

Instruction

Trauma Informed Schools

The Board of Education (Board) believes that when students are healthy, safe, supported, engaged and challenged, they are then able to learn to the best of their ability. Becoming “trauma informed” is one key aspect of creating such a learning environment.

Definitions

Trauma is the response to an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening. Trauma is an actual or perceived danger, which undermines a child’s physical or emotional safety, or poses a threat to the safety of the child’s parents or caregivers, overwhelming their coping ability and impacting their functioning and development. Trauma can result from a single event (single-episode or acute trauma) or it can result from multiple traumatic events over time (complex trauma). There are a wide range of experiences that can result in trauma. Traumatic experiences, whether real or perceived, lead children to feel significant levels of helplessness, powerlessness and intense fear. Trauma has lasting adverse effects on the individual’s functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being.

Trauma-sensitive or trauma-informed schools acknowledge the prevalence of traumatic occurrence in students’ lives and create a flexible framework that provides universal supports, is sensitive to unique needs of students, and is mindful of avoiding re-traumatization.

A **trauma informed school** is one in which all students and staff feel safe, welcomed and supported and where the impact of trauma on teaching and learning is addressed at the center of the educational mission. Trauma-informed schools create school policies, practices and cultures that are sensitive to the needs of traumatized individuals and ensure that all individuals (students, families and staff) meet their maximized potential.

The District recognizes that the developmental impact of childhood and historical trauma increases student risk for, but not limited to, academic failure, severe attendance problems, severe school behavior concerns and possible chronic health concerns, which negatively impacts student engagement and learning. A trauma informed approach to education is intended to improve attendance, graduation rates and reduce incidents of behaviors that can inhibit learning.

The District will strive to create physically and emotionally safe and culturally responsive environments for all staff, students and families through effective professional staff development in school procedures and school practices and instruction in the following areas:

1. Understanding the widespread impact of trauma and the role schools play in promoting resiliency;
2. Recognizing the signs and symptoms of trauma in students, families and staff; and
3. Integrating knowledge about trauma and social emotional learning in children.

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Administrators must consider a student's past and their possible experiences with traumatic events when building relationships, encouraging positive behavior and gathering resources to assist students' success.

The District will develop methods to create positive student experiences that:

1. Show students they belong as valued members of their class and school;
2. Reinforce student feelings that they are useful to their classmates and valued by adults;
3. Teach the students techniques to reinforce their efforts to improve on their own success;
4. Provide the students with authentic evidence of academic competence; and
5. Create supportive parental relationships fostering positive teacher/parent communications on a frequent basis through proactive discussions of student progress, assignments, class plans, curriculum focus and student challenges.

These experiences are intended to lessen the feelings of failure, alienation, uselessness, and powerlessness created by adversity. Teachers will support students in making appropriately assertive efforts to identify reasons for the lack of success and address negative emotions undermining those efforts.

The implementation of a trauma-informed approach is viewed by the Board as an ongoing organizational change process. Such approach is not a program model that can be implemented and simply monitored. Rather, it is a profound paradigm shift in knowledge, perspective, attitudes, and skills that continue to deepen over time. A continuum of implementation involves movement through stages, beginning with becoming trauma aware and then progressing to trauma-sensitive in response to fully trauma informed.

A multi-faceted approach shall focus on attendance policies that focus on causes, disciplinary policies that incorporate restorative practices, curriculum development policies that focus on social and emotional learning and student wellness policies that promote healthy behaviors.

The Superintendent of Schools or his/her designee is directed to implement a trauma informed approach to education through the application of culturally responsive trauma informed practices in the District's schools and programs.

Instruction

Trauma Informed Schools (continued)

(4131 – Staff Development)
(5114 – Suspension and Expulsion/Due Process)
(5131 – Conduct)
(5131.21 – Violent and Aggressive Behavior)
(5131.911 – Bullying/Safe School Climate)
(5131.912 – Aggressive Behavior)
(5131.913 – Cyberbullying)
(5141.4 – Child Abuse and Neglect)
(5141.5 – Suicide Prevention/Intervention)
(5144 – Discipline/Punishment)
(5144.12 – Restorative Justice Approach to School Discipline)
(5144.5 – Progressive Discipline and Promoting Positive School Behavior)
(5145.4 – Nondiscrimination)
(5145.5 – Sexual Harassment)
(5145.51 – Peer Sexual Harassment)
(5145.511 – Sexual Abuse Prevention and Education Program)
(5145.52 – Harassment)
(5145.53 – Human Dignity)
(5145.54 – Civility)
(6114.7 – School Safety)
(6142.101 – Student Wellness)
(6142.102 – Social and Emotional Learning)
(6142.11 – Human Relations Education)
(6164.2 – Guidance/Counseling Services)
(6164.3 – Psychological Services)
(6164.6 – Social Work Services)

Legal Reference: Connecticut General Statutes
 10-15b Access of parent or guardian to student's records. Inspection and subpoena of school or student records.
 10-221 Boards of education to prescribe rule(s), policies, and procedures.
 10-222d Policy on bullying behavior as amended by PA 08-160, P.A. 11-232, P.A. 14-172, PA 18-15 and PA 19-166.
 Public Act 19-166, An Act Concerning School Climates.

Policy adopted: April 21, 2020

STERLING PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Sterling, Connecticut

Trauma-Informed Schools Checklist

According to the Trauma Learning and Policy Institute out of Harvard Law School, distinguishing between trauma-sensitive and trauma-informed schools facilitates increased understanding of addressing the needs of children who have experienced developmental trauma. In order for all students to be able to access learning and experience social, emotional and behavioral success, a trauma-sensitive school creates a culture where all “students feel safe, welcomed and supported.” A trauma-informed school includes collaboration with mental health providers who have expertise in supporting children who have experienced developmental trauma. The following questions are designed to help determine a school’s current status in being trauma sensitive and informed. For each question, if the answer is yes, please feel free to provide examples of how your school is addressing the question.

School-Wide Policies and Practices	Yes	No	Examples
1. Does the school have explicitly stated methods for ensuring there are predictable and safe environments (classroom and non-classroom settings) that are attentive to transition and sensory needs?			
2. Does the school have a trauma-sensitive action plan that identifies barriers to progress and evaluates success that of which all staff are aware?			
3. Do all staff who provide educational services (teachers, para educators, special educators, etc.) consider the role trauma may have on accessing learning?			
4. Do the disciplinary policies balance accountability with trauma-sensitive responses?			
5. Do all staff have access to someone with expertise in developmental trauma for consultation and observation?			
6. Are there ongoing opportunities for professional development on trauma including how to strengthen relationships, identify outside supports and incorporate practices that assist students in their capacity to regulate emotions, behaviors and thoughts to better access learning?			
7. Does the school have explicitly stated methods for ensuring there are predictable and safe environments (classroom and non-classroom settings) that are attentive to transition and sensory needs?			
8. Does the school have a trauma-sensitive action plan that identifies barriers to progress and evaluates success of which all staff are aware?			

Trauma-Informed Schools Checklist
(continued)

School-Wide Policies and Practices	Yes	No	Examples
9. Do all staff who provide educational services (teachers, para educators, special educators, etc.) consider the role trauma may have on accessing learning?			
10. Do the disciplinary policies balance accountability with trauma-sensitive responses?			
11. Do all staff have access to someone with expertise in developmental trauma for consultation and observation?			
12. Are there ongoing opportunities for professional development on trauma including how to strengthen relationships, identify outside supports and incorporate practices that assist students in their capacity to regulate emotions, behaviors and thoughts to better access learning?			
Classroom Strategies and Techniques	Yes	No	Examples
1. Are behavioral expectations communicated in clear, concise and positive ways with common and consistent goals established for all students?			
2. When considering building competencies across domains, are students' strengths and interests incorporated into planning?			
3. Are activities structured in predictable and emotionally safe ways?			
4. Do teachers provide students opportunities to practice emotional, behavioral and cognitive regulation in classrooms?			
5. Do teachers employ multi-modal strategies when teaching content?			
6. Do students have opportunities to experience facilitated healthy peer interactions in the classroom?			
Collaboration and Linkage to Mental Health	Yes	No	Examples
1. Does the school have policies and practices that describe how, when and where to refer families for mental health supports that staff understand and implement?			
2. Does the school have access to trauma-competent services for prevention, early intervention, treatment and crisis intervention?			

Trauma-Informed Schools Checklist
(continued)

Collaboration and Linkage to Mental Health	Yes	No	Examples
3. Does the school have protocols in place that support students in transitioning back from short or long term treatment placements that are designed to be tailored to a student's unique needs?			
4. Do staff have regular access to mental health providers who have expertise in developmental trauma to support their interaction with students and families?			
Family Partnerships	Yes	No	Examples
1. Do staff receive training in developing a broad repertoire of skills to actively and respectfully engage with families from diverse backgrounds?			
2. Does the school have multiple strategies that allow for flexibility in meeting individual family needs including alternate meeting places and times as well as ensuring interpreters and translated materials are available?			
3. Are staff trained in confidentiality and regularly practice that when communicating about students and families?			
Community Linkages	Yes	No	Examples
1. Does the school have ongoing relationships and partnerships with state human service and community-based agencies to facilitate access to resources?			
2. Does the school have the capacity to leverage funding in partnership with ancillary agencies in order to increase supports available to students and families?			

Notes:

Trauma-Sensitive School Checklist

A trauma-sensitive school is a safe and respectful environment that enables students to build caring relationships with adults and peers, self-regulate their emotions and behaviors, and succeed academically, while supporting their physical health and well-being.

This checklist is organized by five components involved in creating a trauma-sensitive school. Each component consists of several elements. Assess your school on each element. Consider if the element is not in place at all, is partially in place, is mostly in place or is fully in place.

School-wide Policies and Practices

- School contains predictable and safe environments (including classrooms, hallways, playgrounds, and school bus) that are attentive to transitions and sensory needs.
- Leadership (including principal and/or superintendent) develops and implements a trauma-sensitive action plan, identifies barriers to progress, and evaluates success.
- General and special educators consider the role that trauma may be playing in learning difficulties at school.
- Discipline policies balance accountability with an understanding of trauma.
- Support for staff is available on a regular basis, including supervision and/or consultation with a trauma expert, classroom observations, and opportunities for team work.
- Opportunities exist for confidential discussion about students.
- School participates in safety planning, including enforcement of court orders, transferring records safely, restricting access to student-record information, and sensitive handling of reports of suspected incidents of abuse or neglect.
- On-going professional development opportunities occur as determined by staff needs assessments.

Classroom Strategies and Techniques

- Expectations are communicated in clear, concise, and positive ways, and goals for achievement of students affected by traumatic experiences are consistent with the rest of the class.
- Students' strengths and interests are encouraged and incorporated.
- Activities are structured in predictable and emotionally safe ways.
- Opportunities exist for students to learn and practice regulation of emotions and modulation of behaviors.

Trauma-Sensitive School Checklist
(continued)

- Classrooms employ positive supports for behavior.
- Information is presented and learning is assessed using multiple modes.
- Opportunities exist for learning how to interact effectively with others.
- Opportunities exist for learning how to plan and follow through on assignments.

Collaboration and Linkages with Mental Health

- Policies describe how, when, and where to refer families for mental health supports; and staff actively facilitate and follow through in supporting families' access to trauma-competent mental health services.
- Access exists to trauma-competent services for prevention, early intervention, treatment, and crisis intervention.
- Protocols exist for helping students transition back to school from other placements.
- Mental health services are linguistically appropriate and culturally competent.
- Staff has regular opportunities for assistance from mental health providers in responding appropriately and confidentiality to families.

Family Partnerships

- Staff uses a repertoire of skills to actively engage and build positive relationships with families.
- Strategies to involve parents are tailored to meet individual family needs, and include flexibility in selecting times and places for meetings, availability of interpreters, and translated materials.
- All communications with and regarding families respect the bounds of confidentiality.

Community Linkages

- School develops and maintains ongoing partnerships with state human service agencies and with community-based agencies to facilitate access to resources.
- When possible, school and community agencies leverage funding to increase the array of supports available.

Source: **Lesley University**
Center for Special Education

Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative
of Massachusetts Advocates for Children
and the Legal Services Center of Harvard Law School