Trauma-Informed Education
Strategy Guide 2.1

Strategy Vision and Description

In this guide, we define Trauma-Informed Education as a school-wide system that recognizes the prevalence of adverse and traumatic childhood experiences and equips teachers and staff with knowledge to recognize trauma and strategies to support students who experience trauma.

This strategy guide uses SAMHSA's definition of trauma: *"Individual trauma results from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening and has lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional or spiritual well-being."* This definition includes trauma as a result of an individual event, series of events, or on-going circumstances including institutional bias and historical or structural oppression. The COVID-19 pandemic has both increased the complexity of related traumas of loss and illness, as well as exacerbating the impact of prior traumas.

This strategy guide is not intended to be used to replace systems and supports following a community-wide traumatic event. If a school community has experienced a wide-scale traumatic event or crisis, please refer to CDE's School Safety and Crisis Resources.

Research has shown that the following components support the establishment of trauma-informed educational practices. It is important to note that while there is evidence to demonstrate the effectiveness of each component (see research following each component), these components are most effective when implemented together. The following components are derived from various articles and research that articulate what trauma-informed education should include:

1. **Plan to Implement Trauma-Informed Practices**
2. **Develop a Common Understanding of Trauma and Trauma-Informed Practices**
3. **Establish Systems and Structures to Sustain Trauma-Informed Practices**

Evidence Base

ESSA defines levels of research based on the quality of the study (Levels 1-4). CDE requires that schools and districts identify the research base for strategies that they select for their Unified Improvement Plans, and for applications for school improvement funds in the EASI application.

The research on **Trauma-Informed Education** that is cited here meets the threshold for **ESSA Level 1-3**.

Necessary Preconditions

The following systems, structures, or practices should be established at the site before implementing this strategy, as they serve as a foundation for the practices described in this guide.

- Foundational Practice: Leadership Team(s), Data Analysis
- Foundational System: Professional Learning
- Foundational Strategies: Multi-Tiered Systems of Support, Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support

Contextual Fit

Possible Root Causes include inadequate, inconsistent or ineffective…

- Adult culture and beliefs
- Attendance and Engagement Systems
- Family Engagement
- Behavior and Engagement Systems
- School Culture
- Systems to meet Social Emotional Needs
- Staff Turnover and Transitions
- Support to address Student Experiences
- Understanding of Student Needs

Is this strategy a good fit for your district/school?

- Does the disaggregated school data indicate a performance issue related to students experiencing trauma, or high risk factors, rather than a performance issue primarily related to race, ethnicity and/or cultural backgrounds of students? Are there documented challenges serving students who have experienced trauma rather than serving students of varying races, ethnicities and/or cultural backgrounds? Although there may be overlap between students who have experienced trauma and students of different races, ethnicities and/or cultural backgrounds, the strategies to address these challenges are different. To address challenges primarily related to serving students of different races, ethnicities and/or cultural backgrounds, refer to the Culturally Responsive Education Strategy Guide.
- Has staff been involved in trauma-informed education efforts previously? How might this involvement or lack of involvement impact the roll out of this strategy?
- Is there a wide range of stakeholders available to give input around the development of a trauma-informed school?
- What is the history of the school's experiences with trauma and/or traumatic events? Has the majority of the school's staff been involved in a school-wide or community traumatic event in recent history?
- Are there data (behavior, attendance, social-emotional, mobility, etc.) available to assist in giving stakeholders a holistic view of the organization?

Core Components, Elements & Activities

Unlike other strategies that are characterized by specific practices or procedures, Trauma Informed Education primarily describes a holistic mindset shift and approach to work in schools. As such, rather than describing Trauma Informed Education "at full implementation," the following Core Components describe the steps needed to achieve these mindset shifts and to implement a Trauma-Informed approach where one has not yet existed.

Components, and elements within each component, should be implemented <u>sequentially</u> in the following order to increase the likelihood of successful outcomes.

Core Component 1: Plan to Implement Trauma-Informed Practices

In order to develop an implementation plan, schools must be aware of their current status around implementing trauma-informed education. It is important to analyze current practices, policies and procedures to determine goals that will drive improved school systems.

Elements or Activities	Description
Trauma Audit	The school leadership team understands what procedures and practices are currently in place and what are needed by performing an audit on trauma-informed school systems. Consider the use of the [Trauma Responsive Schools Implementation Assessment](#), adapting the [Trauma Informed Care Project's self-assessment](#) for organizations, or considering [SAMHSA's questions for implementing a trauma-informed approach](#) in regards to the ten implementation domains.
Set Goals	The school leadership team sets immediate, short-term, mid-term and long-range goals around implementing trauma-informed practices based on results from the trauma audit. Schools leaders and staff understand that implementing trauma-informed educational practices is a whole school effort. Implementing this level of change is a developmental process and will occur gradually over time.
Review and Update Operational Systems	The school leadership team plans for improving operational systems and structures in consideration of the results from the trauma audit. These include leadership aspects, access to resources and services, policies and protocols, collaboration with families, disciplinary practices, physical environment, and collaboration with community agencies. The school leadership team also plans for Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions for students demonstrating symptoms of trauma, including a system for referrals to access Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions. Tier 2 interventions may include evidence-based counseling programs such as Cognitive Behavioral Intervention for Trauma in Schools (CBITS), Support for Students Exposed to Trauma (SSET), and Bounce Back . Tier 3 interventions may include individual counseling and referrals to community mental health agencies. For more information on creating a tiered model for operational elements of trauma-informed education, refer to the [Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) Strategy Guide](#) and/or the [Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) Strategy Guide](#).
Core Component Deliverable	School systems are updated using the results of the trauma audit.

Core Component 2: Develop a Common Understanding of Trauma and Trauma-Informed Practices

As Trauma-Informed Education is a school-wide approach, school stakeholders share a common understanding of what Trauma-Informed Education does and does not include. Creating this shared understanding requires a deeper dive into research around trauma and how it may present at various developmental stages.

Elements or Activities	Description
Professional Learning Topic: Understand Trauma and Impact of Trauma	Create a shared understanding of Trauma and Trauma-Related topics, including: • the operational definition of trauma • the neurobiological impact of trauma • differences between trauma, stress and attachment, and how they interact • estimates of the prevalence of trauma in youth, including the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) survey • the developmental impact of trauma on youth, including impact on relationships, behavior and learning • the impact of trauma, secondary trauma, secondary traumatic stress, compassion fatigue, burnout and related concepts on school staff
Professional Learning Topic: Learn How to Recognize Trauma	School staff members learn to recognize signs of trauma In both academic and non-academic settings. Signs and symptoms of trauma may be gender-specific, age-specific and setting-specific. Signs may include the inability to self-regulate cognitively, emotionally and/or physically. Staff members also participate in self-awareness experiences in order to "know yourself", including personal history and trauma triggers. These experiences are intended to allow staff to become self-aware, and are not meant to facilitate sharing of personal experiences to colleagues, supervisors or others. Self-awareness is important in order to avoid escalating situations when personal triggers are activated.
Professional Learning Topic: Learn Skills to Respond to Symptoms and Resist Re-traumatization	School staff members learn skills to respond to symptoms of trauma and resist re-traumatization in both academic and non-academic settings. Some strategies that respond to symptoms of trauma include: • Techniques for strengthening relationships between children and adults, including helping students feel safe socially and emotionally • Tri-phasic model of commencing, coaching and connecting with students • Mental health first aid Some strategies that resist re-traumatization include evaluating and revising: • the physical environment, such as lighting, colors, space, signs and visuals, acoustics, movement and flow • classroom management systems, including alternatives to punitive disciplinary practices

Elements or Activities	Description
	- class and school rituals and routines - school culture elements - teaching students social-emotional and self-regulation skills and supporting students with daily practice of these skills
Core Component Deliverable	Completion of professional learning for all staff members.

Core Component 3: Establish Systems and Structures to Sustain Trauma-Informed Practices

Once school stakeholders have a common understanding of trauma, practices and procedures are implemented at all levels of interaction between stakeholders: school-wide, classroom, formal and informal groups (including both student and staff groups) and 1:1 interactions (including staff:student and staff:staff).

Elements or Activities	Description
Implement Policies and Practices of Trauma- Informed Education	Full school staff and stakeholders implement strategies and techniques identified through goals in Core Component 1. Full implementation of trauma-informed education is reflected through improved interpersonal relationships between stakeholders. **Element Deliverable:** Data collected at regular time intervals using the Trauma Audit Tool (from Core Component 1) to measure improvements.
Monitor Data	The school leadership team reviews goals, monitor progress towards goals using the data collected (Element Deliverable, above), and adjust the implementation plan as needed.
Ensure Supports for Staff	Ensure that there are supports for compassion fatigue, burnout, stress, secondary trauma and primary trauma. Supports can include trauma awareness experiences such as self-identification surveys (use this manual to score the linked self-assessment), peer groups, opportunities for self-care such as physical exercise groups, and referrals to the Employee Assistance Program or mental health agencies. Consider the use of tools around secondary trauma for staff development, awareness and promoting resiliency, including the ProQOL Professional Quality of Life survey. **Element Deliverable:** Implementation of supports for staff

Guidance for Implementation

Implementation Element	Description
Staffing and Teams	School leaders should consider creating a trauma leadership team made up of various stakeholders, including teachers, support staff, families and others, to collaboratively perform a trauma audit, analyze results, set goals and prioritize action steps in the development of an implementation plan.
Training & Resources	Trauma-informed education represents an overarching approach to education and school systems that reflects an understanding of trauma in implementation of school systems and structures. As such, this represents a shift in mindset by all school personnel, which entails professional learning and reinforcement. This shift in mindset may take a year or more depending on the school staff's starting point in understanding trauma. It also needs to be revisited on a regular basis and when staff new to the school arrive.
Pacing	*Make sure these factors are in place before the year begins:* • Core Components 1 would be best implemented before setting up the professional learning schedule for staff, as Core Component 2 involves several professional learning sessions. It is recommended that school leaders intentionally plan Trauma-Informed Education professional learning as part of the school's year-long focus. Allocate necessary resources as indicated through the results of the Trauma Audit in Core Component 1.
Change Management	Use time to try to get people on board ahead of time. • Trauma is a topic that is likely to have been experienced by the majority, if not all, of a school's staff. School leaders may meet with resistance or acceptance depending on each staff member's experience with trauma and healing from trauma. Staff members may need personal social-emotional support if the discussion of trauma unearths sensitive topics. Trauma-informed education may be seen as 'yet another initiative' when in fact it is a lens by which to view all school systems and structures. Ensuring that this is emphasized during Core Component 2 will likely increase understanding of Trauma-Informed education and increase staff acceptance of the strategy.

Sample Implementation Plan

Context: The following Sample Implementation Plan assumes that a school does not currently have a Trauma-Informed Classrooms Strategy in place and is installing this strategy for the first time. Note also that the dates given in the table below are suggested approximate ranges for the given activities. A true action plan should specify precise dates and date-ranges for each activity. Sample taken from Core Component 1.

Name	Description	Start/End Date	Key Personnel
Trauma Audit	Perform a Trauma Audit of our school. Review results with the leadership team.	July 1-15	Trauma Responsive Schools Implementation Assessment
Goal Setting	Set goals based on the results of the Trauma Audit.	July 1-15	Trauma Responsive Schools Implementation Assessment
Review and Update Systems	Review and update school systems using results of the Trauma Audit (discipline, mental health referrals, physical environment, cultural competence, privacy and confidentiality, safety and crisis planning, communication expectations, etc.)	July 15 - August 15	Trauma Responsive Schools Implementation Assessment, Staff Handbook, Student Handbook

Sources

Academic Studies Leading to ESSA Rating

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Additional Sources Supporting Implementation of the Strategy

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