Improving Traumatized Students' Educational Outcomes by Shifting Away from Punitive and Towards Positive Discipline

A TOOLKIT FOR LEGISLATORS, DISTRICT ADMINISTRATORS, PRINCIPALS, AND EDUCATORS

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TREP PROJECT

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
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FIFTEEN THOUSAND HOURS is the amount of time children spend in school from kindergarten to graduation. With such a substantial amount of time, schools, with the support of legislators and the broader community, can significantly influence their developmental trajectories. To do so, we must envision change to our schools based on the answers to two questions:[1]

1. What is the function of schooling to a society in crisis?
2. To what extent can schools serve as an agent for the healthy development of children?

Improving Traumatized Students' Educational Outcomes by Shifting Away from Punitive and Towards Positive Discipline

A Toolkit for Legislators, District Administrators, Principals, and Educators

This toolkit is designed to help stakeholders in our educational system advance current policies and practices in ways that will enable schools to better meet the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral needs of children and youth who have been exposed to traumatic stressors.

To do so, this toolkit provides:
- Relevant information on trauma and the development of children
- Recommendations for policy and evidence-based practices that encourage system-level change
- Guidance and resources to facilitate implementation

TOOLKIT AUTHORS

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A scan of the literature completed by University of Chicago students enrolled in an educational inequality course in the fall of 2017.

Thoughtful reviews and editing completed by TREP Project staff and doctoral research assistants.

This Toolkit and other resources on developing trauma responsive school systems are available online at TREPEducator.org.

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OVERVIEW OF POLICY AND PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS

Meeting the developmental needs of students requires concerted effort from individuals at all levels of the educational system. We recommend the following actions to help shift current policies and practices to be more trauma responsive for all students.

State Recommendations

- Require the reporting of discipline data that has been disaggregated by key student characteristics such as race-ethnicity, poverty, special education status, gender, and English proficiency

- Provide targeted funding for professional development on trauma and trauma responsive educational practices

- Specify the role of school resource officers and security staff, and require certified training in child and youth development

- Guide allocation of resources toward proactive staff, such as counselors and social workers, and away from reactive staff, such as school resource officers and security staff

District, School, and Educator Recommendations

- Guide design of school discipline codes to encourage proactive and positive discipline, include restorative and remove zero-tolerance policies

- Build intentional parent, family, and community collaborations aimed at reducing children's exposure to violence and other traumatic stressors

- Become knowledgeable of trauma and competent in trauma responsive educational practices that meet the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral needs of students exposed to traumatic stressors

THE NEED FOR A TRAUMA RESPONSIVE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

VIOLENCE EXPOSURE NEGATIVELY AFFECTS CHILDREN'S BEHAVIORAL FUNCTIONING

According to the National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence, about four million children in the U.S. are exposed to violence each year, and about half of those children experience lasting trauma from their exposure.[3] Children who experience trauma are often left with psychological wounds that can linger long after the violent incident has passed, which can inhibit their abilities to succeed in school.

Figure 1. Prevalence of Exposure to Violence, by Various Status Characteristics
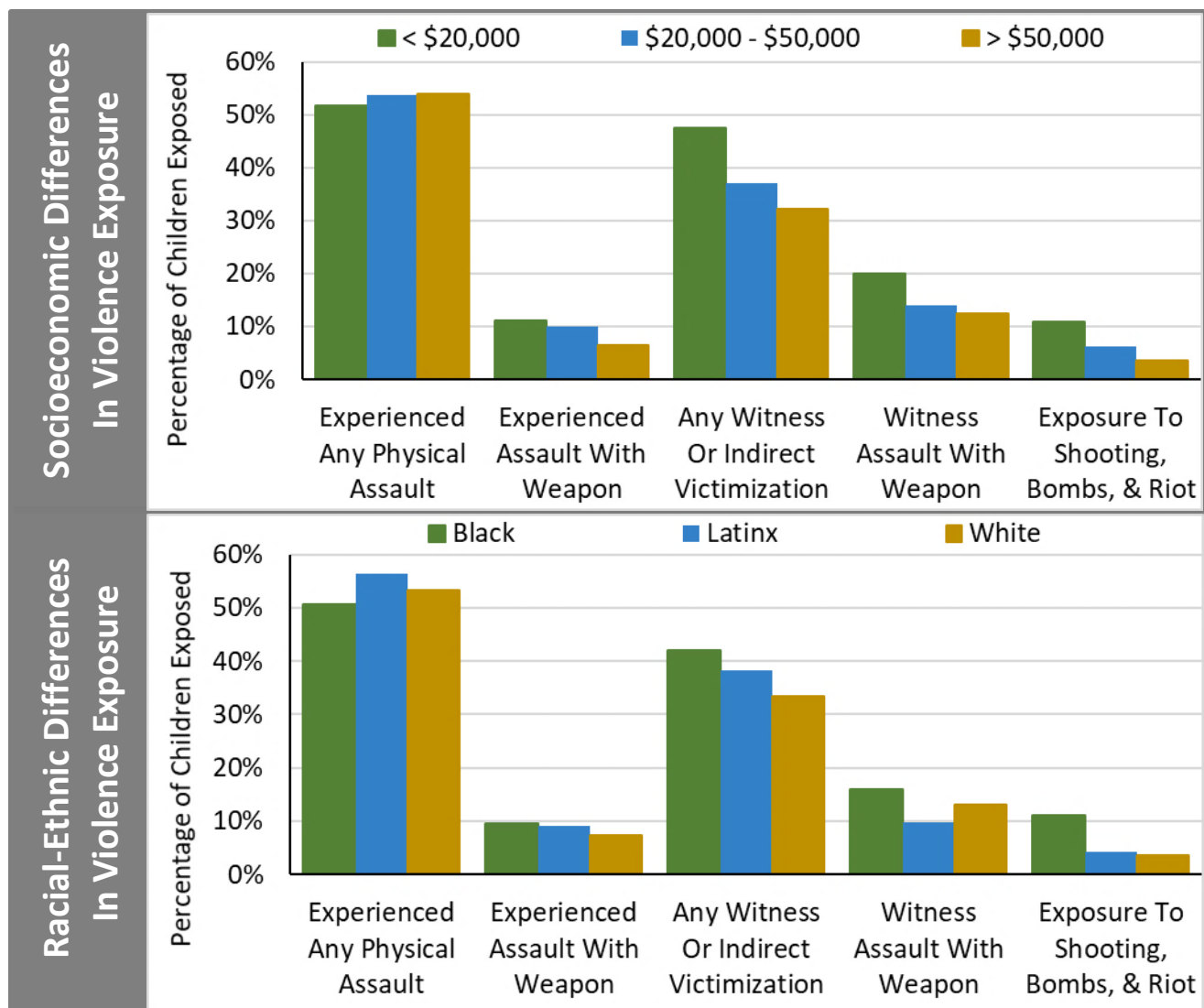
Note: Data based on the Developmental Victimization Survey, conducted between December 2002 and February 2003, which assessed the experiences of a nationally representative sample of 2,030 children age 2 to 17.[4]

As the figures above show, no group of children is completely immune to violence exposure. However, as the figures indicate, lower-income and racial-ethnic minority children have a significantly higher likelihood of experiencing and witnessing violence. The evidence connecting violence exposure to a host of negative life outcomes such as poor physical and mental health, lower levels of completed schooling and workplace productivity indicates that it is a serious public health concern.[5]

Direct violence is not the only experience that leaves lasting psychological trauma. Trauma can also result from:
- Chronic household instability
  - Parent/family substance abuse
  - Parent/family mental illness
  - Domestic violence
  - Parent/family incarceration
  - Conflictual divorce
- Psychological, physical, and sexual abuse
- Physical and emotional neglect
- Institutional violence
  - Involvement with child welfare system
  - Involvement with juvenile justice system
  - Lack of affordable housing or homelessness

"Structural violence [is] the harm individuals, families, and communities experience from the economic and social structure, social institutions, and relations of power, privilege, and inequity that may harm people and communities by preventing them from getting their basic needs met. [The resulting trauma] is a psychological injury resulting from protracted exposure to prolonged social and interpersonal trauma [without the resources to escape]."

Comments made by Howard Pinderhughes at a roundtable meeting on Community Violence as a Population Health Issue.[2]

When children experience a single overwhelmingly traumatic event, or chronic loss of safety, fear, or instability, their progression through critical developmental stages may be delayed or stalled completely.[6] For example, children and adolescents exposed to neighborhood violence are more likely to have difficulty processing and controlling their emotions and behaviors than those who grow up in safe communities. Additionally, they are more likely to struggle with regulating themselves in response to the emotions and behaviors of those around them.[7] This means that a 15-year-old who has undergone a number of traumatic experiences may appear to have the emotional maturity of an average 10-year-old. However, because psychological trauma is often invisible, educators may find the behavior unexplainably frustrating and punish the student for not meeting age appropriate behavioral expectations.

TRAUMA AFFECTS STUDENT LEARNING

Without adult-assisted opportunities for processing traumatic experiences, students may not be able to effectively engage with learning. They may be physically present in the classroom but their thoughts are elsewhere. A school day for traumatized children may be filled with triggers—reminders that bring past experiences into the present, making the child feel as though they are experiencing the traumatic event again.

Traumatized children can be triggered by a range of circumstances, such as:
- ✓ Loud noises
- ✓ Physical touch
- ✓ Aggressive authority figures
- ✓ Physical gestures that are perceived as threatening
- ✓ Sudden changes in routine
- ✓ Confusing, chaotic, or ambiguous interactions and environments
- ✓ Anniversaries of the original event(s)

With so many triggers, students may find it difficult to follow instructions from their teachers, carry out classroom expectations for self-management, and negotiate the numerous and sometimes ambiguous interpersonal interactions with teachers and peers.

> When people experience physical trauma they are often left with a visible wound that alerts others of their hurt and signals their need for rehabilitative care. However, when people experience psychological trauma, often the wound is invisible and those around them may not realize their need for rehabilitative interpersonal interactions. The symptoms of psychological trauma—such as intrusive thoughts, flashbacks, internal confusion, rage about what happened, and feelings of hopelessness about one's future—are not easily observable.

In the absence of opportunities that encourage positive coping skills, "*community violence exposed adolescents may begin to believe that aggressive and violent responses are normal and effective, which can lead to increased aggression and misbehavior and negatively impact their academic performance.*"[8] Furthermore, students who display such behaviors often disrupt learning in the classroom and become a source of distraction to their peers. These challenging behaviors negatively affect a wide range of social dynamics in the school and can degrade relationships among, as well as between, students, parents, teachers, and administrators.

> ### *The American Academy of Pediatrics' Cycle of Violence*
>
> Predictably, some children who have been chronically exposed to violence learn to resolve their own conflicts in a violent manner. Others appear to become desensitized to violence and the pain and distress of others. Some retreat into a shell, avoiding people and the world around them. These children with long-term exposure are at an increased risk for:
> - Behavioral, psychological, and physical problems
> - Academic failure
> - Alcohol and substance use
> - Delinquent acts
> - Adult criminality
>
> When children repeat the violence they have experienced, they perpetuate a cycle of violence that can continue throughout future generations.

Educational institutions are uniquely positioned to provide traumatized students with rehabilitative interpersonal interactions, and mitigate the well-documented negative adult outcomes that are associated with violence exposure during childhood.[9] Schools that attend to students' social and emotional development in concert with their academic development, and provide access to mental health workers in the school building:
- ✓ Become centers of rehabilitative care located within the community
- ✓ Help eliminate the major obstacle of transportation to appointments during the day while parents/family are at work
- ✓ Reduce the stigma that often accompanies mental health treatment

CONCENTRATING LARGE NUMBERS OF TRAUMATIZED STUDENTS IN THE SAME URBAN OR RURAL SCHOOLS CAN DETERIORATE SCHOOL CULTURE AND CLIMATE

Maintaining a positive school climate and culture is extremely difficult when increasing numbers of children coping with violence exposure are concentrated into a given school. One student's aggressive or emotional outburst can trigger the trauma of another student and amplify the negative effects of violence exposure at a particular school.[10] Students' traumas can also have negative effects on educators.

The combination of scarce resources and high demand can leave educators feeling overburdened and demoralized, placing them at an increased risk of compassion fatigue, vicarious traumatization, and burnout.[11] This includes having received minimal preparation for managing challenging student behaviors, being asked to do more with less because of persistently under-resourcing our schools, and feeling constrained by restrictive and punitive discipline policies.

Violence exposure degrades the development of trust within schools. Students who have been repeatedly exposed to violence may struggle to trust others, and teachers who feel fearful at school may limit interactions with certain students.[12] In the absence of trust the climate of a school erodes, making it harder for everyone in the school to feel a sense of belonging.[13]

> The stakes are high for schools serving large numbers of students who have been exposed to traumatic experiences. A high concentration of disadvantage can lead to a severely toxic culture that can shut down learning in the building. Developing and sustaining a developmentally supportive school culture, however, is possible when policymakers, administrators, and educators work together to reform existing policies and practices.

Developing and sustaining a developmentally supportive school culture is therefore essential. In addition to ensuring physical safety, schools must also ensure psychological safety (protection from derogatory statements that negatively affect one's sense of self), and emotional safety (support that enables taking learning risks and failing without feeling like a failure), as these elements foster greater investment and engagement in learning.[14]

Schools with safe climates:
- Promote social, emotional, ethical, and civic skills in concert with academic skills
- Maintain positive teacher-student interactions
- Provide students a safe space, a strong sense of belonging, and engaging opportunities
- Support high expectations for student achievement along with a comprehensive system to address barriers to learning
- Communicate clear, appropriate, and consistent expectations, and measured consequences to address challenging student behaviors
- Implement policies to facilitate parent/family and community involvement and engagement
- Foster collaborative relationships between and among administrators and staff
- Work to decrease teacher burnout and turnover, and increase teacher satisfaction

THE EVIDENCE IS CLEAR: PUNITIVE AND EXCLUSIONARY DISCIPLINE ARE INEFFECTIVE

Gun violence is an ever-present threat in too many urban neighborhoods, and in the wake of youth shootings and homicides are traumatized siblings, friends, and peers.[15] Predictably, many of these children arrive to school with varying levels of emotional challenges. However, very few enter schools that teach them how to regulate the complex cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dysregulation caused by trauma. Many schools instead respond with punitive and exclusionary discipline when these students are unable to meet behavioral expectations.

Another "punitive" response is funneling students coping with trauma into special education, which does little to develop their self-regulation and often exacerbates disadvantage by in-school hyper segregation of students who trigger each other's histories of trauma.[16]

Exclusionary discipline is often thought of as punishment that will motivate behavior change; however, it has been proven ineffective, largely because it "teaches" nothing and carries several disadvantages.[17] Additionally, it is the students with weaker academic performance who are most likely to receive exclusionary discipline; taking instructional time away from those who need it most.

Research shows that increased use of police presence and zero-tolerance policies can increase the likelihood that students receiving such punishments will exhibit acting out behaviors.[18] Exclusionary discipline is associated with negative educational outcomes, including academic failure, grade retention, and greater likelihood of dropping out, as students often miss important educational opportunities and are stigmatized by staff and peers. Furthermore, exclusionary discipline affects all students in the building not only the students who receive it. Schools with higher levels of exclusionary discipline have a more negative school climate that can harm the educational experiences of students not exhibiting behavioral challenges.[19]

Given the many negative effects of exclusionary discipline, it is particularly disturbing that it is primarily used for factors other than behaviors that threaten the safety of peers and staff.[20]

**Figure 2. School Disciplinary Actions, by Disciplinary Infraction**
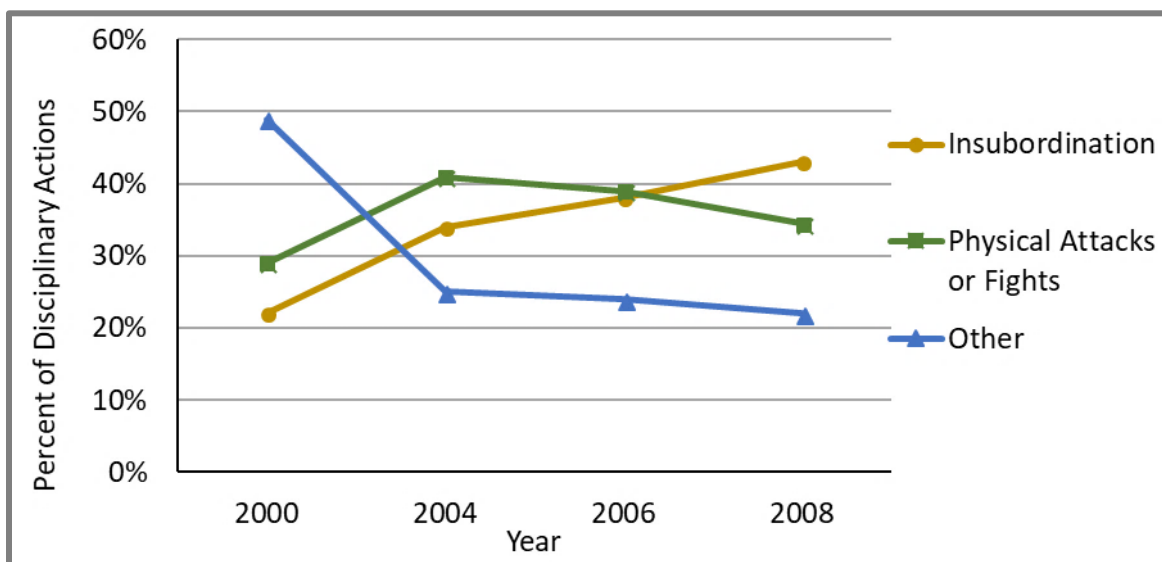
Adapted from *What Do We Know About School Discipline Reform?*[21]

Even more disturbing than the ineffectiveness of punitive policies and the collateral damage they create, is that punitive policies are not applied evenly. Minority youth, particularly Black youth, are subject to greater exclusionary punishments than their White peers even though

evidence shows that Black students do not misbehave at higher rates than other students.[22] By disproportionately punishing minority students, disciplinary systems compound existing societal inequalities. Many researchers and policy makers have concluded that the negative consequences of using such policies are "disproportionately severe and uniquely far-reaching" for Black and Latinx students.[23]

Figure 3. School Disciplinary Actions, by Race-Ethnicity
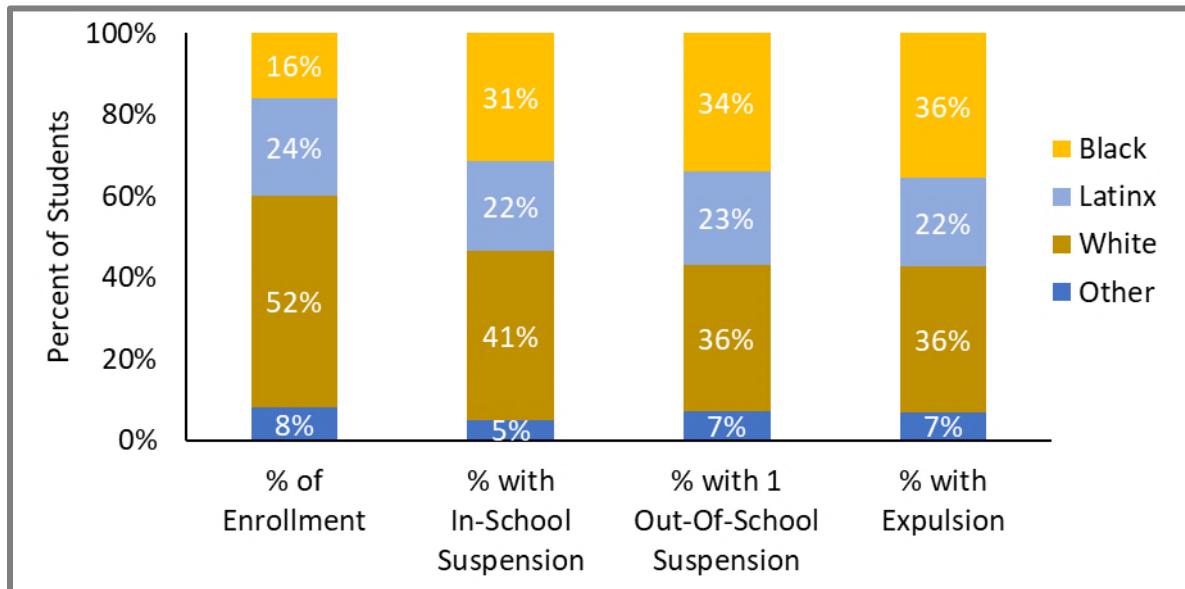
Adapted from *What Do We Know About School Discipline Reform?*[24]

There also appears to be a broader school-wide effect when it comes to the association between race-ethnicity and harsh discipline. Even after accounting for a host of factors, including students' actual rates of disciplinary infractions, schools with higher proportions of Black students are significantly more likely to utilize punitive and exclusionary discipline.[25] Although the emphasis on zero-tolerance policies is fading, what remains is a culture of control that manifests as the presence of police officers in the school, criminalization of misbehavior, metal detectors, random locker and bag searches, and strict uniform requirements. These authoritarian social control practices are primarily in schools attended by urban students of color, and work against their developing a strong sense of school belonging because they disrupt the school environment, foster antagonistic relationships between and among students and staff, and incite emotional distress and lowered self-esteem.[26]

When police are in schools, student misbehavior becomes criminalized because discipline problems that were previously handled by school staff are delegated to the school resource officer.[27] This creates a pathway from the school to the juvenile justice system, rather than a pathway that directs students exhibiting challenging behaviors to the counselor and then integrated back into the classroom.

Given the increased rhetoric of evidenced-based approaches to education, the decision to continue disciplinary policies that have been proven to be detrimental to student success runs counter to the larger educational mission of building successful pathways for all students.

EDUCATORS NEED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TO BUILD THEIR CAPACITY TO MEET THE COGNITIVE, EMOTIONAL, AND BEHAVIORAL NEEDS OF STUDENTS COPING WITH TRAUMA

Public schools, and particularly schools serving highly disadvantaged student populations, do not have the resources to ensure that every student has time with a counselor, but they can provide every student with a teacher who understands how stress and trauma affect student functioning and is attentive to students' social and emotional learning needs.

Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), which includes abuse and neglect, witnessing violence, and parental substance abuse, has been established as one root cause of negative adult outcomes.[28] Educational failure is one pathway through which ACEs has negative effects.[29]

Figure 4. Percent of Students with Academic Concerns, by ACEs Exposure
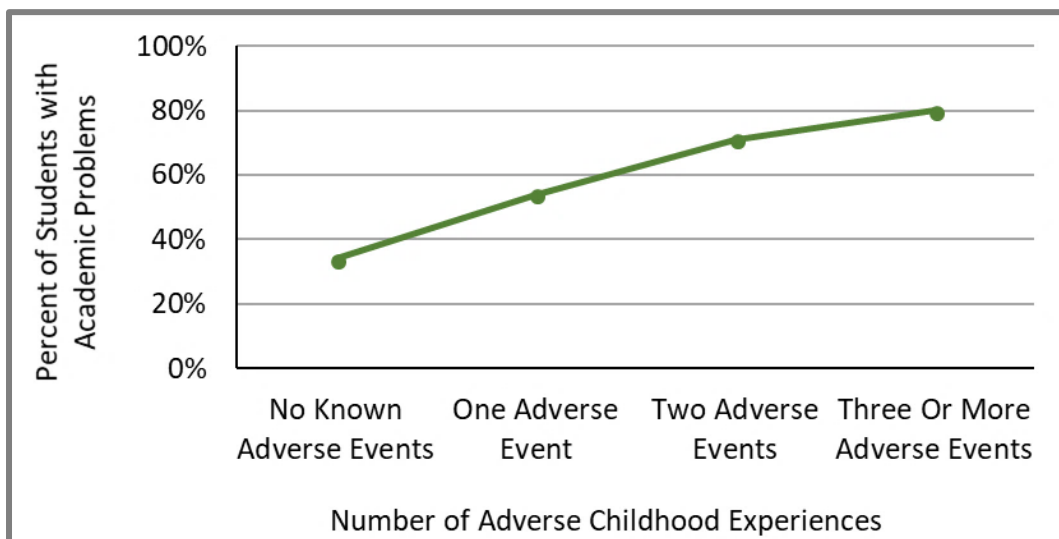
Based on the Spokane Childhood ACEs Study[30]

The signs and symptoms of ACEs exposure and trauma can manifest in the classroom as:

Hyperarousal	Hypoarousal
• Inability to remain seated	• Daydreaming, "spacing out"
• Tension, irritability, and impatience	• Forgetting assignments
• Anger outbursts and aggression	• Forgetting material previously mastered
• Defiance and Impulsivity	• Lack of motivation
• Exaggerated startle response	• Not processing material just discussed
• Excessive chatter	• Lethargy and sleeping in class

Recognizing students who are struggling to cope with traumatic experiences is the first step to improving their educational experiences. Coupled with engaging instruction, the utilization of evidence-based strategies for minimizing challenging behaviors and teaching self-regulation can place students attempting to cope with traumatic stressors on the path to success.

Compared to less thoughtful punitive discipline, proactive and restorative discipline are more time consuming during initial periods of implementation; however, once established they save time and resources by diffusing problems early and preventing future acting out behaviors, as well as maintaining higher levels of school belonging and engagement.[31]

Most discipline codes tend to focus on policies for punishing what students should not do, rather than on policies for teaching and rewarding what students should do. In addition to perpetuating cycles of isolation and aggression, these reactionary, negative, and exclusionary sanctions tend to be used repeatedly with the same students, indicating that their use is not effective in preventing future discipline problems. By adding proactive policies, such as those associated with *Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)* to discipline codes administrators are setting a new tone to limit the use of suspension and expulsion. Revised discipline codes can articulate a change in school philosophy and policy from reactionary to prosocial and encourage a shift in teacher action from reactive to proactive.[32]

Moving toward increased use of restorative practice requires a shift in how misbehavior is viewed, shifting away from viewing misbehavior as punishment opportunities toward viewing it as teaching opportunities	
Punitive	**Restorative**
• Misbehavior defined as breaking school rules	• Misbehavior defined as harm done to one person/group by another
• Accountability defined as passive recipient of imposed consequence	• Accountability defined as understanding impact of actions, taking responsibility for choices, and repairing harm
• Past oriented focus on what happened and establishment of blame or guilt	• Future oriented focus on problem-solving and problem prevention
• Adversarial relationship and process with authority figure who decides penalty	• Dialogue with harmed individual(s), offender, and authority figures
• School community as spectators	• School community involved in facilitating restoration
• Attention and adherence to rules	• Attention to relationships and mutuality

Note: Reproduced from Jefferson County Public Schools' Restorative Justice Practices in Schools Review of the Literature.[33]

POLICY AND PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS

The policy and practice recommendations offered in this Toolkit are fundamentally undergirded by the belief that schools should use an instructional framework for discipline.[34]

Under an instructional framework, students' challenging behaviors are seen as opportunities to understand the underlying problem—diagnose the error—and then respond with corrective feedback that builds their capacity for self-regulation.

State Level Recommendations
- Require reporting of discipline data that has been disaggregated by student characteristics such as race-ethnicity, poverty, special education status, gender, and English proficiency
- Provide targeted funding for professional development on trauma and trauma responsive educational practices
- Specify the role of school resource officers and security staff, and require certified training in child and youth development
- Guide allocation of resources toward proactive staff, such as counselors and social workers, and away from reactive staff, such as school resource officers and security staff

District, School, and Educator Recommendations
- Provide districtwide guidance to encourage proactive and positive discipline, include restorative and remove zero-tolerance policies
- Build intentional parent, family, and community collaborations aimed at reducing children's exposure to violence and other traumatic stressors
- Become knowledgeable of trauma and competent in trauma responsive educational practices that meet the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral needs of students exposed to traumatic stressors

The benefits relative to the costs are clear: By enacting proactive recommendations, we save future financial and human costs such as special education services, crime and violence, increased policing, increased physical and mental healthcare—including emergency room usage—as well as lost productivity, wages, and tax revenue.

STATE LEVEL RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: Require reporting of school-level discipline data that has been disaggregated by key student characteristics such as race-ethnicity, poverty, special education status, gender, and English proficiency

> *"Well, just like if they see a group of Black kids, they automatically assume they're doing something bad. Like if you like standing in the hallway with a group of Black kids in one spot and the White kids [in another spot], the administrator will tend to come to the Black kids...if I'm walking to the nurse I'm automatically stopped, I'm questioned about what I'm doing, but then you see all the other White kids just walk out of the school."[35]*

More than 25 years of national, state, and district level research show that Black and Latinx students are two to three times more likely to be suspended than White students. [36] They are also overrepresented in other disciplinary measures, including office referrals, detentions, and expulsions. Many used to argue that these were socioeconomic rather than racial-ethnic differences, but a 2018 U.S. Government Accountability Office report shows that "disproportionate discipline persists regardless of the type of disciplinary action, level of school poverty, or type of public school these students attended."[37]

Collection, analysis, and reporting disaggregated discipline data is vital to ensuring a more equitable school system for all students. Publishing school-level discipline data in the ways that we publish academic accountability data will enable us to hold districts and schools accountable for equitable treatment of students. Additionally, principals themselves report that data-based decision-making at the school-level is more effective than simply doling out punitive measures; tracking behavior and discipline allows for targeted interventions that lead to longer term solutions.[38]

Important guidance can be gleaned from related policy examples. The state of California passed the *Keep Kids in School Act*, a law requiring schools identified for improvement to report suspensions, expulsions, police arrests, and referrals to law enforcement, disaggregated by race, ethnicity, and other factors. The state of Washington passed *RCW 28A.600.490*, a law requiring district-level discipline task forces that collect data for disciplinary actions based on revised standards for causes of student disciplinary actions. The district-level reporting requirements of Illinois' *Public Act 98-1102* and the school-level reporting guidelines of the No Child Left Behind Act and can be used as models for reporting disaggregated information on disciplinary practices.

MODEL LANGUAGE: STATEWIDE DISCIPLINE ACCOUNTABILITY REPORTING LAW

The district shall include in its annual school-level report cards to the state:

(i) information, in the aggregate, on classroom, school, and district use of punitive and exclusionary discipline (i.e., detentions, in- or out-of-school suspension, and expulsion) at each grade level (disaggregated by race, ethnicity, gender, disability status, migrant status, English proficiency, and status as economically disadvantaged, except that such disaggregation shall not be required in a case in which the number of students in a category is insufficient to yield statistically reliable information or the results would reveal personally identifiable information about an individual student);

(ii) information that provides a comparison at each grade level between disciplinary actions received by each group of students described in the subsection above;

(iii) the most recent 2-year trend in disciplinary action received by each group of students at each grade level.

Additional Resources

Discipline Rates: A Data and Analytics Tool
Published by State of Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction

Addressing the Root Causes of Disparities in School Discipline:
An Educator's Action Planning Guide
Published by the National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments

Are We Closing the School Discipline Gap?
Published by the Civil Rights Project

Improving School Discipline Data Collection and Reporting: A Status Report for the 2013–14 School Year
Published by the West Virginia Department of Education

Forum Guide to Crime, Violence, and Discipline Incident Data
Published by the National Forum on Education Statistics

School Discipline Data
Published by The Children's Defense Fund

Recommendation 2: Provide targeted funding for professional development on trauma and trauma responsive educational practices, and social and emotional learning

> "The need and demand for SEL in the classroom is growing—and so is the science behind it. But mainstream education has yet to make it foundational to the learning and teaching process. … First, pre-service teachers need SEL content … [, next] the SEL mentoring of pre-service teachers during their student teaching [and, finally continued mentoring] for at least the first two years of in-service teaching. … Until learning and practicing SEL skills is mandated in teacher education programs, many teachers are on their own to seek out this information."[39]

Schools are the primary mental health assessment and service institutions for children, particularly for children in economically disadvantaged families and neighborhoods.[40] Nationally, over 70% of children in need of mental health treatment do not receive services.[41] Even though most schools don't have the resources needed to meet students' needs for individual or small-group counselling that would be provided by school psychologists and social workers, by building the capacity of teachers to engage in trauma responsive educational practices, schools can play a significant role in reducing the negative effects of exposure to traumatic stressors.

Developing the social and emotional skills that are embedded in the Common Core curriculum to achieve proficiency in each academic area is an important endeavor.[42] Persistence in math requires self-efficacy and the ability to manage stress and regulate emotions. In English, character analysis requires labeling one's and others' emotions and reflecting on how current choices affect the future. Essentially, the development of students' social and emotional skills is not a distraction from but a contributor to academic achievement.

Despite the fact that 83% of teachers report wanting training in social and emotional learning, very few teacher training programs address this need and even fewer offer a related certification.[43] Requests for this training are especially prevalent in alternative or charter schools, where teacher duties stretch well beyond the certifications they carry.[44] Facilitating some level of mandatory social and emotional training and professional development, and offering specialized social and emotional learning certifications should be included as a priority for the billions of federal, state, and local funds spent on professional development.

State policy is critical for shaping the social and emotional learning standards that schools are required to meet in their work with students.[45] The Collaborative for Academic Social and Emotional Learning's 2018 report found that only eight states have SEL standards for grades K-12, eight are developing guidelines, and 16 have related web pages with information for educators.[46] Their *Collaborating States Initiative* assists states that want to develop policies or guidelines to support implementation of quality social and emotional learning.

EFFECTIVE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Professional development efforts should adhere to the following standards of practice:

- Occur over time and preferably be ongoing: The largest struggle for teachers is not learning new approaches but implementing them. Traditional professional development is ineffective because it doesn't support teachers during the implementation stage of learning.

- Include access to coaches or mentors: Coaches are highly effective in helping teachers implement a new skill. During coaching, teachers work with a master educator before, during and after a lesson, getting feedback on their implementation of a newly learned teaching skill.

- Supported by school-based professional learning communities: Schools need communities of teachers who serve as peer coaches. This enables teachers to be innovators of strategies tailored to their population of students.

- Delivered in the context of the teacher's subject area: Regardless of whether teachers are working with coaches or in professional learning communities, teachers need to be working with the content they teach.

More guidance can be found in *Teaching the Teachers: Effective professional development*.

Additional Resources

Encouraging Social and Emotional Learning in the Context of New Accountability
Published by Learning Policy Institute

Social and Emotional Learning: Opportunities for Massachusetts, Lessons for the Nation
Published by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development

Social and Emotional Learning: Coaching Toolkit
Published by SEL Solutions at American Institutes for Research

Social and Emotional Learning in Schools from Programs to Strategies
Published by Society for Research in Child Development

How to Close the Social-Emotional Gap in Teacher Training
Published by Greater Good Magazine

Key Features of High-Quality Policies and Guidelines to Support Social and Emotional Learning
Published by the Collaborative for Academic Social, and Emotional Learning

Recommendation 3: Specify the role of school resource officers and security staff, and require certified training in child and youth development

> *There are about 19,000 police officers stationed in schools nationwide, and stories of their school-discipline disasters regularly cross Mo Canady's desk. Canady, the executive director of the National Association of School Resource Officers, which offers specialized training to school resource officers says, "The first thing I do is search our database to see Did this person come through our training? And the answer is consistently no."[47]*

Approaching student misbehavior with punitive legal actions, such as arrest, can have grave repercussions for students' futures, not only because juvenile justice system involvement has negative developmental effects, but also because the students become negatively labeled. [48] Disproportionate placement of police in primarily inner-city schools with large minority populations leads to an unequal application of the law because students at those schools experience almost automatic police involvement, while other schools have the space and time to exercise more discretion.[49]

Researchers and policymakers increasingly believe that the larger presence of school resource officers on school campuses is what accounts for the finding that despite declining incidences of crime and violence in schools since the 1990s, arrests and referrals to the juvenile justice system are increasing.[50] Because the vast majority of disciplinary infractions can be addressed, and have for generations been addressed, without the intervention of school resource officers, schools should have restrictive policies about when police can become involved with student discipline.

Research shows that increasing the number of school resource officers in schools does not make students feel safer, and officers often lack the training that would enable them to work with students exhibiting challenging behaviors in ways that are developmentally supportive. Simply increasing the number of school resource officers without considering other factors, like enhanced training, setting specific goals and missions for their work, and also increasing the social work staff in the building will not have the desired effect of improving students' outcomes.[51]

Schools are first and foremost educational spaces and the expectations we have for educators to satisfy rigorous certification requirements tailored to the task of working with children should also apply to school resource officers. Because school resource officers receive their primary training from police academies, becoming a school resource officer should include unlearning or compartmentalizing policing techniques that are inappropriate and harmful in dealing with students.[52] For these reasons, states should require certified, evidence-based training for school resource officers to ensure that they are well-equipped to react and support the students entrusted to their care.

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MODEL LANGUAGE: TRAINING AND CERTIFICATION STANDARDS FOR SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICERS

Before being appointed as a school resource officer (SRO), an individual must have:

(i) successfully completed the minimum training requirements established for law enforcement officers, and received at least forty hours of approved, developmentally appropriate SRO training;

(ii) the school district will provide time for their school principals or their designees and the assigned SROs to attend three two-hour citywide, approved, developmentally appropriate SRO training meetings per year, one at the beginning of the school year and once during each semester;

(iii) approved, developmentally appropriate SRO training may include topical areas such as child and adolescent development and psychology; age-appropriate responses; cultural competence; restorative justice techniques; special accommodations for students with disabilities; practices proven to improve school climate; and the creation of safe spaces for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning students.

Additional Resources

Policing in Schools: Developing a Governance Document for School Resource Officers in K-12 Schools
Published by the American Civil Liberties Union

Safe School-based Enforcement through Collaboration, Understanding, and Respect: State and Local Policy Rubric
Published by the U.S. Department of Education

A Toolkit for California Law Enforcement: Policing Today's Youth
Published by the Police Foundation

Role of the School Resource Officer Tutorial
Published by School Safety Net

Recommendation 4: Guide allocation of resources toward proactive staff, such as counselors and social workers, and away from reactive staff, such as school resource officers and security staff

> *At the end of January 2018, a seven-year-old Latinx boy in Miami, Florida, was arrested and led away from his school in handcuffs. School officials alleged that he had been playing with his food, was scolded, reacted badly, and ended up attacking his teacher. That's not great behavior, but he's a small child and posed no real risk. Rather than asking why the incident escalated and how they could change the environment to avoid such incidents, school police simply took him to prison.[53]*

Currently, schools are staffed with many more school resource officers than social workers in a misguided reversal of the role of preventative versus reactive staff in a school's ecosystem. A 2016 national examination of public school staffing data found that there are more school resource officers and security staff than there are counseling staff in four out of the 10 largest public school districts in the U.S., including three of the five largest districts.[54] Houston had 1,175 students per counselor but only 785 students per school resource officer. Chicago Public Schools had 1,416 security staff compared to 1,056 counselors and social workers in primary and secondary schools. Imagine the difference if those numbers were reversed.

An examination of educational spending in Texas found that school districts spent almost three times as much on security services than on social work services, and urban districts spent more of their overall budget on security expenditures compared to suburban districts.[55] These higher poverty urban districts are exactly the districts in which social workers are severely lacking relative to the level of need presented by students.

Overtly criminalized and punitive school environments, often characterized by police officers in schools, metal detectors, and random locker searches can create a culture in which routine discipline practices shift from being handled by school officials to being handled by law enforcement. Such practices contribute to the perpetuation of the school-to-prison-pipeline, in which students are first exposed to the criminal or juvenile justice system by means of their school's disciplinary policies.[56]

School social workers play a very different role in the lives of students who have been exposed to trauma or other adverse life experiences that can lead to acting out behaviors.[57] Social work and counseling staff are particularly helpful in addressing the underlying social and emotional needs that may be the cause of acting out behavior.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPLEMENTATION

The *Illinois Safe Schools and Healthy Learning Environment Act* creates an optional grant program for school districts that wish to reallocate funding for school-based law enforcement personnel toward restorative justice programs, school psychologists, social workers, other mental and behavioral health specialists, and other strategies for creating safe and healthy learning environments.

Districts should implement hiring policies that prioritize hiring social worker and counseling staff as school resource officers naturally leave their positions. Although this is a longer-term strategy, it is a feasible action plan to transition schools from increasingly relying on school resource officers for behavioral remediation to relying on social and emotional staff for preventative action.

Additionally, through the implementation of State Level Recommendation 3 listed above regarding developmentally appropriate training for school resource officers, all school staff should increase their competency in responding to student acting out behaviors in developmentally supportive ways. This is critical for ensuring that schools are places where students feel educated rather than policed.

Additional Resources

Teachers or Guards? The Cost of School Security
Published by School Business Affairs

Safe School-based Enforcement through Collaboration, Understanding, and Respect (SECURe)
Published by the U.S. Department of Education

Education Under Arrest: The Case Against Police in Schools
Published by Justice Policy Institute

The School-To-Court Pipeline: Where Does Your State Rank?
Published by the Center for Investigative Reporting

Seeding Change in School Discipline: The Move from Zero Tolerance to Support
Published by the American Federation of Teachers

Advancing School Discipline Reform
Published by the National Association of State Boards of Education

Guiding Principles: A Resource Guide for Improving School Climate and Discipline
Published by the U.S. Department of Education

DISTRICT, SCHOOL, AND EDUCATOR RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: Provide districtwide guidance regarding school discipline codes that rely on proactive and positive discipline, include restorative practices, and exclude zero-tolerance policies

> *Many New Orleans public schools operated under a no-excuses, strict discipline model in the immediate post Hurricane Katrina era. With better understanding of its negative effects, several of these schools are now working to become more trauma-informed to better address the needs of their students. Students in New Orleans exhibit rates of PTSD that are three times the national average, nearly 50% have dealt with homicide in some way, and 40% are below the poverty level. As one principal on the forefront of change notes: "A lot of times teachers want students punished because they say you've wronged me as a teacher. But remove yourself from the situation and think about what that student needs. Even the students who give teachers the most grief want to be here." [58]*

Punitive discipline holds little promise for improving student misbehavior and school climate. Removing students from the classroom as punishment, often through suspension or expulsion, is harmful to students who may already be struggling academically.[59] One of the first steps in reforming district-wide discipline policies is decreasing the use of zero-tolerance policies, exclusionary discipline, and criminalization of student behavior.[60] This must be coupled with the addition of policies and training on practices that must be implemented when punitive and exclusionary discipline are eliminated.

With the removal of zero-tolerance policies, school administrators should actively implement positive, proactive, and restorative discipline practices to ensure that staff have an effective replacement discipline plan. Positive, proactive, and restorative discipline are based on principles of social and emotional learning, and have convincing evidence of improving school climate, reducing aggression and acting out behaviors, and increasing the display of pro-social behaviors.[61]

Positive and proactive discipline utilizes preventative actions to decrease the number of behavioral errors, and restorative discipline maintains the school belonging of students who have committed disciplinary infractions. When students are engaged in restorative discipline practices, they feel that they have a larger stake and a voice in their educational experiences.[62]

As *Voices of Youth in Chicago Education* note, staff and students pay a high cost when schools rely on punitive discipline, which can lead to increased violence in schools by damaging the positive student–teacher relationships that are the foundation for a safe school climate.[63] Students need to experience their schools as safe, welcoming, and supportive environments in which they have the opportunity to make mistakes and learn from those mistakes.

<u>TRAUMA RESPONSIVE DISCIPLINE</u>

The National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges state that trauma-informed discipline involves acknowledging the role trauma may have in behavior and identifying practices that will provide appropriate consequences while promoting healthier behavior in the future. Examples include:

✓ Disciplinary practices involve more than simply isolating students from peers
✓ Disciplinary infractions are handled in a timely manner that is consistent with the standards outlined by the school
✓ Restorative solutions (e.g., restorative circles) are employed to foster a positive and communicative school environment
✓ Signs outlining school rules or expectations are posted throughout the school to remind students to be safe, respectful, and responsible
✓ There is a designated room or space where students are sent after disruptive outbursts to engage in mindfulness practices and reflect on their recent behavior

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Additional Resources

Educator Toolkit: How to Fix School Discipline
Published by the Fix School Discipline Collaborative

Positive School Discipline Course for School Leaders
Published by the Education Development Center

The School Discipline Consensus Report
Published by the Council of State Governments Justice Center

Climate Change: Implementing School Discipline Practices That Create a Positive School Climate
Published by the Alliance for Excellent Education

Instead of Suspension: Alternative Strategies for School Discipline
Published by Duke Center for Child and Family Policy and Duke Law School

School Climate Guide for District Policymakers and Education Leaders
Published by the National School Climate Center

Restorative Practices: Fostering Healthy Relationships & Promoting Positive Discipline in Schools
Published by the Schott Foundation for Public Education

Recommendation 2: Build intentional parent, family, and community collaborations aimed at reducing children's exposure to violence and other traumatic stressors

> *Several schools have successfully made families a vital part of the fight against violence: "Parents can be seen at all times in nearly all areas of the school; they attend conferences, speak to classes, substitute, and volunteer."[64] Tina Kandakai's examination of factors influencing violence in schools found that parent-teacher communication was a concern for about 70 % of urban mothers.[65] Mothers were concerned about teachers' ability to recognize problems that could lead to violence and to communicate these concerns to parents. Contrary to myths, most parents, including parents of children who are exhibiting challenging behaviors at school, want and need to be included in the development and implementation of school violence prevention programs.*

There is a substantial body of evidence showing that family engagement improves students' math and reading proficiency, academic achievement, attendance, and is associated with lower levels of behavior problems.[66] Now, attention is also being given to engaging family and community members in advancing students' social and emotional development. Particularly, the importance of parent engagement and collaboration in reducing children's exposure to traumatic stressors and increasing the number of supportive adults that can help children cope with challenging life experiences.[67]

Several school-based trauma interventions, such as the Cognitive Behavioral Intervention for Trauma in Schools (CBITS), have a parent component that adds to the effectiveness of the intervention. The parent component of CBITS builds parenting skills relevant to trauma exposure and stress related to poverty.[68] This is critical because exposure to traumatic stressors and trauma are often passed down through generations of families.[69] There are good models for how to engage families when needed to implement individualized interventions, but few that provide strategies for the regular involvement of families in school-wide interventions aimed at preventing problems by decreasing risk factors, strengthening protective factors, and building resilience.[70]

However, there is strong evidence that parents, including parents with several characteristics of disadvantage, respond positively to being actively invited and enabled to participate in school engagement opportunities.[71] To accomplish this, parents need to be actively recruited and consistently encouraged by school personnel. With effort, schools can become an "access point for families to learn about parenting, child development, and children's mental health."[72] The deep knowledge that families and community members have about students' life experiences, needs, and assets can be especially helpful for administrators and teachers, many of whom do not live in the neighborhoods in which high poverty schools are located.

GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR ADVANCING FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

- Are our engaged families representative of the diversity of our student population?

- What families do we need to work the hardest to reach and what insights can they offer?

- What can we learn from families that are involved about how to reach less involved families?

- What community agencies do family members have connections with and how can they help us engage those organizations?

- How can we best solicit input from families about the intervention choices?

- What is most important to share about interventions and what are effective ways to share it?

- How involved does the school want families to be in implementing interventions?

More details available in the *School Climate Improvement Action Guide for Working with Families*.

Additional Resources

A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family and Community Connections on Student Achievement
Published by Southwest Educational Development Laboratory

Using Trauma-Sensitive Strategies to Support Family Engagement and Effective Collaboration
Published by the Center for Appropriate Dispute Resolution in Special Education

Family and Community Engagement in Addressing Childhood Trauma
Published by the Coalition for Community Schools

A Trauma-Sensitive Toolkit for Caregivers of Children
Published by the Spokane Regional Health District

Creating Trauma-Informed Family Driven Systems of Care
Published by Thrive

Aligning and Integrating Family Engagement in Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports
Published by the Technical Assistance Center on PBIS

Best Practices in Engaging Families in Child and Youth Mental Health
Published by the Ontario Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth Mental Health

Recommendation 3: Become knowledgeable of trauma and master educational practices that meet the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral needs of students who have been impacted by trauma

> *The South Bronx is home to a transformative school. One third of the students at Haven Academy are in foster care, another third under the watchful eye of New York's Administration of Child Services, and the rest reside in neighborhoods with high levels of poverty and violence. All have experienced trauma and instability and are prone to extreme behavioral outbursts and academic disengagement. In the face of those challenges, teachers at Haven Academy are learning how to successfully manage their classrooms and keep students engaged in learning. To achieve this, the school is equipped with social workers, behavior and learning specialists, and teachers who have received trauma-informed training. [73]*

While schools like Haven Academy have not completely solved challenges of educating students exposed to trauma, their success meeting the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral needs of some of the country's most vulnerable children stands as a model and proof of the benefits of schools staffed by educators who are knowledgeable of trauma and utilize trauma responsive educational practices.

Educators receive limited pre-service training and subsequent in-service professional development on classroom management, even less on how to integrate social and emotional learning into their instructional plans, and almost none on how to recognize and respond to students who are coping with traumatic stressors. Professional development for administrators, teachers, and other school staff has been identified as pivotal in catalyzing the implementation and maintenance of change.[74] With focused professional development teachers will be more able to effectively identify students who are exhibiting signs of trauma, and less likely to label them as defiant and oppositional, or disengaged and unmotivated.

In addition to caring for their students, teachers themselves need to be supported in learning how to cope with the stresses of working with traumatized children. Currently, 50% of teachers will leave the profession in their first five years, due to lack of training and the stress of managing a classroom.[75] However, when teachers feel equipped to be a support for students, they can help facilitate more positive outcomes for youth and for their professional careers.[76]

The changes that trauma causes in brain structure and chemistry, and the cascade of emotional and behavioral dysregulation don't have to be permanent. Children's brains have a substantial ability to adapt and change, which means that with the right developmental supports post-traumatic growth is possible. For this to happen educators must become aware of how students are affected by trauma, and have access to training on the educational practices that can foster recovery and resilience.

CREATING SAFE SCHOOLS WITHIN UNSAFE NEIGHBORHOODS

The need for safety has long been established as a foundational need that must be attended to before more abstract aspects of self and interpersonal development can flourish. The way educators utilize their power to discipline students can ether increase or decrease their sense of safety at school. One option is the utilization of relational discipline, which is grounded in research showing that positive student-teacher relationships, not punitive measures, are most effective in gaining compliance while also supporting students' abilities to meet classroom expectations.

Relational discipline is:

- Built on teachers' genuine desire to understand students' experiences in and outside of school
- Built on a foundation of mutual understanding of care for the student and their success
- Based on a positive relationship that is initiated and maintained by the teacher
- A school-wide process; individual teachers invite support from other staff in the building with whom a student may have stronger relationships

Additional Resources

Helping Traumatized Children Learn
Published by Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative

Creating Sanctuary in the School
Published by Journal for a Just and Caring Education

Healing the Hurt: Trauma-Informed Approaches to the Health of Boys and Young Men of Color
Published by the California Endowment

Calmer Classrooms - A Guide to Working with Traumatized children
Published by the Child Safety Commissioner

The Heart of Learning and Teaching Compassion, Resiliency and Academic Success
Published by Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction

Child Trauma Toolkit for Educators
Published by the National Child Traumatic Stress Network

Optimum Learning Environments for Traumatized Children
Published by Jasper Mountain Hope for Children and Families

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