

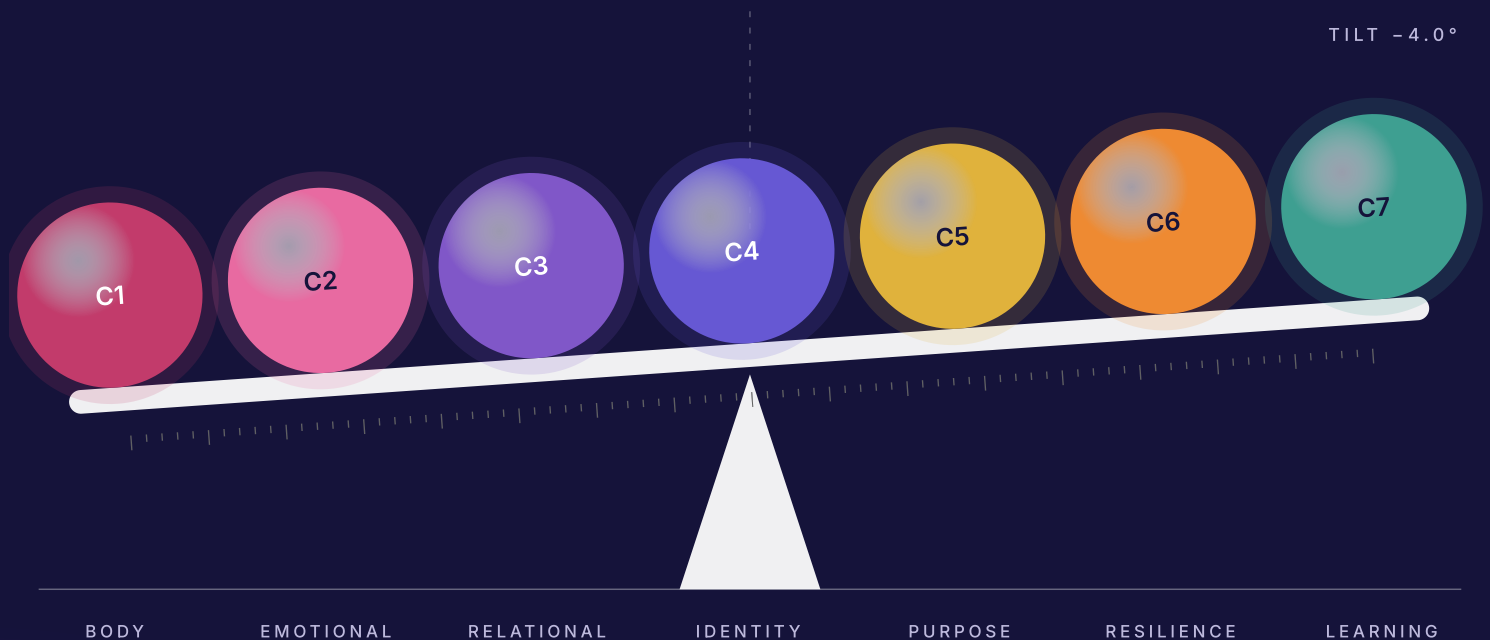


Santulan

RESEARCH-BASED FEATURE
INDIA · OCTOBER 2026

Beyond *Marks*

Why every student needs more than academic success.



A CLEAR-EYED LOOK AT THE CONSEQUENCES OF UNSUPPORTED DEVELOPMENT, AND THE CASE FOR A MORE COMPLETE SCHOOL SYSTEM.

SANTULAN · STUDENT CAPABILITY DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM

Five things *every educator* should take from this article

Marks tell us what a student produced. They do not tell us how the student is coping, relating, planning or believing. Schools that notice those things early can support children more kindly and more efficiently.

1. Same marks, different days

Two students can score the same and live very different school lives. A mark sheet cannot tell which child needs what.

2. The evidence is real, and bounded

Indian and global research shows that well-being, climate and social-emotional skills matter. It does not prove any one product works.

3. Costs arrive quietly

Student, family and school all pay when support is late, repeated or uncoordinated: fatigue, friction, missed follow-ups.

4. Policy is moving

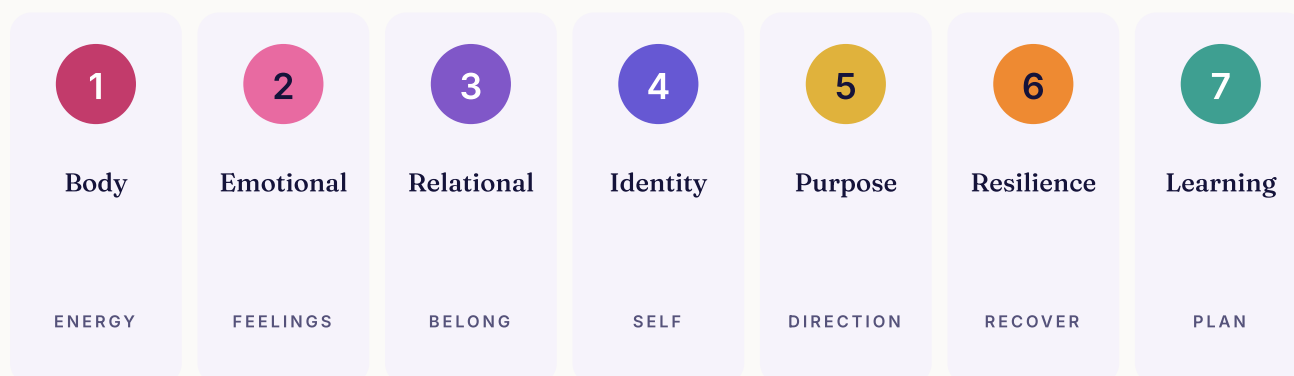
NEP 2020, NCF-SE 2023, the Supreme Court (Jul 2025), CBSE and UGC are each asking schools to look beyond marks.

5. Seven capabilities, one loop

Santulan proposes a shared language of seven capabilities and a Notice, Understand, Practise, Support, Review loop.

6. Trust before scale

No diagnosis by dashboard. Privacy, safety above scoring, and staged proof of value come first.



The seven connected capabilities in Santulan's proposed framework. The labels are product constructs, not a clinical diagnostic taxonomy.

HOW TO READ THIS ARTICLE

Student examples are fictional. Research findings describe groups and associations; they do not predict what will happen to any particular child. Bracketed numbers [1] point to the sources on the final pages.

A child is more than *a report card*

Imagine two students in Class IX. Both score 85% in mathematics.

One recovers after a difficult test, asks for help, plans the next week and feels comfortable learning with classmates. The other lies awake before examinations, worries about disappointing everyone, avoids asking questions and cannot begin homework without repeated reminders. Their marks look similar. Their everyday experience of school is not.

Now imagine the second child being described as “careless”, “not serious” or “lacking discipline”. Every adult may be noticing something real, yet no one may be seeing the whole picture. The child may need better sleep, help with emotions, a more supportive classroom, practical planning strategies, or assessment for a separate learning or health concern. A mark sheet cannot tell us which.

What if a school could notice the struggle before the child becomes known by the struggle?

This is the need Santulan seeks to address. Schools have established structures for syllabuses, examinations, attendance and academic results. Many have much less consistent ways to notice, strengthen and follow up the abilities that help students manage everyday life: emotional coping, relationships, confidence, purpose, resilience, healthy routines and independent learning.

The answer is not to label children or turn every feeling into a diagnosis. It is to make development beyond marks an everyday part of education: practical, compassionate, evidence-informed and coordinated across adults. This article examines the evidence, the possible consequences of doing nothing, and the limits of what Santulan can currently claim.

The evidence says *these experiences matter*

In 2022, NCERT surveyed 379,842 students from Classes VI to XII across India. The Ministry of Education reported that many students felt positive about school and their futures, while also noting that several positive well-being indicators declined from middle to secondary school. Worries about studies, examinations and results, and reports of mood swings, became more prominent with age. These are students' reported experiences, not rates of psychiatric illness.^[1, 2]

That combination matters. A student can be generally happy with school and still feel overwhelmed during exams. They can have friends yet struggle to ask for support. A useful student-development system must notice strengths as well as needs; it cannot reduce young people to a catalogue of risks.

379,842

students surveyed

NCERT 2022 · Classes VI–XII

11

Indian studies reviewed

BMC Public Health, 2025

1 : 500

counselling, Classes IX–XII

CBSE, Jan 2026 (as reported)

Evidence anchors: NCERT national survey [1–2]; Indian school-climate systematic review [5]; CBSE counselling requirement for Classes IX–XII as reported in January 2026 [4, 20]. The values describe different measures and must not be compared as prevalence rates.

School climate is not a decorative extra

An Indian systematic review published in BMC Public Health in 2025 examined 11 studies involving 3,711 adolescents. It reported that supportive student–teacher relationships, peer connections, belonging and school climate were associated with better emotional-health indicators and academic outcomes. The studies were largely observational: the review supports the importance of context, but does not prove that one particular intervention caused the outcomes.^[5]

UNICEF's mapping of child and adolescent mental-health services in India also identifies gaps in awareness, identification, access and support. Those gaps make early, appropriate help important, while reinforcing the need for referral pathways rather than trying to make every teacher into a therapist.^[3]

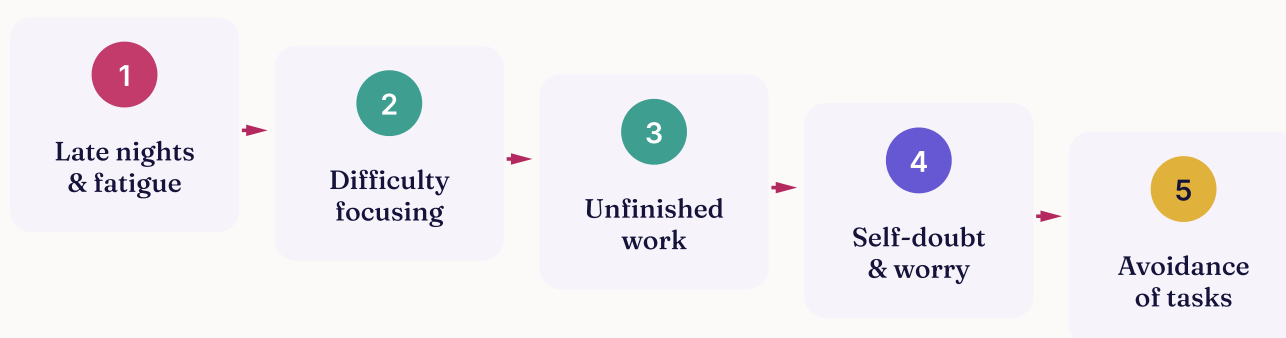
WHAT THE EVIDENCE DOES AND DOES NOT ESTABLISH

It establishes that development and well-being are legitimate educational concerns; that supportive relationships and school environments matter; and that services do not always reach children early. It does **not** establish that the seven Santulan domains are already psychometrically validated, or that Santulan has been proven to improve children's outcomes. That is a separate research task.

The quiet cost of waiting *for a visible problem*

When people hear “student well-being”, they may picture a crisis. In reality, the first signs are often ordinary: a student withdraws from group work; a child stops attempting hard questions; a teenager repeatedly forgets assignments; someone fears mistakes more than they enjoy learning. These experiences are common and do not automatically imply disorder. But persistent difficulties can make school harder than it needs to be.

When support is missing, difficulties may reinforce one another. One problem takes energy away from another area of life. The student becomes more tired, more frustrated or more reluctant to seek help. Eventually adults may notice only the visible result: poor performance, absence, conflict or disengagement.



A hypothetical cascading pathway, illustrating how body regulation, learning and self-belief can interact. It is not a validated causal chain and not a prediction for any individual student.

Three costs we can easily overlook

To the student	Lost confidence, repeated frustration, strained relationships and fewer chances to practise coping and independent action.
To the family	Uncertainty, difficult conversations, repeated reminders and a sense that school and home are responding to different versions of the same problem.
To the school	Fragmented follow-up, repeated teacher interventions, counselling overload and limited visibility into whether support is helping.

Some of these costs are difficult to quantify, and it would be misleading to invent a rupee figure for “capability neglect”. The useful question is what schools already observe: time spent repeating interventions, students re-referred for the same concern, follow-ups that are missed, and families who do not know what support has been tried.

Prevention is not the promise that no child will struggle. It is the commitment not to wait unnecessarily before offering appropriate support.

What students need, *domain by domain*

Seven connected capabilities, each with what it is, how it shows up when support is missing, and what support can look like.

1 Body & Self-Regulation

ENERGY

A student's learning day begins before the first period. Sleep, movement, food, physical comfort, energy and awareness of stress all influence whether a child feels ready to engage. Body and self-regulation is not about making children perfectly calm. It is about helping them notice physical signals, practise healthy routines and use age-appropriate ways of settling and organising themselves.

When difficulties persist, students may feel tired, inattentive or irritable. Teachers may see unfinished work or low participation without recognising underlying sleep, health, sensory or environmental needs. Research reviews, largely from US adolescent samples, report associations between sleep and school performance, with variation across studies. Good routines can help, but they do not replace medical evaluation where indicated.^[8]

SUPPORT CAN LOOK LIKE classroom movement opportunities, sleep-literacy conversations, predictable routines, stress-awareness exercises, safe help-seeking and appropriate health referrals. The aim is readiness, not punishment for physical or neurological differences.

2 Emotional Capability

FEELINGS

Children experience disappointment, anger, shame, excitement, jealousy and fear. Emotional capability helps them recognise what is happening, describe feelings without shame and choose actions that protect their wellbeing and relationships. It also includes asking for support when feelings are too difficult to manage alone.

A student who cannot yet respond constructively to strong emotions may lash out, withdraw or keep replaying a mistake. When adults focus only on behaviour, they can miss what preceded it. A large meta-analysis of 213 school-based programmes found that universal social and emotional learning improved social-emotional skills and some behavioural and academic outcomes on average, although programme quality and context matter.^[10]

SUPPORT CAN LOOK LIKE language for feelings, emotion-coaching, structured reflection, regulation strategies, modelling by adults, and escalation to qualified professionals for persistent or serious distress. Santulan should never claim that exercises alone treat a mental-health condition.

Learning is social. Students need to belong, communicate, disagree respectfully, collaborate, ask for help and set boundaries. A quiet student is not necessarily socially weak; an outspoken student is not necessarily socially capable. What matters is whether a child can participate and feel safe in relationships suited to their age and temperament.

When these needs are poorly supported, children may struggle with conflict, peer rejection, bullying experiences, isolation or fear of speaking up. The Indian school-climate review found consistent associations between peer support, belonging, emotional health and academic experiences. Importantly, difficulty with belonging may reflect the environment as much as the individual child.^[5]

SUPPORT CAN LOOK LIKE inclusive classroom practices, group-work coaching, anti-bullying safeguards, restorative conflict resolution, safe reporting systems and opportunities for students to be heard.

"Am I good at anything?" "Do I matter if my grades fall?" "Must I be like everyone else?" These are not unusual teenage questions. Students gradually form a sense of who they are through feedback, relationships, achievements, family expectations and personal experience. A healthy self-concept allows room for growth without requiring constant success.

When a child begins treating one poor result as proof that they are a failure, they may avoid risks, compare themselves harshly and stop asking for help. Longitudinal research and meta-analyses show a relationship between academic self-concept and achievement, though researchers continue to debate the strength and causal interpretation of reciprocal effects.^[9]

SUPPORT CAN LOOK LIKE specific strengths-based feedback, learning goals rather than identity labels, reflective journals, role models, diverse opportunities to succeed and conversations that separate a person's worth from performance.

"Calm down" is an instruction. "I can see you are upset; let us identify what happened and choose the next safe step" is a developmental response.

A CRUCIAL PROTECTION

Santulan must not produce fixed identity labels such as "weak personality", "low capability child" or "unlikely to succeed". Such labels could cause the very harm a development system is supposed to prevent.

5 Values, Purpose & Agency

DIRECTION

Young people hear a great deal about careers and examinations, but often have little opportunity to think about why a goal matters, what they value, or which small action they can take today. Purpose is not the expectation that a 14-year-old has a life plan. Agency is the gradually developing experience of being able to make informed choices and act on them.

Without support, some students drift between other people's expectations, struggle to decide or lose motivation when a path feels meaningless. The evidence linking meaning, self-concept and achievement is promising, but this domain currently has a less mature intervention evidence base than established social-emotional or learning research. Claims of long-term transformation should therefore be cautious.^[11]

SUPPORT CAN LOOK LIKE values exploration, exposure to varied futures, short-term goal setting, choice-making, community projects, reflection on consequences and inclusive career conversations.

6 Adaptability & Resilience

RECOVER

Every student eventually faces a poor result, a friendship change, an unexpected move, criticism or a challenge that does not yield immediately. Resilience is not silent endurance or the ability to tolerate harmful conditions. It is a process of adjusting, recovering, seeking help and trying another pathway when one is blocked.

When a student fears a setback so much that they stop trying, learning opportunities shrink. School-based resilience programmes have shown benefits in some systematic reviews, but effects vary substantially with age, delivery and outcome measures. Resilience cannot be taught while ignoring discrimination, bullying, unsafe environments or overwhelming academic pressure.^[12]

SUPPORT CAN LOOK LIKE normalising mistakes, gradual challenges, problem-solving practice, access to supportive adults and school policies that do not shame students for struggle.

The right question is not “Why is this student so fragile?” It is “What support, skills and conditions will help this student adapt?”

A student may understand an answer and still fail to complete an assignment. Starting a task, planning steps, estimating time, switching attention, keeping track of materials and reviewing one's work all require executive and self-directed learning processes. These skills develop over time and vary between children; they should never be used as shorthand for intelligence or character.

When students need more support here, adults may see procrastination, forgetfulness, inconsistent study habits and dependence on reminders. Research links executive functioning with learning and academic outcomes, while intervention studies warn that gains in isolated skills do not always transfer automatically to everyday academic performance.^[13]

SUPPORT CAN LOOK LIKE visible task breakdowns, planning routines, realistic deadlines, worked examples, feedback loops, environmental adjustments and specialist assessment for persistent difficulties when appropriate.

Why seven separate boxes are not enough

Students do not live in domains. A tired student may struggle with focus. Repeated failure can affect self-belief. Social exclusion may make classroom participation feel unsafe. An unclear goal can weaken persistence. These interactions provide the rationale for a connected view of development, but they should be investigated without assuming that one score explains another.

Body & Self-Regulation	Established links with sleep, attention and health (largely US samples)
Emotional Capability	Substantial SEL research; context matters
Relational & Social	Strong school-climate associations
Identity & Self-Concept	Longitudinal achievement associations; causal debate
Values, Purpose & Agency	Promising; less mature intervention evidence
Adaptability & Resilience	Intervention evidence varies with age and delivery
Self-Directed Learning	Established link with learning; mixed training transfer

Indicative evidence landscape, synthesising [5, 8–13]. These are descriptions of the research base, not Santulan validation ratings or child scores.

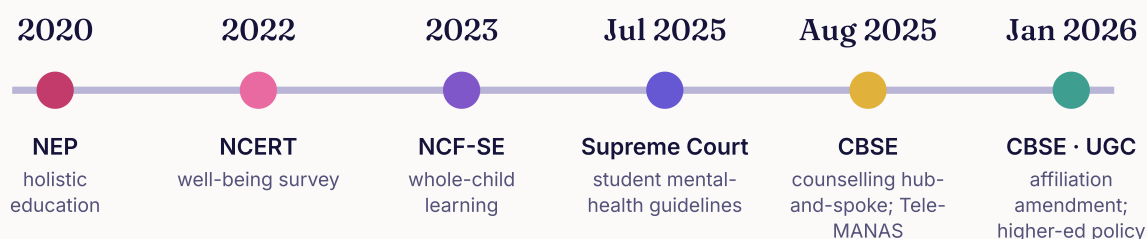
DESIGN HYPOTHESIS

The seven-domain framework needs construct definitions, age-specific indicators, cultural adaptation, reliability testing, fairness analysis and appropriate evidence for each intervention. The strongest responsible promise is to help adults ask better questions and support children more coherently.

India is asking schools *to look beyond marks*

The National Education Policy 2020 and the National Curriculum Framework for School Education 2023 emphasise holistic development, well-being and learning that extends beyond examination performance. They establish an educational direction, not a licence for companies to claim government endorsement.^[14, 15]

In July 2025 the Supreme Court of India issued guidelines on student mental health, including access to qualified counsellors, regular staff training and parent sensitisation.^[17] CBSE has since expanded attention to school counselling: its August 2025 counselling Hub-and-Spoke model and Tele-MANAS circular were followed by a January 2026 amendment to affiliation provisions. As reported, the amendment asks secondary and senior secondary schools to appoint a socio-emotional counsellor and a career counsellor, with one counselling and wellness teacher for up to every 500 students enrolled in Classes IX–XII, subject to the circular's detailed provisions.^[4, 16, 19, 20] In higher education, the UGC announced a uniform mental-health framework in January 2026.^[18]



Selected milestones in Indian education and mental-health policy. The sequence does not imply any official approval of Santulan.

CHECK THE PRIMARY TEXT

Staffing figures and qualifications vary by board, school level and state. Schools must examine the actual affiliation requirements rather than relying on marketing summaries or news reports, including this one.

The question is operational, not just philosophical

If a counsellor is responsible for hundreds of students, meaningful care cannot depend solely on crisis appointments. Schools also need ways for teachers and parents to notice difficulties, for students to practise everyday skills, and for appropriate adults to follow up. This does not mean that software fulfils staffing requirements. It means that trained people can benefit from well-designed supporting processes.

A school may already run life-skills activities, assemblies, counselling sessions and parent orientations. Santulan's opportunity is not to dismiss these efforts; it is to help connect them into one sustained pathway with clearer responsibility, documentation and review.

The cost of inaction appears *in everyday school life*

Picture a school where teachers repeatedly discuss the same student's unfinished work, parents receive periodic complaints, and a counsellor meets the student after a serious incident. Everyone is trying to help. But no one can easily see what was tried last term, which approach the student found useful, or whether classroom and home expectations were aligned.

That is an operating-system problem. It consumes attention, creates avoidable frustration and may delay appropriate support. In serious cases, it can also create safeguarding risks. The most credible way to estimate the institutional cost is to measure actual processes, not to assign speculative monetary values to children's emotional lives.

VISIBLE SCHOOL SYMPTOM	UNDERLYING QUESTION WORTH ASKING	MEASURE FOR A PILOT
Repeated referrals	Was the original concern followed up?	Follow-up completed on time
Unfinished work	Is planning support practical and accessible?	Task-start and completion trends
Peer conflict	Is the environment inclusive and safe?	Incidents and resolution quality
Parent complaints	Did home and school agree on next steps?	Communication and response time
Counsellor overload	Are non-clinical needs handled appropriately?	Triage quality and staff time

None of these metrics proves that an individual child lacks a capability. They are indicators that a school may need a more coordinated process. A responsible system protects student privacy and does not turn private reflections into a leaderboard.

Urgency without fear

The persuasive argument is not that every child is at risk of breakdown. It is that development is occurring every day, with or without the school's intentional support. If a school can teach a chapter systematically, review progress, adapt instruction and involve the family, why should practical life capabilities receive only occasional attention?

For management, the purchasing question becomes measurable: can a structured support process increase appropriate reach, reduce missed follow-ups, make teacher effort more useful and help students practise skills regularly, without adding unacceptable workload? That is the case Santulan needs to prove in pilots.

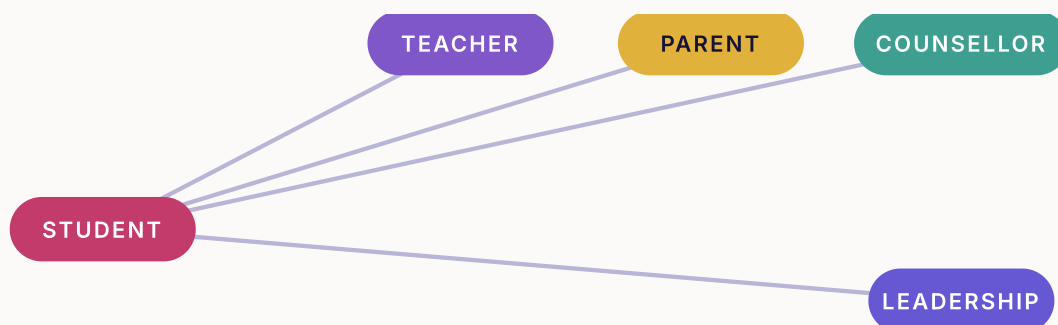
What Santulan *could make possible*

Santulan proposes a Student Capability Development System that brings students, teachers, parents, counsellors and school leaders into one coordinated developmental approach. The centre is the student, not the dashboard. Technology should support human judgment rather than replace it.



Proposed development loop: an ongoing cycle, not a one-time score. Referral occurs when a concern needs specialist assessment or safeguarding action.

A student might notice a pattern: "I panic when I do not understand the homework." A teacher may observe that instructions need to be broken into smaller steps. A parent might report that the child is sleeping poorly. The counsellor can then determine whether the support need is routine, persistent or serious. A helpful response may involve classroom adjustments, emotion-coaching, healthy routines, professional assessment or a combination. The student sees progress as changes in experience and action, not simply as a higher score. That is the difference from a one-off assessment: a questionnaire alone rarely teaches a child what to do on a difficult Monday morning, so assessment is a starting point, not the destination.



Shared purpose. Different responsibilities. Protected student privacy.

Five stakeholder perspectives. Access to sensitive information must be limited by role, consent and safeguarding requirements.

In the proposed model, students receive age-appropriate language and activities; teachers receive classroom strategies; parents receive practical guidance; counsellors manage appropriate referrals and follow-up; and leadership sees only necessary aggregated patterns and process information. This division of responsibility is a design target, not a claim that the current MVP has fully validated every workflow.

What a responsible system *must never forget*

A student capability platform has unusual responsibilities. Children are not employees to be ranked, customers to be scored, or data points to be optimised. They have rights, changing developmental needs and different environments. A system intended to help them must be careful about labels, surveillance and unnecessary data collection.

Five non-negotiable safeguards

No diagnosis by dashboard	Santulan should not diagnose depression, anxiety, ADHD, trauma or other conditions without appropriate clinical processes and regulatory basis.
Consent, assent and privacy	Gather only needed data, explain what is collected, restrict access and establish retention, deletion and escalation policies consistent with applicable Indian law.
Safety above scoring	Serious distress, abuse or imminent risk must trigger qualified human-led safeguarding and referral processes, not a generic self-help module.
Inclusion and fairness	Assess tools for language, disability, neurodiversity, socioeconomic variation and cultural bias; provide alternatives and accommodations.
Meaningful validation	Publish construct definitions, reliability and validity evidence, intervention fidelity, adverse-event monitoring and results, even when findings are modest or mixed.

Research on whole-school mental-health interventions gives reason for hope, not certainty. A 2025 systematic review and meta-analysis found benefits for certain outcomes but less consistent improvements across multiple mental-health measures. It is therefore scientifically wrong to transfer the average effect of a broad research category directly to Santulan.^[6] A co-produced whole-school programme for India is also under development, which shows the field is still learning what works in Indian schools.^[7]

The promise must never be: “Our software knows your child.” The promise should be: “Your child will be understood and supported more thoughtfully.”

The difference is ethical and practical. A programme earns trust by showing that a young person can disagree with a report, ask who has access, receive a human explanation and get help without being permanently labelled.

How Santulan can *demonstrate real value*

The research makes the case for a structured approach. Now Santulan must establish whether its own design works. That requires more than testimonials or colourful growth dashboards; it requires a staged evaluation that tests feasibility, safety, acceptability and actual student outcomes.

Stage 1 A careful feasibility pilot	Work with a small, diverse group of schools over a defined period, beginning with a limited number of age-appropriate domains rather than all seven at once. Include student feedback, teacher workload, counsellor review and parent communication. Track completion of planned support, perceived usefulness, appropriate referrals and privacy or safeguarding issues. Pilot design is a plan, not evidence of effectiveness.
Stage 2 Test whether students benefit	Over a longer period, use validated independent measures for two or three priority capabilities, consider comparison schools or a cluster-randomised design where feasible, pre-register outcomes and involve an independent evaluator. Observe practical behaviour as well as survey scores. Distinguish improvements in reporting from improvements in functioning.
Stage 3 Test whether schools sustain it	Study what happens when the excitement of a pilot is over. Do teachers continue using supports? Are parents receiving appropriate guidance? Do counsellors find the system manageable? Can leadership review useful aggregated signals without intruding on privacy? Is the cost per student reasonable? Would schools renew?

CLAIM WE MAY MAKE TODAY	CLAIM THAT NEEDS PILOT EVIDENCE
Indian students report meaningful wellbeing and school-life challenges.	Santulan improves a defined student outcome.
Supportive school relationships are associated with better outcomes.	Santulan changes school climate or belonging.
CBSE has counselling and wellness requirements.	Santulan makes a school legally compliant.
Developmental domains can be connected conceptually.	Santulan scores validly predict a child's future.

A credible pilot should be willing to find problems. If a module burdens teachers, worsens stigma or fails to change outcomes, it should be redesigned or discontinued. That is how an educational mission becomes trustworthy infrastructure.

Children cannot wait for a crisis *to begin learning how to live.*

At school, children learn to calculate, remember, compare, write and explain. They also learn, through every friendship, mistake, exam, disappointment and success, how to respond to pressure, how to see themselves, how to treat others, and whether asking for help is safe.

Those lessons happen even when no one has planned them. A classroom that humiliates mistakes teaches one lesson; a classroom that treats mistakes as information teaches another. A parent conversation that ends in blame teaches one lesson; one that builds a plan teaches another.

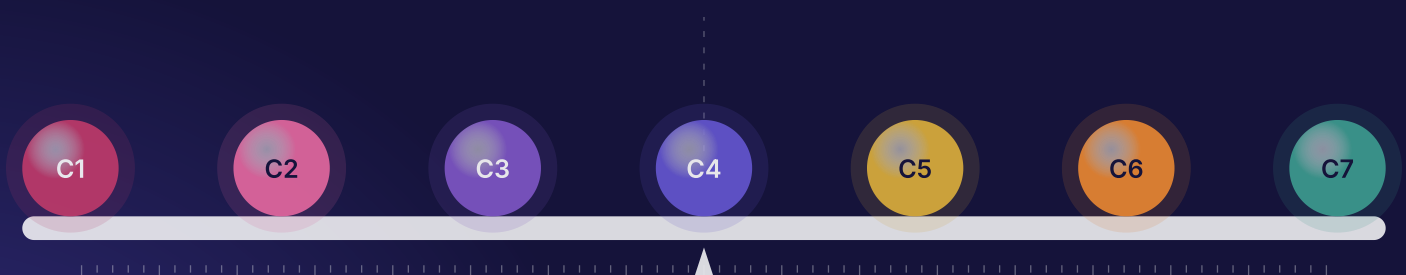
Santulan's founding insight is that this part of education should not be left to chance. Seven proposed capability areas can give schools a shared language. A student-centred support loop can connect everyday practice with the expertise of teachers, parents and counsellors. Thoughtful measurement can show where a school is providing consistent help, and where its approach needs improvement.

Every child deserves to be understood beyond marks, supported beyond problems, and developed beyond academics.

AN INVITATION TO SCHOOLS

Begin with three questions. Which developmental needs do our students say are most difficult? How do adults currently respond when they notice them? Can we show that our support is accessible, appropriate and improving over time?

If schools can answer with care and evidence, the conversation shifts from "Do we need another assessment?" to "Are we building the conditions in which students can grow?" That is the conversation Santulan exists to advance.



References: *official documents and peer-reviewed research*

All links are provided for source checking. Percentages, sample sizes, policy provisions and research findings should be interpreted in their original context. Accessed for preparation: October 2026. Sources marked “secondary report” should be replaced by the primary document before external circulation.

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EVIDENCE NOTE

Most observational findings cannot establish causation. Research on global or non-Indian samples should not be assumed to transfer without cultural validation. Santulan-specific psychometric validity, effectiveness, cost savings and compliance outcomes remain unproven and must be independently assessed.