

# Improve districts' ability to attract and retain mental health support staff

## The challenge

Amid a [nationwide shortage of mental health workers](#), districts may struggle to attract and retain staff providing dedicated mental health support. This can make it more difficult for districts to meet the mental health needs of their students.

## Purpose of this Promising Practice

This Promising Practice includes:

- [Focus group facilitator's guide for attracting and retaining staff that provide dedicated mental health support](#). Attracting and retaining talented staff requires a strong organization. The linked facilitator's guide describes three common attributes of organizations that do this well.
- [Materials for focus group participants](#).

After completing these exercises, **you will have a prioritized set of ideas** on how to improve your district's ability to attract and retain staff providing dedicated mental health support.

**Your next step will be to propose these ideas to decision makers and oversee the successful execution of these plans.** Consider reviewing the Chiefs for Change [Implementation Engine](#) for suggestions and resources to support execution.

## Who might use this Promising Practice, and when?

School districts that want to increase the number and consistency of mental health services they can provide to their students by strengthening provider retention—or who are experiencing mental health provider staffing shortages and don't have sufficient capacity to meet student needs.

This Promising Practice is designed for **district and school staff accountable for ensuring the adequate provision of mental health services to students**, including the hiring and retention of mental health support staff. Likely roles include members of the district's Student Services Department (e.g., the director of student support or health services manager) and human resources professionals.

# Focus group facilitator's guide for attracting and retaining mental health support staff



## Who is this tool for?

This tool is designed to be used by district and school staff who are responsible for ensuring the adequate provision of mental health services for students. This includes those responsible for attracting and retaining mental health support staff. Individuals who may benefit from this resource include members of the district's Student Services Department, e.g., director of student support or health services manager.

Staff can assemble a focus group to complete the exercises included in this document.



## Steps for using this tool (*supporting materials follow*):

1. Identify which district staff to include in the focus group, taking into consideration the district's need for different types of mental health support staff.
2. Schedule the focus group and invite focus group members to the meeting.
3. Before the focus group, review the focus group agenda and facilitator's guide.
4. During the meeting, consider using the facilitator's guide to lead the focus group in understanding the staff experience, brainstorming concrete ideas, and prioritizing ideas for improving the district's ability to attract and retain dedicated mental health support staff.
5. Propose prioritized ideas to district decision makers. Begin launching approved initiatives. Consider the Chiefs for Change [Implementation Engine](#) for suggestions in overseeing this execution phase.

**This tool describes potential actions and initiatives that may be governed by existing agreements in your district, including collective bargaining. When considering potential actions, understand how existing contracts and collective bargaining agreements impact what is or is not possible for particular groups of staff.**

## Who should attend this focus group?

**Facilitator's guide:** As you develop this focus group, try to reflect the diversity of your district's schools, employees, and families.

For example, consider including employees from elementary, middle, and high schools and employees representing different social and economic demographics that reflect those of the student population.

Role	Name of meeting attendee(s)
District head of student support	
School head(s) of student support	
School counselor(s)	
Social worker(s)	
School psychologist(s)	
Other licensed provider(s) (e.g., LCSW)	
Other health provider (e.g., school nurse)	
Other, please specify	

**If conducting a focus group is not feasible, consider surveying your district's mental health support staff as an alternate way to obtain input.**

## Consider the district’s need for different types of mental health support staff

**Facilitator’s guide:** Consider using this table to ensure the focus group includes voices that can speak to the biggest staffing challenges facing the district.

Type of provider	Potential alternative employers for this talent	What alternate employers offer to mental health support staff	What districts offer to mental health support staff	
			Benefits	Common challenges
Counselors and social workers	Other public-sector employers (including other districts)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Training and mentorship</li> <li>Clear career paths</li> <li>Working at an organization with care delivery as its primary function</li> <li>Opportunity for telehealth and remote work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work-life balance and vacation time (e.g., can meet students during the school day rather than after school or on weekends)</li> <li>Chance for school-wide impact</li> <li>Deep relationships with students and families</li> </ul>	Mental health and counseling staff needs are often deprioritized (e.g., no fixed office, non-care admin duties)
Licensed clinicians and providers (e.g., LCSWs and school psychologists)	Private practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Extensive training and mentorship</li> <li>Flexibility and autonomy</li> <li>Clear career paths</li> <li>Working at an organization built by and for providers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work-life balance and vacation time (e.g., can meet students during the school day rather than after school or on weekends)</li> <li>Competitive benefits</li> <li>Chance for school-wide impact</li> <li>Deep relationships with students and families</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mental health and counseling staff needs are often deprioritized (e.g., no fixed office, non-care admin duties)</li> <li>Inflexible (e.g., no telehealth)</li> </ul>

## Considerations for scheduling the focus group

**Facilitator's guide:** It is important for this focus group to represent the voice of district staff providing dedicated mental health support. Please do your best to schedule a time that will work for all members of the focus group you identified in the previous section.

Please schedule at least two hours with the focus group participants. You might consider breaking the focus group into two shorter sessions.

Consider using the example email below to invite staff to participate in the focus group:

Dear colleagues,

The district has set an ambitious goal to become a more attractive place to work for staff providing dedicated mental health support. We want to retain and attract the best talent to meet our students' mental health needs.

As such, the district is planning a two-hour focus group for district mental health support staff to brainstorm ways in which the district could become a more attractive place to work. I'd like to invite you to join this focus group.

Please complete the following survey to indicate your availability [e.g., insert Doodle link].

Let me know if you have any questions. I look forward to working with you soon!

[Signature]

## Potential focus group meeting agenda

**Facilitator's guide:** Consider reviewing the agenda outline with the focus group at the beginning of the meeting.

Agenda item	Estimated time required
Set meeting intentions and introductions	5 minutes
Review the framework for understanding how to attract and retain mental health support staff	15 minutes
Set a district aspiration to become a more attractive employer for mental health support staff	20 minutes
Break	5 minutes
Discuss potential actions to help the district attract and retain mental health support staff	40 minutes
Prioritize proposed actions based on their estimated impact and ease of implementation	20 minutes
Begin to make plans to propose ideas to decision makers	15 minutes

## Setting meeting intentions

**Facilitator's guide:** Consider setting meeting intentions at the beginning of the focus group session. You could read the intention written below or draft your own. Consider asking the group if they have questions about the meeting's intentions or want to make any changes.

**Sample intention:** The purpose of this meeting is to brainstorm ways to help our district become a more attractive place to work for mental health support staff, including all of you in this room. We want to do this so that our district can better attract and retain mental health support staff and better meet the mental health needs of our students.

## Focus group facilitator's guide

**Facilitator's guide:** *The rest of this guide includes a copy of the materials that will be handed to each focus group member, with additional facilitation instructions for each worksheet.*

## Framework for how to attract and retain dedicated mental health support staff

**Facilitator’s guide:** Recruiting and retaining talented staff requires a strong organization. The following three attributes define many organizations that are able to do this well. With the focus group, review the three attributes of an attractive employer. Consider asking the group: (1) Which of these attributes are most important to you when thinking about an attractive employer? (2) Would you change anything about these elements, like adding or removing any? Later, there will be time to brainstorm potential actions the district could take across this framework.

**Reminder:** This tool describes potential actions and initiatives that may be governed by existing agreements in your district, including collective bargaining. When considering potential actions, understand how existing contracts and collective bargaining agreements impact what is or is not possible for particular groups of staff.

Sample attributes of an attractive employer	Specific aspects
<b>Great organization</b>	<p><b>Work norms and values:</b> Pace of work, norms, collaboration, and district culture (e.g., clarity on values, mutual respect, emphasis on wellness)</p> <p><b>Physical environment:</b> Design and features of the physical space (e.g., room size, noise, light, shared vs. independent space)</p> <p><b>Purpose:</b> Ability to do work that has a positive impact on people and communities</p> <p><b>Flexibility and balance:</b> Appropriate workload, hours, and/or location</p> <p><b>Systems and processes:</b> Clarity and reliability of district processes</p> <p><b>Diversity, equity, and inclusion:</b> Multiple perspectives are represented, respected, and valued; all individuals are treated fairly and justly; space is made to accommodate the characteristics of each employee; individuals are engaged in all aspects of organizational work, including decision-making processes, and reflect the diversity of the district</p>
<b>Great leaders</b>	<p><b>Management:</b> Whether leadership is perceived as supportive, fair, and inspirational across the district</p>



Sample attributes of an attractive employer	Specific aspects
Great job	<p><b>Task variety:</b> Diversity of skills and tasks required in the role; flexibility in activities</p> <p><b>Meaningful tasks:</b> Job responsibilities aligned to providers' desire to help people and use their mental-health expertise</p> <p><b>Achievement:</b> Entrusted responsibility to work on important tasks, feel empowered, and experience autonomy</p> <p><b>Training and development:</b> Opportunity to continuously build skills and knowledge through formal training, mentorship, and tasks or roles that lead to professional growth</p> <p><b>Job advancement:</b> Opportunity for internal promotion and growth; a clear and attainable advancement path, with the potential for long-term progression, where feasible</p> <p><b>Compensation and benefits:</b> Total compensation (including bonuses and benefits)</p> <p><b>Recognition:</b> Informal and formal recognition in response to behaviors that align with district goals</p>

Source: [Mental Health Technology Transfer Network, "Attracting and Retaining the Right Talent," McKinsey People & Organizational Performance Practice](#)

## Consider setting an aspiration for how the district could become a more attractive employer for dedicated mental health support staff

**Facilitator’s guide:** With the group, review the district’s current strategy to recruit and retain mental health support staff along the three attributes. Then set an aspiration for how the district could become a more attractive employer for staff providing dedicated mental health support services.

To generate ideas, consider asking the group: (1) What made you want to work here and what keeps you here? (2) What are you observing among peers and colleagues who work in other settings?

Consider dividing the focus group into three subgroups, with each subgroup focusing on one attribute and/or voting to settle any disagreements about what the district’s aspiration should be.

Attributes	Where are we right now?	Where do we want to be?
<p><b>Great organization</b></p>	<p><i>(Consider current work norms, physical environment, purpose, sustainability, and processes)</i></p>	<p><i>Our organization will be ...</i></p>
<p><b>Great leaders</b></p>	<p><i>(Is leadership perceived as supportive, fair, and inspirational?)</i></p>	<p><i>Our leaders will be ...</i></p>
<p><b>Great job</b></p>	<p><i>(Consider task variety, autonomy, responsibility, and opportunities for training and development. Are compensation and benefits competitive? Are there opportunities for career advancement?)</i></p>	<p><i>Our jobs will be ...</i></p>

## Review example actions to help districts recruit and retain mental health support staff

**Facilitator’s guide:** With the district focus group, review each of the sample actions across the three attributes—great organization, great leaders, great jobs—and indicate the actions that focus group members believe the district should consider exploring further. You’ll prioritize these actions in the next exercise.

### 1/3: Great organization

**Example of private-practice benefits:** Mental health service provision is the core activity in a private practice. Mental health workers tend to spend their time working directly with those they support and feel that all elements of their organization are designed to enable their success.

Example initiatives	Specific actions to consider <i>(Italicized actions may also benefit districts in developing external provider partnerships)</i>	The district does this	Consider exploring further
<b>1. Improve the working conditions for mental health support staff</b>	<i>Designate office space for mental health support staff to use for counseling sessions and administrative work</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<i>Build a culture that prioritizes student mental health and treats mental health support staff as equals</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<i>Adopt flexible telehealth models to enable work-from-home or hybrid work models for staff</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>2. Standardize and streamline administrative systems and processes</b>	<i>Establish processes for the entire journey, including referrals to external providers</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<i>Centrally triage all in-need students through a single (set of) admin(s), including referral to external providers</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<i>Standardize IT processes (e.g., via a single note-entry system across the district)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>3. Foster the connection of mental health support staff to the school community</b>	Integrate the mental health team into the broader teacher and staff work cadence (e.g., joining morning meeting when not providing direct service to students)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Integrate the mental health team into the broader teacher and staff community and celebrations (e.g., employee of the week)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Increase opportunities for providers to interact with students (e.g., opportunities to lead universal class-based or school-wide interventions)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

### 1/3: Great organization (continued)

**Facilitator's guide:** Brainstorm other possible district actions to add to the list above. Consider (1) reflecting on current challenges, including for different types of mental health support staff, (2) discussing how to address those challenges, and (3) documenting potential actions.

Also document any other actions the district is already taking.

This is the district's chance to identify actions that fit its unique needs. There is no need to think of additional actions if none come to mind.

Other actions the district is already taking	Other actions the district could take to become a great organization

## 2/3: Great leaders

**Example of private-practice benefits:** Private practices are generally led by a provider or provider groups that represent the voices of their workers, providing opportunities for ownership of practice goals and participation in organization-wide decision making.

Example initiatives	Specific actions to consider <i>(Italicized actions may also benefit districts in developing external provider partnerships)</i>	The district does this	Consider exploring further
<b>4. Always seek mental health and counseling staff input on important decisions about student wellbeing</b>	<i>Establish a teams-based approach to designing and refreshing mental health services</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<i>Regularly collect input from all stakeholders (e.g., teachers, families, and community leaders)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<i>Set up clear channels for mental health and counseling staff to provide feedback on mental health services</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>5. Ensure all employees understand mental health/counseling staff's roles</b>	<i>Work with the district mental health and counseling staff to develop clear role descriptions</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<i>Help teachers and administrators understand the role of mental health and counseling staff (e.g., share role descriptions and hold trainings)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Establish guardrails to protect mental health and counseling staff's time from tasks outside their explicit role description. (See the guide to <a href="#">Strengthen support for school-based mental health staff</a> for more details.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>6. Provide support and coaching with adoption of evidence-based approaches to mental health services</b>	<i>Regularly employ needs assessments to identify student needs and target the provision of care</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Regularly review literature on the latest evidence-based approaches to refresh interventions used in districts	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Adopt tools to monitor outcomes and adjust care when indicated	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

### 2/3: Great leaders (continued)

**Facilitator's guide:** Brainstorm other possible district actions to add to the list above. Consider (1) reflecting on current challenges, including for different types of mental health support staff, (2) discussing how to address those challenges, and (3) documenting potential actions.

Also document any other actions the district is taking.

This is the district's chance to identify actions that fit its unique needs. There is no need to think of additional actions if none come to mind.

Other actions the district is already taking	Other actions the district could take to have great leaders

### 3/3: Great jobs

**Example of private-practice benefits:** Private-sector mental health workers often have autonomy over whom they serve, how they practice, and when and where they work. Working in a private practice offers opportunities for professional development, such as case supervision and mentorship. Private practices often provide better financial compensation than public schools. Private practices also offer opportunities for professional advancement, such as participation in practice administration.

Example initiatives	Specific actions to consider <i>(Italicized actions may also benefit districts in developing external provider partnerships)</i>	The district does this	Consider exploring further
<b>7. Free up mental health support staff time for tasks that fully utilize their education and training</b>	Rebalance tasks by licensure and reassign non-specialized tasks to other school staff where appropriate	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<i>Set goals to ensure staff are able to spend time on direct contact and regularly monitor progress on goals</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<i>Regularly meet with relevant staff to review goals for spending more time on tasks that fully utilize their education and training, including removing barriers and maintaining accountability for these goals</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>8. Create professional development opportunities for mental health support staff</b>	Set a cadence of frequent case supervision and build structures for mentoring early-career mental health support staff	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Provide regular training on the latest evidence-based practices and improving counseling techniques	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<i>Consider leveraging current or new partnerships with external providers to support this professional development</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>9. Amplify mental health support staff's impact on the district</b>	<i>Invite mental health support staff to participate in school or district student wellbeing strategy or policy setting</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Invite mental health and counseling staff to lead trainings for staff and universal interventions in classrooms	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Co-create and execute school or district-wide mental-health campaigns with mental health support staff	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>10. Emphasize and (where possible) improve your district's salary and benefits packages</b>	Seek additional, sustainable funding sources to improve the compensation of district-employed staff	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Ensure that target staff benefits packages are in line with other district employee (e.g., teacher) benefits	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Where relevant, front-load or affix benefit accrual to job performance rather than staff tenure	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Example initiatives	Specific actions to consider <i>(Italicized actions may also benefit districts in developing external provider partnerships)</i>	The district does this	Consider exploring further
<b>11. Consider levers to augment mental health support staff salaries</b>	Let mental health support staff work extra hours (ideally on providing care to students) with commensurate increases in compensation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Consider providing bonuses or pay increases for staff achieving additional levels of professional licensure	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Consider signing bonuses for high-demand mental health support positions and schools	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>12. Create career advancement opportunities</b>	Create opportunities for mental health and counseling staff to enter school administration, especially overseeing student wellness	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Where beneficial, create supervisory and training roles for experienced mental health support staff	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Consider working with partners to create career pathways between private practices and school employment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



### 3/3: Great jobs (continued)

**Facilitator's guide:** Brainstorm other possible district actions to add to the list above. Consider (1) reflecting on current challenges, including for different types of mental health support staff, (2) discussing how to address those challenges, and (3) documenting potential actions.

Also document any other actions the district is taking.

This is the district's chance to identify actions that fit its unique needs. There is no need to think of additional actions if none come to mind.

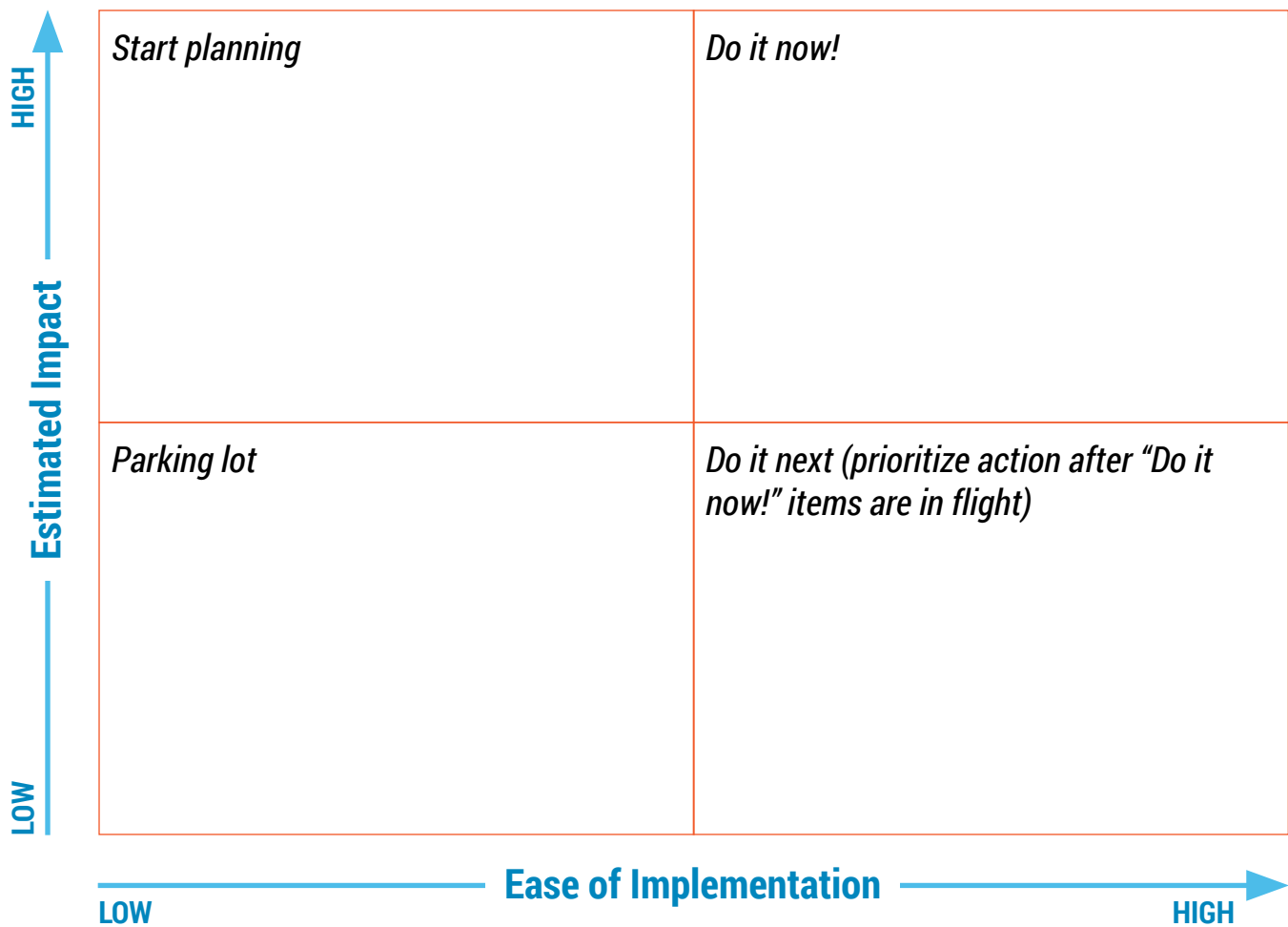
Other actions the district is already taking	Other actions the district could take to offer great jobs

## Prioritize proposed actions for further exploration based on their estimated impact and ease of implementation

**Facilitator’s guide:** Consider prioritizing proposed actions that can be presented to decision makers. Actions marked for further exploration in the previous exercise can be prioritized based on their estimated impact and ease of implementation. Consider referencing the illustrative prioritization of example initiatives on the next page.

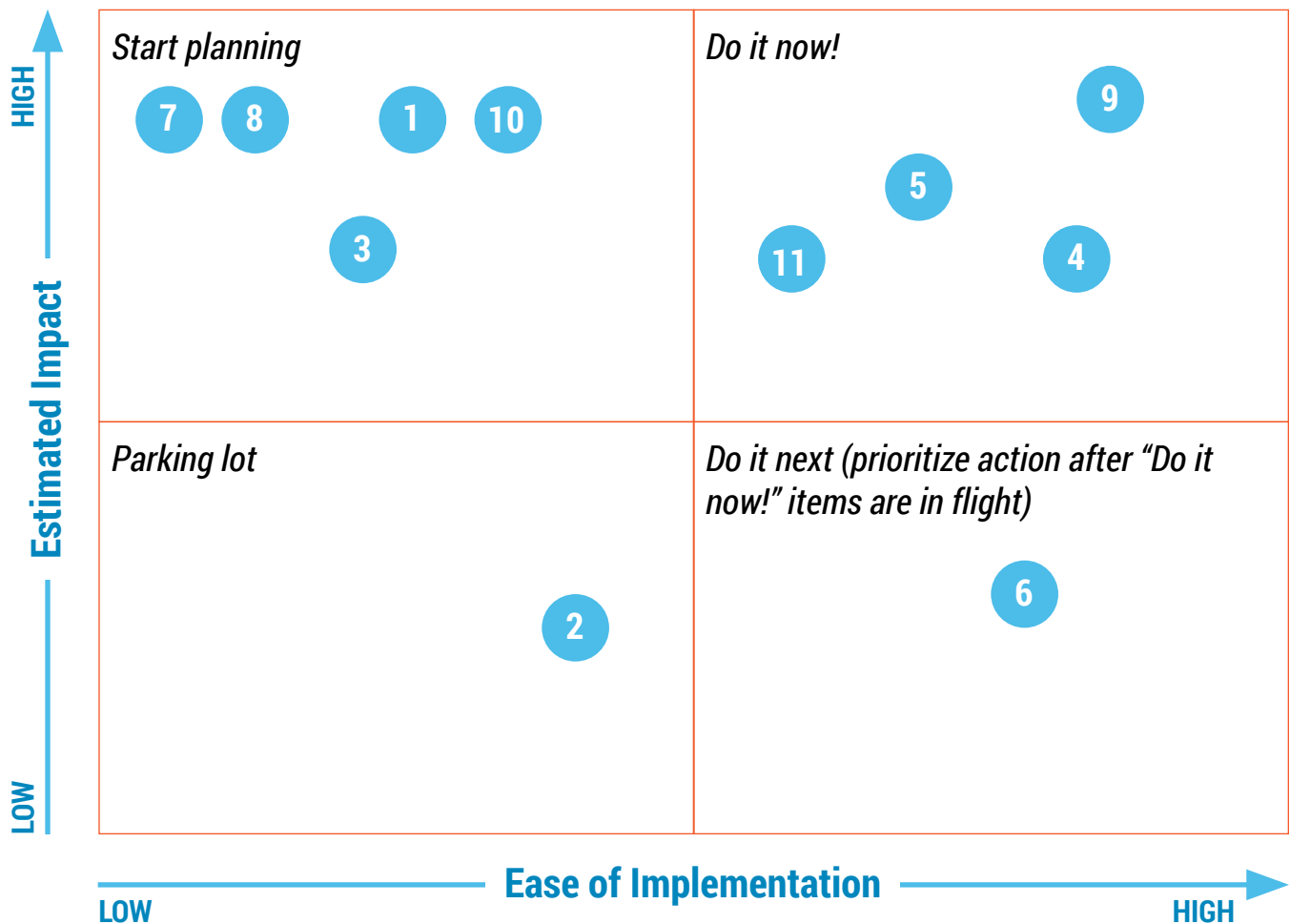
Split into three subgroups (one for each attribute) to decide the likely impact and ease of implementation for each action marked for further exploration. Have each group present to the broader team. Where the team disagrees, align on next steps (and an owner) for developing a more accurate estimate.

**Reminder:** This tool describes potential actions and initiatives that may be governed by existing agreements in your district, including collective bargaining. When considering potential actions, understand how existing contracts and collective bargaining agreements impact what is or is not possible for particular groups of staff.



## Illustrative prioritization of example initiatives

**Facilitator's guide:** Consider starting with this illustrative prioritization of example initiatives when prioritizing proposed actions for your district. Make adjustments to fit the specific needs and capabilities of your district.



- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 Physical conditions</li> <li>2 Foster connections</li> <li>3 Evidence/outcomes</li> <li>4 Staff input</li> <li>5 Role descriptions</li> <li>6 Emphasize benefits</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>7 Augment salaries</li> <li>8 Career advancement</li> <li>9 Top of license</li> <li>10 Professional development</li> <li>11 Amplify impact</li> </ul> |
|--|--|

## Propose ideas that could make the district a more desirable place to work for staff providing dedicated mental health support

**Facilitator’s guide:** Consider involving focus group participants in proposing initiative ideas. List all ideas identified as high priority (“Do it now!” or “Do it next”). Think about who the initiative owners could be and propose deadlines. For initiative ideas the district opts to launch, consider reviewing the [Chiefs for Change Implementation Engine](#) for suggestions and resources to support execution.

Initiative category	Initiative idea <i>(Example initiative)</i>	Proposed initiative owner	Possible deadline
<input type="checkbox"/> Do it now! <input type="checkbox"/> Do it next	<i>Establish expectations for percent of staff time spent in direct contact with those in need of support</i>	<i>Principal of each school</i>	<i>Start of next school year</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Do it now! <input type="checkbox"/> Do it next			
<input type="checkbox"/> Do it now! <input type="checkbox"/> Do it next			
<input type="checkbox"/> Do it now! <input type="checkbox"/> Do it next			
<input type="checkbox"/> Do it now! <input type="checkbox"/> Do it next			
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<input type="checkbox"/> Do it now! <input type="checkbox"/> Do it next			
<input type="checkbox"/> Do it now! <input type="checkbox"/> Do it next			
<input type="checkbox"/> Do it now! <input type="checkbox"/> Do it next			

# Materials for focus group participants

## Framework for how to attract and retain staff providing dedicated mental health support

Review the three attributes of an attractive employer. Note that these attributes will be used several times in the focus group.

Attributes of an attractive employer	Specific aspects
Great organization	<p><b>Work norms and values:</b> Pace of work, norms, collaboration, and district culture (e.g., clarity on values, mutual respect, emphasis on wellness)</p> <p><b>Physical environment:</b> Design and features of the physical space (e.g., room size, noise, light, shared vs. independent space)</p> <p><b>Purpose:</b> Ability to do work that has a positive impact on people and communities</p> <p><b>Flexibility and balance:</b> Appropriate workload, hours, and/or location</p> <p><b>Systems and processes:</b> Clarity and reliability of district processes</p> <p><b>Diversity, equity, and inclusion:</b> Multiple perspectives are represented, respected, and valued; all individuals are treated fairly and justly; space is made to accommodate the characteristics of each employee; individuals are engaged in all aspects of organizational work, including decision-making processes, and reflect the diversity of the district</p>
Great leaders	<p><b>Management:</b> Whether leadership is perceived as supportive, fair, and inspirational across the district</p>

Attributes of an attractive employer	Specific aspects
Great job	<p><b>Task variety:</b> Diversity of skills and tasks required in the role; flexibility in activities</p> <p><b>Meaningful tasks:</b> Job responsibilities aligned to providers' desire to help people and use their mental-health expertise</p> <p><b>Achievement:</b> Entrusted responsibility to work on important tasks, feel empowered, and experience autonomy</p> <p><b>Training and development:</b> Opportunity to continuously build skills and knowledge through formal training, mentorship, and tasks or roles that lead to professional growth</p> <p><b>Job advancement:</b> Opportunity for internal promotion and growth; a clear and attainable advancement path, with the potential for long-term progression, where feasible</p> <p><b>Compensation and benefits:</b> Total compensation (including bonuses and benefits)</p> <p><b>Recognition:</b> Informal and formal recognition in response to behaviors that align with district goals</p>

## Consider setting an aspiration for how the district could become a more attractive employer for dedicated mental health support staff

Review the district's current strategy to recruit and retain mental health support staff along the three attributes. Then set an aspiration for how the district could become a more attractive employer for dedicated mental health support staff.

The facilitator may divide the focus group into three subgroups, with each subgroup focusing on one attribute.

Attributes	Where are we right now?	Where do we want to be?
<p><b>Great organization</b></p>	<p><i>(Consider current work norms, physical environment, purpose, sustainability, and processes)</i></p>	<p><i>Our organization will be ...</i></p>
<p><b>Great leaders</b></p>	<p><i>(Is leadership perceived as supportive, fair, and inspirational?)</i></p>	<p><i>Our leaders will be ...</i></p>
<p><b>Great job</b></p>	<p><i>(Consider task variety, autonomy, responsibility, and opportunities for training and development. Are compensation and benefits competitive? Are there opportunities for career advancement?)</i></p>	<p><i>Our jobs will be ...</i></p>

## Review example actions to help districts recruit and retain mental health support staff

Review each of the sample actions across the three attributes and indicate the actions that you believe the district should consider exploring further. You'll prioritize these actions in the next exercise.

### 1/3: Great organization

Example initiatives	Specific actions to consider <i>(Italicized actions may also benefit districts in developing external provider partnerships)</i>	The district does this	Consider exploring further
<b>1. Improve the working conditions for mental health support staff</b>	<i>Designate office space for mental health support staff to use for counseling sessions and administrative work</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<i>Build a culture that prioritizes student mental health and treats mental health support staff as equals</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<i>Adopt flexible telehealth models to enable work-from-home or hybrid work models for staff</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>2. Standardize and streamline administrative systems and processes</b>	<i>Establish processes for the entire journey, including referrals to external providers</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<i>Centrally triage all in-need students through a single (set of) admin(s), including referral to external providers</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<i>Standardize IT processes (e.g., via a single note-entry system across the district)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>3. Foster the connection of mental health support staff to the school community</b>	Integrate the mental health team into the broader teacher and staff work cadence (e.g., joining morning meeting when not providing direct service to students)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Integrate the mental health team into the broader teacher and staff community and celebrations (e.g., employee of the week)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Increase opportunities for providers to interact with students (e.g., opportunities to lead universal class-based or school-wide interventions)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



### 1/3: Great organization (continued)

*Brainstorm other possible district actions to add to the list above. Consider (1) reflecting on current challenges, including for different types of mental health support staff, (2) discussing how to address those challenges, and (3) documenting potential actions.*

*Also document any other actions the district is taking.*

*This is the district's chance to identify actions that fit its unique needs. There is no need to think of additional actions if none come to mind.*

Other actions the district is already taking	Other actions the district could take to become a great organization

## 2/3: Great leaders

Example initiatives	Specific actions to consider <i>(Italicized actions may also benefit districts in developing external provider partnerships)</i>	The district does this	Consider exploring further
4. Always seek mental health and counseling staff input on important decisions about student wellbeing	<i>Establish a teams-based approach to designing and refreshing mental health services</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<i>Regularly collect input from all stakeholders (e.g., teachers, families, and community leaders)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<i>Set up clear channels for mental health and counseling staff to provide feedback on mental health services</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Ensure all employees understand mental health/counseling staff's roles	<i>Work with the district mental health and counseling staff to develop clear role descriptions</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<i>Help teachers and administrators understand the role of mental health and counseling staff (e.g., share role descriptions and hold trainings)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Establish guardrails to protect mental health and counseling staff's time from tasks outside their explicit role description. (See the guide to <a href="#">Strengthen support for school-based mental health staff</a> for more details.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Provide support and coaching with adoption of evidence-based approaches to mental health services	<i>Regularly employ needs assessments to identify student needs and target the provision of care</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Regularly review literature on the latest evidence-based approaches to refresh interventions used in districts	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Adopt tools to monitor outcomes and adjust care when indicated	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## 2/3: Great leaders (continued)

*Brainstorm other possible district actions to add to the list above. Consider (1) reflecting on current challenges, including for different types of mental health support staff, (2) discussing how to address those challenges, and (3) documenting potential actions.*

*Also document any other actions the district is taking.*

*This is the district's chance to identify actions that fit its unique needs. There is no need to think of additional actions if none come to mind.*

Other actions the district is already taking	Other actions the district could take to have great leaders

## 3/3: Great jobs

Example initiatives	Specific actions to consider <i>(Italicized actions may also benefit districts in developing external provider partnerships)</i>	The district does this	Consider exploring further
<b>7. Free up mental health support staff time for tasks that fully utilize their education and training</b>	Rebalance tasks by licensure and reassign non-specialized tasks to other school staff where appropriate	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<i>Set goals to ensure staff are able to spend time on direct contact and regularly monitor progress on goals</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<i>Regularly meet with relevant staff to review goals for spending more time on tasks that fully utilize their education and training, including removing barriers and maintaining accountability for these goals</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>8. Create professional development opportunities for mental health support staff</b>	Set a cadence of frequent case supervision and build structures for mentoring early-career mental health support staff	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Provide regular training on the latest evidence-based practices and improving counseling techniques	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<i>Consider leveraging current or new partnerships with external providers to support this professional development</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>9. Amplify mental health support staff's impact on the district</b>	<i>Invite mental health support staff to participate in school or district student wellbeing strategy or policy setting</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Invite mental health and counseling staff to lead trainings for staff and universal interventions in classrooms	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Co-create and execute school or district-wide mental-health campaigns with mental health support staff	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>10. Emphasize and (where possible) improve your district's salary and benefits packages</b>	Seek additional, sustainable funding sources to improve the compensation of district-employed staff	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Ensure that target staff benefits packages are in line with other district employee (e.g., teacher) benefits	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Where relevant, front-load or affix benefit accrual to job performance rather than staff tenure	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Example initiatives	Specific actions to consider <i>(Italicized actions may also benefit districts in developing external provider partnerships)</i>	The district does this	Consider exploring further
<b>11. Consider levers to augment mental health support staff salaries</b>	Let mental health support staff work extra hours (ideally on providing care to students) with commensurate increases in compensation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Consider providing bonuses or pay increases for staff achieving additional levels of professional licensure	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Consider signing bonuses for high-demand mental health support positions and schools	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>12. Create career advancement opportunities</b>	Create opportunities for mental health and counseling staff to enter school administration, especially overseeing student wellness	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Where beneficial, create supervisory and training roles for experienced mental health support staff	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Consider working with partners to create career pathways between private practices and school employment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

### 3/3: Great jobs (continued)

*Brainstorm other possible district actions to add to the list above. Consider (1) reflecting on current challenges, including for different types of mental health support staff, (2) discussing how to address those challenges, and (3) documenting potential actions.*

*Also document any other actions the district is taking.*

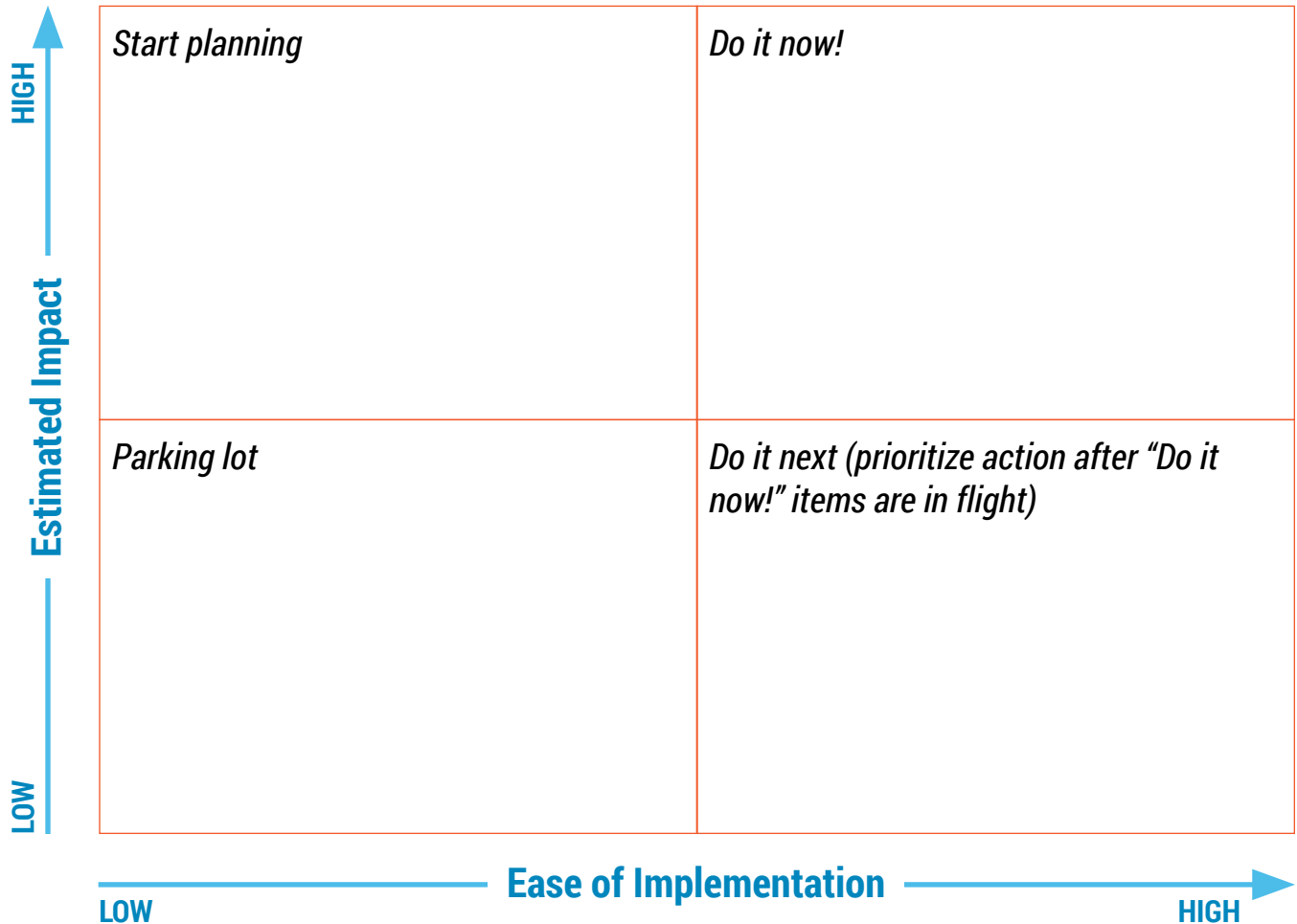
*This is the district's chance to identify actions that fit its unique needs. There is no need to think of additional actions if none come to mind.*

Other actions the district is already taking	Other actions the district could take to offer great jobs

## Prioritize proposed actions for further exploration based on their estimated impact and ease of implementation

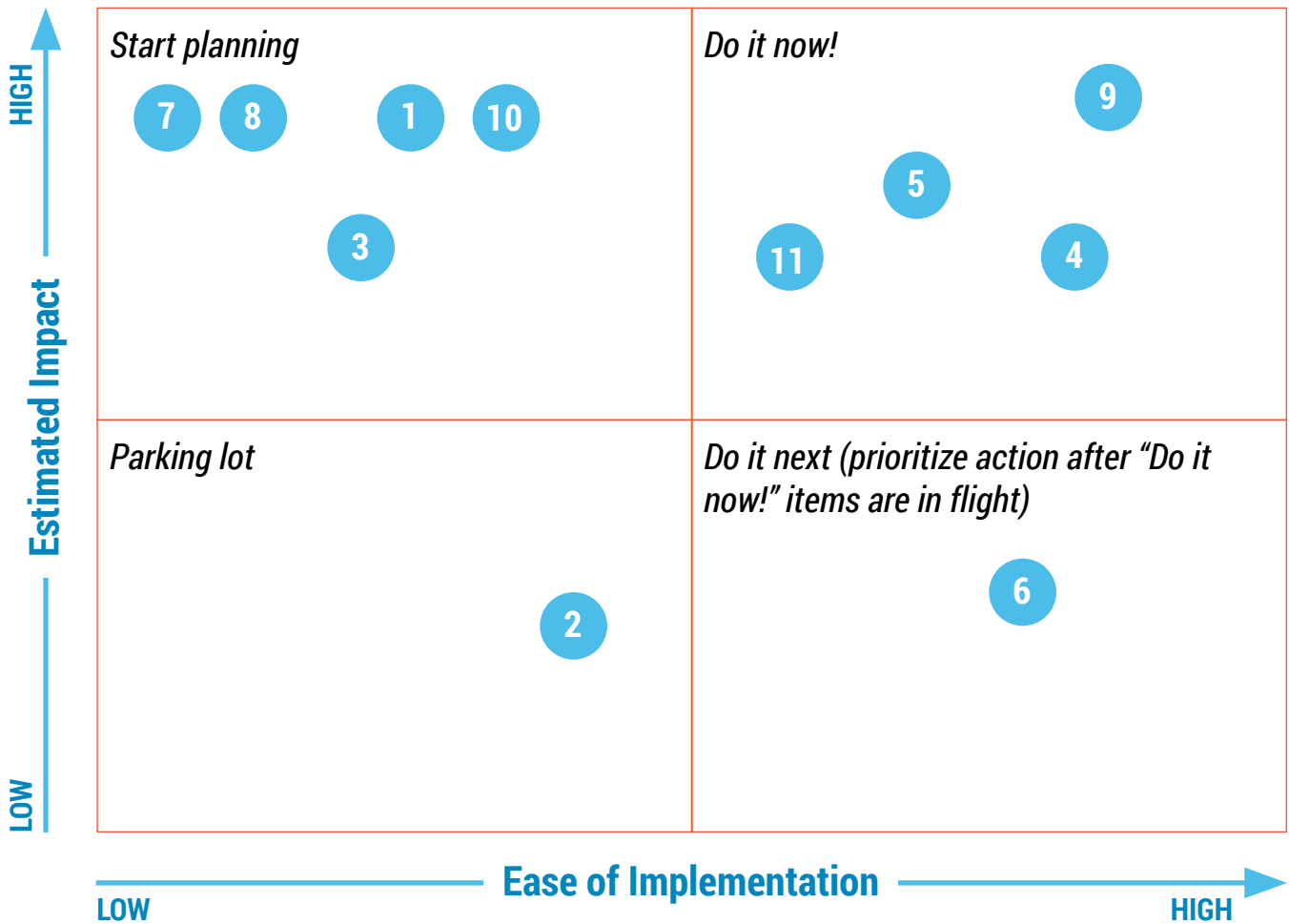
Consider each potential action marked for further exploration. Estimate each action's likely impact and ease of implementation. Consider referencing the illustrative prioritization of example initiatives on the next page.

The facilitator may divide the team into three subgroups (one for each attribute) to explore these questions.



### Illustrative prioritization of example initiatives

Consider starting with this illustrative prioritization of example initiatives when prioritizing proposed actions for your district. Make adjustments to fit the specific needs and capabilities of your district.



- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 Physical conditions</li> <li>2 Foster connections</li> <li>3 Evidence/outcomes</li> <li>4 Staff input</li> <li>5 Role descriptions</li> <li>6 Emphasize benefits</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>7 Augment salaries</li> <li>8 Career advancement</li> <li>9 Top of license</li> <li>10 Professional development</li> <li>11 Amplify impact</li> </ul> |
|--|--|



## Propose ideas that could make the district a more desirable place to work for staff providing dedicated mental health support

List all initiative ideas identified as high priority (“Do it now!” or “Do it next”). Think about who the initiative owners could be and propose deadlines.

Initiative category	Initiative idea <i>(Example initiative)</i>	Proposed initiative owner	Possible deadline
<input type="checkbox"/> Do it now! <input type="checkbox"/> Do it next	<i>Establish expectations for percent of staff time spent in direct contact with those in need of support</i>	<i>Principal of each school</i>	<i>Start of next school year</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Do it now! <input type="checkbox"/> Do it next			
<input type="checkbox"/> Do it now! <input type="checkbox"/> Do it next			
<input type="checkbox"/> Do it now! <input type="checkbox"/> Do it next			
<input type="checkbox"/> Do it now! <input type="checkbox"/> Do it next			
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<input type="checkbox"/> Do it now! <input type="checkbox"/> Do it next			