Education and Mental Health

Arche XR was built to support integration, not isolation. The platform aligns with MTSS and ISF by offering a unified, school-ready solution that bridges educational and mental health goals. With modules spanning universal wellness, targeted skill-building, and intensive behavioral support, Arche XR can be implemented within classrooms, counseling services, after-school programs, and community-based settings. It requires no clinical team, advanced training, or special infrastructure, allowing educators, behavior staff, and support personnel to deliver consistent, evidence-based programming across environments.

This flexibility makes Arche XR an ideal fit for schools seeking to align SEL, mental health, and academic initiatives. The same tools can be used across departments, embedded into IEPs, 504 behavior plans, wellness programs, or district-level strategies. Whether a student accesses the platform at school, in a community center, or through a juvenile justice setting, the content remains standardized and pre-programmed, ensuring fidelity across all systems.

Arche XR was co-developed with youth, educators, caregivers, and clinicians to reflect real-world needs. Its design supports continuity and coherence across systems without requiring staff to adapt content or manage separate programs. By providing a shared platform accessible to all youth-serving professionals, Arche XR supports the kind of cross-sector alignment the DOE recommends, helping schools shift from fragmented support models to coordinated systems that prioritize whole-child development.

***“98% of educators report Arche XR is a resource-efficient, easy-to-use school SEL and mental health program.”***

(Thomson et al., 2025)



## 5. Leverage Policy and Funding

**DOE Recommendation Explained:** The DOE calls on schools and communities to take full advantage of federal, state, and local funding sources to support and sustain comprehensive mental health services. These include programs such as ESSER, IDEA, Title IV-A, Medicaid, and public-private partnerships, with an emphasis on aligning spending with student mental health needs and equity priorities.

### How Arche XR Fits Across Funding Streams

Arche XR is built to fit within multiple K–12 budget categories, including education curriculum, student mental health, and instructional technology. This cross-cutting alignment allows schools to draw from diverse funding streams, including SEL-specific funds, general education budgets, and technology grants. Although funding eligibility varies across districts and states, Arche XR’s design is compatible with federal programs such as ESSER and Title IV-A, as well as with philanthropic and state-level grants focused on wellness, innovation, or school safety.

The platform advances policy goals centered on prevention, early intervention, and equitable access. Because Arche XR does not rely on a fee-for-service model or require licensed clinical staff, it helps districts extend mental health programming without increasing personnel costs. Its plug-and-play setup and offline functionality make it scalable in both high-resource and under-resourced contexts. Administrators can use Arche XR to reallocate limited funds more efficiently, shifting away from reactive models and investing in proactive, trauma-informed care.

Arche XR’s approach aligns with federal and agency priorities, including SAMHSA’s whole-child frameworks and the goals of programs like Project AWARE. For districts pursuing sustainable funding, Arche XR offers an optional evaluation service led by research scientists. Schools that opt in receive aggregated data on usage, engagement, and student outcomes, which can support future grant applications and policy advocacy. This real-world evidence strengthens funding proposals and positions schools to demonstrate measurable impact over time.

Arche XR is not only a program; it is a policy-aligned solution that helps schools expand access, support equity, and build lasting systems of care.

***“When educators feel like they have the resources to do their job well, they feel less stressed and can better meet the needs of their students”***

(Grayson & Alvarez, 2008)



## 6. Enhance Workforce Capacity

### DOE Recommendation Explained

The DOE calls for the expansion and support of the school workforce to meet increasing mental health needs. This includes training educators, aides, and behavioral staff to deliver both universal and targeted supports, establishing partnerships with colleges, and building coaching systems to promote high-fidelity implementation across tiers.

### How Arche XR Strengthens and Supports Staff

Arche XR enhances workforce capacity by providing evidence-based mental health and SEL programming that can be delivered by a wide range of school personnel without requiring clinical licensure or specialized mental health training. Teachers, aides, behavioral coaches, and IT staff can facilitate sessions with minimal preparation, allowing for seamless integration into school routines. Each module is brief, self-guided, and standardized to ensure consistent implementation, reducing staff burden while maintaining program fidelity.

More importantly, Arche XR improves student engagement in mental health services, particularly at Tier 2 and Tier 3. Findings from Thomson et al. (2025) demonstrate that students were more likely to attend and participate in traditional interventions when VR was included. This increased engagement leads to more productive sessions and better use of existing mental health resources, maximizing the time and impact of counselors and support staff.

For schools seeking to build a sustainable and data-informed workforce strategy, Arche XR offers an optional evaluation service supported by a team of doctoral-level researchers and clinicians. Schools can receive support in training implementation teams, analyzing outcomes, and applying insights to strengthen practice. These data also help schools track program reach, engagement, and effectiveness, which can be used to guide professional development and secure future funding.

By removing staffing barriers and promoting effective use of existing personnel, Arche XR directly supports the DOE's call to build a well-prepared, distributed team capable of delivering high-quality, tiered mental health support.

***Arche XR equips staff to implement evidence-based SEL and mental health programming without additional training.***



## 7. Use Data for Decision Making to Promote Equitable Implementation and Outcomes

**DOE Recommendation Explained:** The DOE emphasizes the importance of collecting and using actionable data to guide decision-making at both the systemic and school levels. Schools are encouraged to use disaggregated data to identify needs, track outcomes, allocate resources, and ensure equitable delivery of mental health services. Data should support continuous improvement and inform Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) across all levels.

### **How Arche XR Enables Data-Informed Decision Making**

Arche XR supports this recommendation by offering a built-in data dashboard that captures key implementation metrics. These include session completion rates, engagement levels, time spent in modules, and usage trends by site, grade, or session type. The data are designed to align with DOE priorities, including participation fidelity, program reach, and equitable access. Educators and administrators can use this information to identify disparities, refine their programming, and tailor interventions based on patterns of student engagement.

Arche XR implementation metrics help schools evaluate how SEL and mental health content is being used and where support may be needed. The dashboard is low-burden, does not require specialized training, and offers insights that can guide decisions for Tier 1-3 support.

For schools that opt in, Arche XR also provides an evaluation service led by doctoral-level researchers. This service includes aggregate, pre- and post-assessment data that measure changes in emotion regulation, help-seeking attitudes, and behavioral risk. These data provide concrete evidence of program effectiveness, helping schools document their impact for internal planning, grant reporting, or accountability requirements.

By equipping schools with meaningful, user-friendly data tools, Arche XR strengthens equity and transparency. Schools are empowered to make informed decisions, track progress, and demonstrate success, supporting both student outcomes and long-term sustainability.

***Arche XR equips schools with implementation data and outcome tracking to support informed decision-making and continuous improvement.***



## Conclusion: Moving from Strategy to Action

The U.S. Department of Education's seven strategic recommendations provide schools with a clear path toward creating equitable, resilient, and mentally healthy learning environments. However, implementing these goals requires more than just commitment; it necessitates practical, scalable tools that meet students where they are.

**Arche XR answers that call.** With its immersive design, evidence-based framework, and ease of implementation, Arche XR helps schools bridge the gap between policy and practice. Through a national partnership with T-Mobile, schools can also gain access to high-speed internet connectivity, enabling reliable implementation even in areas with limited infrastructure. Arche XR supports students across all tiers of need, empowers staff without additional burden, and offers a flexible solution adaptable to any setting, from urban districts to rural communities, from classrooms to juvenile justice centers. As schools seek innovative ways to promote wellness, reduce disparities, and deliver on the promise of social-emotional learning and mental health equity, Arche XR provides a path forward that is grounded in science, enhanced by nationwide connectivity, and guided by the voices of youth and educators.

**Now is the time to act.** Arche XR is ready to support your school, district, or agency in advancing these priorities with confidence and clarity.



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