Helping Traumatized Children Learn

2

safe, supportive learning environments that benefit all children

Creating and Advocating for Trauma-Sensitive Schools

Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative
a partnership of Massachusetts Advocates for Children and Harvard Law School

The release of *Helping Traumatized Children Learn 2* represents an exciting next step in the evolution of the cultural movement to transform our school systems into safe, supportive learning environments for all children, including those who have experienced overwhelming adversity. Full of the wisdom of hard won experience and a flexible framework for change, this volume holds great promise for students, teachers, parents, and entire school systems to transform the historical effects of childhood adversity among students—truancy, expulsion, school failure, and rejection—into the promise of hope, healing, and academic success.

—Robert Anda, MD, MS, Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study Co-Founder and Principal Investigator, Co-Founder ACE Interface, Senior Science Consultant to the Center for Disease Control

Helping Traumatized Children Learn, Volume 2 is a must-read for school leaders. Volume 1 created awareness of trauma's impact and laid a foundation on which schools can build. Volume 2 is all about rolling up your sleeves and getting to work. It clearly defines what it means to be "Trauma Sensitive" and provides a clear path on how schools can get there.

—Ryan T. Powers, Principal, Mary E. Baker Elementary School, Brockton
Adjunct Professor, Lesley University

This book offers actionable policies and practices for creating safe and supportive learning environments in schools across the Commonwealth, ensuring that all students have the opportunity to reach their highest potential.

—Massachusetts Representative Alice Peisch
House Chair of the Joint Committee on Education

In my thirty-some years of working in teacher education, I would be hard pressed to think of a topic that has resonated more deeply with practitioners than the impact of trauma on learning. Readers of this book learn why a school-wide approach to trauma-sensitivity removes barriers to learning for all children. They are provided with a process of inquiry and reflection that addresses all of the key indicators of a trauma-sensitive school, while at the same time, valuing the unique features of each school's environment. Both volumes of Helping Traumatized Children Learn should be required reading for every teacher and educational administrator at the school, district, state, and federal level.

—Mary E. Curtis, Ph.D., Director, Center for Special Education, Lesley University

This is a timely and very much needed book. It provides clear, practical and research- and practice-informed guidance. It addresses three things that should be aligned, but often are not: addressing trauma school-wide, not just individually; monitoring the implementation of trauma-sensitive schools; and creating public policy to ensure that all students, including the many who have experienced traumatic events, succeed.

—David Osher, Ph.D.,Vice President and AIR Institute Fellow, American Institutes for Research

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Creating and Advocating for Trauma-Sensitive Schools helps educators understand the causes of trauma and how it manifests itself in the school setting. More importantly, it provides a framework that educators can use to develop trauma sensitive schools, filling a need in the literature for a practitioners guide.

—Salvatore Terrasi, Ph.D., Director of Pupil Personnel Services, Brockton Public Schools
National Adjunct Faculty, Lesley University

I encourage all educators, school leaders and policymakers to examine the findings described in this book. We know that children cannot effectively learn if they are feeling threatened or scared or if underlying behavioral or emotional challenges are not acknowledged and addressed. Our students and schools deserve our help to meet this challenge. Frameworks like this one will enhance the capacity of schools to provide students with the services they deserve and will help to build supportive environments so that all students can thrive and succeed.

—Massachusetts State Senator Katherine Clark

This second volume from MAC shows us that trauma sensitivity is central to the process of creating the safe, healthy, and supportive learning environments that can improve education outcomes for all students. It provides much-needed guidance to policy makers about how to support schools in this effort. The authors articulate a way forward for educators and policymakers to work together to provide safe and supportive schools where all children can learn. Let's get to work!

—Massachusetts State Representative Ruth Balser

The Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative in this book operationalizes the principles of the flexible framework for trauma-sensitive schools that was the focus of their first book. They do so with clear and detailed information and rich case vignettes that make these principles come alive. This is an inspiring and invaluable guide for school administrators, teachers, advocates and policy-makers.

—Betsy McAlister Groves, LICSW, Founder, Child Witness to Violence Project /Boston Medical Center, Lecturer, Harvard Graduate School of Education

As researchers and practitioners who work to understand and promote safe, supportive and inclusive school climates, we are thrilled to read and use this second volume. It is comprehensive but accessible, visionary but concrete. It helps us understand the systemic contours and roots of trauma—and the ways in which schools can improve the lives of traumatized children in a universal (school-wide) context. It offers guiding questions for planning, implementation, assessment and advocacy. We commend it to colleagues at the school, system and state levels.

—Jonathan Cohen, Ph.D., Founder and Director of the National School Climate Center
Steven Brion-Meisels, Ph.D., Senior NSCC consultant

A truly visionary document that provides concrete steps to galvanize momentum for creating "trauma sensitive schools" which translates to caring instruction and shows steps to build a critical mass of staff to embrace this approach. This is masterful in providing a thoughtful template that balances precision, flexibility and wisdom.

—Nancy Rappaport, MD, Associate Professor of Psychiatry, Harvard Medical School

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2

Creating and Advocating for Trauma-Sensitive Schools

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Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative

a partnership of
Massachusetts Advocates for Children
and **Harvard Law School**

www.traumasensitiveschools.org

Massachusetts Advocates for Children

Mission:

Massachusetts Advocates for Children's (MAC) mission is to be an independent and effective voice for children who face significant barriers to equal educational and life opportunities. MAC works to overcome these barriers by changing conditions for many children, while also helping one child at a time. For over 40 years, MAC has responded to the needs of children who are vulnerable because of race, poverty, disability, or limited English.

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The school *supports all students to feel safe* physically, socially, emotionally, and academically | 19

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The school *explicitly connects students to the school community* and provides multiple opportunities to practice newly developing skills | 22

The school *embraces teamwork* and staff share responsibility for all students | 23

Leadership and staff *anticipate and adapt* to the ever-changing needs of students | 25

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Preface

Students who have had highly stressful experiences in their lives can experience difficulties taking advantage of what schools have to offer. Learning, remembering, trusting, or managing your own feelings and actions can be a painful challenge for a child who has experienced violence or other adversity. Yet, when adults are unaware of trauma's impacts, schools too often fail such children and even punish them while misreading their behavior as laziness, apathy, or intentional misbehavior. In safe learning environments, individual children can go from failing to succeeding and schools can support positive educational outcomes while reducing unnecessary suspensions and expulsions.

The Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative (TLPI) of Massachusetts Advocates for Children and Harvard Law School draws on research and deep experiences with children and schools, demonstrating that by viewing their academic challenges and behaviors through a "trauma lens," educators can help children learn and thrive. By representing families in our Education Law Clinic, lawyers and law students have created opportunities to serve vulnerable children. And TLPI works directly with educators to create trauma-sensitive schools. In the course of this work, the perspectives of children, educators, and families are all crucial.

Starkly underscored by brain research showing measurable effects on individual children who have undergone traumatic experiences, advocates can work together with parents and teachers to create "trauma-sensitive" schools. "Why talk of trauma?"' I asked Susan Cole and Michael Gregory, whose vision and ongoing work animate every part of this work. I was concerned that the word "trauma" can seem too medical, or too extreme to capture the powerful insights and attract the interest of many parents, teachers, lawyers, and reformers. They explained that it is fine if schools prefer to adopt other terms but we should not flinch from the word "trauma," given the need to acknowledge and address the cascading risks of school failure experienced by children who grow up surrounded by violence and jeopardy.

So, the project launched eight years ago a first book on the subject. Volume 1 of *Helping Traumatized Children Learn* offered tools and proposed reforms to help all students learn. After a decade of work in this vein, the leaders of this effort now have lessons to share about successful advocacy that can help those who want to provide effective school experiences for children dealing with adversity. This second volume examines the time, support, and institutional space that educators need to act on insights about how trauma affects learning. Drawing on work in Massachusetts and elsewhere, this book demonstrates how a variety of education stakeholders can join together to build the supports necessary for schools to become safe havens for learning. Yet, the most informed and motivated educators cannot make changes alone if laws, policies, and funding streams stand in the way. Nor does it work simply to supply social and psychological services to individual students. That is both too inefficient and too partial to make sustainable differences.

A statewide coalition of parents, teachers, behavioral health providers and other community members can identify remedies, secure buy-in from policymakers, review outcomes of initial reforms, recalibrate efforts, and pursue the process further while building the kind of sustainable learning community that over time leads to systemic change. This volume offers the story of such efforts and possibilities and rich lessons to draw for the future. It shows how to advocate for and create trauma-sensitive schools that can be safe and engaging learning communities for all students. This work offers the concrete promise of learning and growth for children, families, educators and those who advocate on their behalf.

Martha L. Minow
Morgan and Helen Chu Dean and Professor
Harvard Law School

Foreword

Schools must be given the supports they need to address trauma's impact on learning. This is the message of *Helping Traumatized Children Learn, Volume 1: Supportive Environments for Children Traumatized by Family Violence (HTCL 1).* Published in 2005, *HTCL 1* summarized research on trauma's impact on learning, behavior, and relationships at school and offered a Flexible Framework for weaving trauma sensitivity into all the activities of the school day. It proposed a policy agenda to support schools in this work. *HTCL 1's* school-wide approach to trauma sensitivity struck a chord: today many educators and policymakers now recognize that addressing trauma's impact across the entire school is key to student success.

In the eight years since the publication of our first volume, the Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative (TLPI) team has been working directly with schools to understand more clearly what is involved in becoming trauma sensitive. The efforts of educators in these schools have taught us much about the teamwork, collaboration, flexibility, creativity, and deep understanding of the impact of trauma on learning needed for school-wide trauma sensitivity. We have seen students in trauma-sensitive schools benefit from greater academic achievement, improved behavior, and stronger relationships.

TLPI is a partnership between Massachusetts Advocates for Children and Harvard Law School. Through Harvard's Education Law Clinic, the TLPI team and its law students have represented more than 100 families. In each of these families, a student with a disability that qualified him or her for special education also had traumatic experiences which were playing a role in his or her struggles at school. We are grateful for what these families have taught us about how schools respond, both positively and negatively, to some of our most vulnerable students.

Our close collaboration with Lesley University has added much to TLPI's understanding of the professional development needed for whole-school trauma sensitivity. Lesley University uses *HTCL 1* as a text in graduate coursework on trauma-sensitive schools, where groups of colleagues within a school or district receive graduate credit in education while working together to make their own schools trauma sensitive. TLPI's education consultant and an author of this book serves as adjunct professor, mentoring instructors, designing curriculum, and teaching courses. Our partnership with Lesley has brought a wealth of learning from these educators to this publication.

We have been honored to participate along with experts across the state in the Behavioral Health and Public Schools Task Force, established by Massachusetts law to develop a statewide framework, based on the Flexible Framework, to create safe and supportive school environments with collaborative services. In addition, Massachusetts laws, regulations, and policies now require several important initiatives, including bullying prevention, truancy prevention, and others (detailed in Chapter 3) to be organized by the elements of the Framework to ensure they use a whole-school approach.

While the epicenter of activity continues to reside in Massachusetts, the years since the publication of *HTCL 1* have seen a number of cities and states launch their own movements for trauma-sensitive schools. Washington State, Wisconsin, West Virginia, and the San Francisco Unified School District have all undertaken efforts informed by Massachusetts' trauma-sensitive schools movement. This gradual but promising growth has occurred alongside increasing understanding within the federal government that the principles underlying trauma sensitivity are important elements of the public policy dialogue. United States Attorney General Eric Holder's Defending Childhood

Initiative (DCI), the Department of Education's Safe Supportive Learning Initiative and Safe Schools/Healthy Students program, and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA) designation of Trauma and Justice as a strategic initiative, are some examples of the growing attention paid to the issue of trauma. While TLPI's advocacy efforts in the immediate future will remain largely (though not exclusively) centered in Massachusetts, these national developments invite us to contemplate advocacy strategies for elevating trauma sensitivity as a priority in the nation's education reform agenda.

This second volume of *HTCL, Creating and Advocating for Trauma-Sensitive Schools: Safe, Supportive School Environments That Benefit All Children,* is the natural outgrowth of all the work TLPI has done over the past eight years – representing highly vulnerable children, providing professional development and consultation to educators, helping to draft legislation, and building a growing coalition. The success of *HTCL 1* made this publication inevitable, for we had to begin to answer the next logical question: "Okay, so how do we create a trauma-sensitive school?" We hope this book provides schools with the tools to answer this question for themselves as well as guidance to policymakers to ensure schools receive the supports they need.

Jerry Mogul
Executive Director
Massachusetts Advocates for Children

Acknowledgements

Our work ensuring that children traumatized by exposure to adverse experiences succeed in school is made possible by the enormous support we have received. We are extremely grateful to the Oak Foundation which underwrites The Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative's ongoing work with Lesley University and the production of this book. Their generosity has also allowed us to create traumasensitiveschools.org and develop materials and videos around which the online learning community is forming. Without the long term funding from the Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation; the C. F. Adams Charitable Trust; the Gardiner Howland Shaw Foundation; the Alfred E. Chase Charity Foundation, Bank of America, N.A., Trustee; the Klarman Family Foundation; and the Massachusetts Bar and Boston Bar Foundations, none of our work would have been possible. We are also grateful to The Ludcke Foundation, Nord Family Foundation, Skadden Fellowship Foundation, Equal Justice Works Fellowships program, Partners HealthCare, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts, the Center for Public Representation, the Boston Public Health Commission and the Defending Childhood Initiative, the Elinor Ristuccia Fund, and the Jason Hayes Foundation, which have provided us with much needed resources. In particular, we would like to thank Janet Taylor of the C.F. Adams Charitable Trust for asking the tough questions that led to numerous breakthroughs and that continue to propel the project forward.

Our work has been immeasurably enriched by our long-standing partnership with Mary E. Curtis, Ph.D., Director of the Lesley University Center for Special Education. Under her direction, the Center jointly sponsored a ground-breaking conference in 2000 titled, *Helping Traumatized Children Learn*. Since that time we have co-sponsored with the Center two symposia on transforming teacher education to help educators meet the needs of traumatized students and two institutes on trauma and learning. Her leadership and our joint collaboration has led to three graduate courses on trauma and learning at Lesley University.

We cannot express enough gratitude to the educators and community leaders in Brockton, Massachusetts for their long-term commitment to creating their trauma-sensitive schools, and for sharing their professional wisdom over the last eight years. We are grateful for the leadership of Dr. Salvatore Terrasi who has worked tirelessly to support district-wide trauma sensitivity in Brockton.

We thank Dean Martha Minow and Harvard Law School for believing in our vision. We are grateful that HLS has partnered with MAC over the last ten years, deepening our ability to provide law students in the Education Law Clinic with the opportunity to represent some of our most vulnerable students and to play a direct role in furthering the systemic advocacy work required to create trauma-sensitive schools.

Finally, we thank Executive Director Jerry Mogul, the Board and staff of Massachusetts Advocates for Children, and MAC founder Hubie Jones. MAC continues to be a shining star in Massachusetts. Its creative strategies and visionary model of multi-strategic child advocacy underpins all our work, inspiring countless law students to become leaders in this field.

We are thankful for the trauma-sensitive learning community that has grown around our work. Please see appreciations at the end of this book for additional individuals to whom we are most grateful.

The Authors
November 14, 2013

Executive Summary

The goal of *Creating and Advocating for Trauma-Sensitive Schools* is to move beyond awareness of trauma's impacts on learning to help schools become trauma-sensitive learning environments that can improve educational outcomes for all students. An elementary principal who spoke to the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education described the benefits of school-wide trauma sensitivity for one of his students:

> *Darrel transferred to our school in fourth grade. We knew a bit, though not a lot, about his difficult life prior to coming to our school. His mother had fled with her children to a battered women's shelter, and Darrel had spent much of his time at his previous school either in the office or suspended. When he first came to us, he constantly pushed the limits, was noncompliant, and had great difficulty with transitions. What he didn't expect was that we had worked hard to understand the role of trauma in learning and to use this knowledge to change the culture and structure of our school. Darrel had no idea that we, unlike the adults in his other school, would not give up on him. We worked as a team with Darrel and his mother to understand his difficulties with trust and relationships, to help him regulate his emotions rather than just react to them, and to help him calm down so that he could learn and make friends. We made sure everyone understood how to respond to him. We referred his mom to community partners and made her a real team member. Fast forward to fifth grade. Darrel has not once been suspended this year and he seldom visits the office. He is achieving academically because he is in the classroom and available to learn. His success would not have been possible if the school-wide environment was not sensitive to his trauma-related needs and equipped to respond.*[1]

This book offers a Guide to a process for creating trauma-sensitive schools and a policy agenda to provide the support schools need to achieve this goal. Based on the experience of Darrel's school and other

This Guide is intended to be a living document that will grow and change as more schools become trauma sensitive and add their ideas.

pioneering schools in Massachusetts, the Guide is intended to be a living document that will grow and change as more schools become trauma sensitive and add their ideas. The policy agenda, honed through fifteen years of advocating for trauma-sensitive schools at all levels of policy in Massachusetts, calls for changes in laws, policies, and funding streams to support schools in this work. We believe that school-wide trauma sensitivity can become a regular part of how schools are run if educators engage in the process of creating trauma-sensitive schools and join with students, parents, advocates, and many others to raise their voices to legislators and other policymakers. We have launched a companion online learning community for creating and advocating for trauma-sensitive schools, called *traumasensitiveschools.org*. This site offers resources to support schools in the use of the Guide and an opportunity to share ideas and best practices about whole-school trauma sensitivity. It also provides an opportunity to learn about and join in the campaign to advocate for the support schools need to become trauma-sensitive learning environments.

Since the 2005 publication of Volume 1 of *Helping Traumatized Children Learn*, many schools have shown the dramatic educational improvements trauma sensitivity can bring about for students like Darrel who have been exposed to traumatic events. These schools have made trauma sensitivity an essential aspect of high-quality instruction and a central part of their school-wide educational mission. In turn, students at trauma-sensitive schools have reaped the benefits of greater academic achievement, more time spent on learning, reduced disciplinary referrals, improved relationships with peers and adults, and more supportive teaching in the classroom.

Trauma-sensitive schools also benefit students who have not experienced traumatic events. *All* students benefit from safety and positive connections to school. An understanding of trauma's impact on learning can rally educators around their students' shared need for safety and connection to the school community. This calls for a whole-school approach that is inclusive of all, while recognizing that there are those who are especially vulnerable.

Darrel's principal ended his presentation to the Board of Education by describing the benefits of school-wide trauma sensitivity for all of his students:

> *Before we became engaged in this work of developing a trauma-sensitive school, we were not structured to support struggling students in a holistic way, nor did we have the knowledge base to help. All of that has begun to change because we understand trauma and use a whole-school approach. This is a long process, but as a school we are now proactive, where before we were reactive. We no longer just respond to students' challenges and behaviors punitively. Teachers are more aware and feel empowered to intervene. They realize that supporting students socially, emotionally, and behaviorally will only improve a child's ability to focus on academics.*

It is critical that children feel safe and connected to others in all parts of the school, not just in one program or with one teacher.

The work to create trauma-sensitive schools is growing under many names across the country: the "CLEAR Initiative" (Collaborative Learning for Educational Achievement and Resilience)[3] and "Compassionate Schools,"[4] in Washington; "HEARTS" (Healthy Environments and Response to Trauma in Schools), in San Francisco;[5] "Trauma-Sensitive Schools," in Wisconsin;[6] and others. In Massachusetts, we have the "Trauma-Sensitive Schools" and the "Safe and Supportive Schools" grant programs and are advocating for legislation titled, *An Act Relative to Safe and Supportive Schools*. Under this legislation, schools would develop whole-school action plans that set the conditions for trauma sensitivity by establishing safe and supportive schools. (See Chapter 3 for more details.) Irrespective of the name that is chosen, we all share the same goal: to put school-wide trauma sensitivity at the center of each school's educational mission. We pledge to work with those committed to quality education to make this a reality.

More and more educators are recognizing that addressing trauma's impact on learning creates an enormous opportunity to help students learn and be successful at school. However, while the desire to take advantage of this opportunity resonates with most education professionals, moving from awareness to action is challenging in today's school environment. Educators often face institutional barriers that can get in the way. No single educator can adequately incorporate trauma sensitivity alone. Changing the culture of a school is a process that requires the commitment of the staff and leaders and support from policymakers. In the busy world of education, educators are often pulled in many directions, responding to ever-changing policies and laws that are sometimes conflicting or fragmented. Rarely are schools given the time and support to engage in the dynamic process of culture change needed to become a trauma-sensitive school.

The education and policy agendas in this book propose to address these challenges. We have found that educators must be empowered to form dynamic, trauma-sensitive learning communities that will enable them to help all children feel safe and supported to learn throughout the school day, in all parts of the school. This requires a collaborative school-wide process in which leadership and staff identify priority needs for the students and families in their school and tailor trauma-sensitive solutions that fit with their unique culture and infrastructure.[2] Over time, school-wide trauma sensitivity can become fully integrated into the running of the school.

We hope this book will encourage schools to find their own pathways to school-wide trauma sensitivity. It is based on the accumulated wisdom of outstanding educators with whom we have worked, research from the fields of education and organizational change, the efforts of advocates, providers, and policymakers, and, of course, the experiences of students and their families. As more schools join this movement and share their experiences with policymakers, we will see laws, policies, and funding streams converge to place trauma sensitivity at the forefront of education reform.

The Foundation for Moving Forward

We begin by reviewing key points from Volume 1 of *Helping Traumatized Children Learn*. These ideas provide the foundation from which to move forward to take action on behalf of students. "Robert" is an eleventh-grade student who had been homeless and a witness to domestic violence. When his family sought advocacy to address his school challenges, Robert described his difficulties at school:

> *The teachers tell me I'm smart. They say I'm just not trying. I find myself staring out the window during class. Next thing I know, two weeks have passed and I have failed yet another geometry or biology test. I really try to listen to what the teacher is saying. Sometimes I can see her mouth moving but can't hear a thing. It is as if I am in a soundless chamber. They say I have potential but that I am slipping out of reach. I wish I could focus and soak in the material, but I just can't. I wish they understood how hard it is.*[7]

When students walk through the school doors carrying the negative feelings and expectations that can result from overwhelming adversity, school can become yet another place where they feel fearful or threatened. The goal of the Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative is to help schools become safe havens for learning: places where all students, including those who are traumatized, can calm their fears, make positive connections with adults and peers, behave appropriately, and learn at their highest levels.

High rates of traumatic experiences in childhood

Robert is one of many students who come to school every day having experienced traumatic events that compromise their learning, behavior, and relationships. A turning point for many educators has been understanding just how common traumatic experiences are in the lives of children. The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) study,[8] published in 1998, found that extraordinary numbers of adults reported abuse and/or challenging family experiences during childhood. The study asked participants about their experiences in seven categories of childhood adversity: physical, sexual or psychological abuse; witnessing domestic violence; and living with a parent with mental illness, substance abuse, or involvement in criminal behavior. Half of the adults participating in the study had experiences in at least one of these categories as children. Further studies have expanded our understanding of the prevalence of traumatic experiences in childhood.[9] By identifying the large number of children who are chronically bullied, live with homelessness or in the proximity of pervasive community violence, are refugees from war-torn countries, are shuttled around in the foster care system, survive natural disasters, undergo multiple, invasive medical procedures, or live with a parent traumatized by combat, these studies have demonstrated that traumatic experiences are more pervasive than many educators currently recognize.[10]

Readers of the first volume of *Helping Traumatized Children Learn* will note we have expanded our original focus on family violence to include multiple adverse experiences. Although there are differences in the way each traumatic event may affect a child, the fact is that all kinds of adversity have the potential to impede progress at school.

Trauma impacts learning, behavior, and relationships at school

Overwhelming traumatic events can alter a child's world-view and even the architecture of his or her developing brain. Recent research in the areas of epigenetics and neurobiology has confirmed and expanded our understanding of the ways traumatic experiences can profoundly affect memory, language development, and writing.[11] This can interfere with a child's ability to master the basic subject matter that is the core of every school's curriculum. Indeed, trauma-related responses can become embedded in, and therefore encumber,

all aspects of the learning process. Moreover, children may respond fearfully to people and situations at school even if the traumatic events happened months or years earlier. And they may have difficulty with peer and/or adult relationships because they cannot trust that other students or teachers have their best interests at heart. The trauma response can also undermine a student's ability to self-regulate emotions, behavior, and attention, resulting in responses such as withdrawal, aggression, or inattentiveness.[12]

Experts explain that trauma is not the event itself, but rather a response to a highly stressful experience in which a person's ability to cope is dramatically undermined.

Experts explain that trauma is not the event itself, but rather a response to a highly stressful experience in which a person's ability to cope is dramatically undermined.[13] Many factors influence how an individual child might respond to stressful events. The child's age and temperament, the nature of the experience, and the child's social context—family, school, and community—all play a role. Because many factors influence individual reactions to stressful events, no two children will be affected by a similar event in exactly the same way. Recognizing and responding to trauma's impact at school is vital. With this understanding, educators can avoid viewing trauma-related behaviors as intentional or as stemming from a lack of motivation or laziness, which in turn can reduce the perceived need for punitive responses that often exacerbate the problem and retraumatize the child.

The Trauma Lens

After learning that so many children are affected by traumatic experiences and understanding the neurobiological impact trauma can have on learning, many educators experience an "aha" moment. It is a relief that researchers can finally explain what many administrators and teachers have been dealing with for years. These studies from public health experts, neurobiologists, and psychologists can lead to greater empathy and a shift in perception about what may underlie the challenges certain students face at school. This knowledge provides a new lens—what we call the Trauma Lens—through which students and their learning, behavior, and relationships can be seen and understood.

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A look through the Trauma Lens can also reveal systemic barriers that prevent educators from responding to students in new ways. For educators to overcome these barriers and put this understanding to use effectively, it is essential that the school-wide infrastructure—not just one program, classroom, or staff member—supports a shift in culture that sustains trauma-sensitive ways of thinking and acting.

The Trauma Lens clarifies the need for a whole-school approach

The nature of trauma is that it can cause feelings of disconnection from the school community that undermine students' success. Experts explain that a welcoming, supportive community can help children overcome these feelings and diminish the severity of the trauma response.[14] As schools are communities for children, these findings reinforce what many educators and parents already know implicitly—that a supportive school-wide environment can play a significant role in addressing the needs of students who have endured traumatic experiences.

It is critical that children feel safe and connected to others in all parts of the school, not just in one program or with one teacher. Trauma-sensitive individual services and programs in special and regular education will be very important. However, if students are to solidify their skills in developing relationships, in self-regulation, and in academic and nonacademic areas, and use these skills to participate fully in the school community, they need to practice and become fluent using them everywhere in the building, not only in one class or small group.[15] Thus, an integrated and coordinated approach to service delivery is an essential part of a trauma-sensitive school.[16]

School staff will not always know if a given child's problems grow out of traumatic experiences. Nor is it appropriate or necessary to screen all children in an attempt to identify which ones have had traumatic experiences, further stigmatizing those who may already feel alienated and potentially causing more harm.[17] Rather, the best approach is to make sure we provide trauma-sensitive learning environments for *all* children. In a school-wide trauma-sensitive culture, educators will gradually develop an awareness that traumatic experiences may be at the heart of a student's learning, behavior, or relationship difficulties. As this awareness grows into a deeper understanding, educators will see how a trauma-sensitive environment can help children who are struggling feel safe, connected to the school, and engaged in learning. And they will also see with greater clarity how a whole-school approach that values teamwork, coordination, and collaboration will enhance the school experience for all.

Moving to Action

Despite the best intentions, moving to action can be difficult. It is easy to lose patience with the students who need it most. Intellectual understanding and compassion may get lost in the heat of a trying moment or in the competing initiatives going on in school at any one time. And the understanding of an individual teacher is not nearly enough. Every classroom is part of a larger school environment that bombards students and staff with messages to meet legal and policy requirements that are often fragmented and structured to respond to a single pressing concern of the moment, rather than to achieve the best educational results. All of this can overwhelm the best intentions of educators, schools, and policymakers.

That is why whole-school trauma sensitivity requires more than an awareness of trauma's impact on learning. Everyone—administrators, educators, paraprofessionals, parents, custodians, bus drivers, lunch personnel—must be part of a school-wide change in understanding and response that is supported from the top down and the bottom up.

In recent years, a broad range of programs, and even whole-school approaches, have been developed to address a variety of discrete issues. Many good programs and services can be employed in the process of creating a trauma-sensitive school. However, no program by itself can make a school trauma sensitive, and overly prescriptive instructions cannot address the difficulties of making changes in a complex school ecosystem and culture. For programs and services to be helpful, they need to "fit" the school's culture and support its capacity to tailor solutions to priorities identified by its educators.[18] They need to foster the growth of a trauma-sensitive learning community.

Thus, we offer tools—not instructions—to equip schools with the ability to select their own trauma-sensitive approaches to meet the particular needs of their students and families. School-wide thinking and planning must grow from within rather than be imposed from outside. This allows schools to become trauma-sensitive learning communities that engage in the kind of open-ended discussion that can ignite a process of dynamic change. Laws must be structured to support this kind of thinking and planning. It begins not with easy answers, but with difficult questions about how a school best responds to all of its students, including those who have experienced adversity.

All children can learn in a trauma-sensitive school because they have positive connections to others and a sense of safety throughout the entire school.

Chapter Summaries

Chapter 1 – A Vision for a Trauma-Sensitive School

Although no two trauma-sensitive schools will be identical, a definition helps build a common vision and a consensus on how to meet the challenges. Chapter 1 offers this definition:

> A trauma-sensitive school is one in which all students feel safe, welcomed, and supported and where addressing trauma's impact on learning on a school-wide basis is at the center of its educational mission. An ongoing, inquiry-based process allows for the necessary teamwork, coordination, creativity, and sharing of responsibility for all students.

All children can learn in a trauma-sensitive school because their positive connections to others are fostered and they experience a sense of safety throughout the entire school, allowing them to calm their emotions and behaviors so that they can engage appropriately with the curriculum and the school community.

Based on our work with schools, we have distilled six core attributes of a trauma-sensitive school, explained in detail in Chapter 1. Taken together, these attributes make up the vision upon which a trauma-sensitive school rests.

In a trauma-sensitive school, adults:

- **share an understanding** of how trauma impacts learning and why a school-wide approach is needed for creating a trauma-sensitive school

- **support all students to feel safe**—physically, socially, emotionally and academically

- **address students' needs in holistic ways**, taking into account their relationships, self-regulation, academic competence, and physical and emotional well-being

- **explicitly connect students to the school community**, providing them with multiple opportunities to practice newly developing skills

- **embrace teamwork** with a sense of a shared responsibility for every student

- **anticipate and adapt** to the ever-changing needs of students and the surrounding community

In this chapter, we offer a set of questions based on the above attributes of a trauma-sensitive school. Called the "Trauma-Sensitive Vision questions," they are designed to be a tool schools can use to maintain the focus on trauma sensitivity in all their work.

In Volume 1 of *Helping Traumatized Children Learn,* we introduced the Flexible Framework to help schools weave trauma sensitivity into all the activities of the school day. The Flexible Framework allows the complexities of school infrastructure to be understood as a manageable list of six discrete but interrelated school operations: (1) leadership, (2) professional development, (3) access to resources and services, (4) academic and nonacademic strategies, (5) policies, procedures and protocols, and (6) collaboration with families.[19] All of these operations are needed to work together to change the culture of a school. Chapter 1 re-introduces the Flexible Framework as a structure for organizing a school-wide trauma-sensitive Action Plan and offers a set of questions, derived from these six elements of school operations, called the "Flexible Framework questions." These questions are designed as a second tool to keep the focus on the whole school as staff develop and implement their Action Plans.

Chapter 2 – Guide to Creating a Trauma-Sensitive School

In our work with schools, we have observed that becoming trauma sensitive requires not only a deep understanding of trauma's impact on learning but also a spirit of inquiry that most often starts with a small but enthusiastic group of leaders and staff who learn together and can articulate their sense of urgency about why they feel trauma sensitivity will provide better educational outcomes for all students.

We have observed that becoming trauma sensitive requires not only a deep understanding of trauma's impact on learning but also a spirit of inquiry that most often starts with a small but enthusiastic group of leaders and staff who learn together and can articulate their sense of urgency about why they feel trauma sensitivity will provide better educational outcomes for all students.

With fully invested leadership, the urgency to take action can expand to an entire staff, which becomes dynamically involved in identifying priorities and then planning, implementing, and evaluating a school-wide trauma-sensitive Action Plan.

Chapter 2 is a Guide to a collaborative, inquiry-based process to help schools become trauma-sensitive learning communities that identify and address their priorities creatively and in cost-effective ways. The Trauma-Sensitive Vision and Flexible Framework questions are essential tools to help schools in this collaborative process of change. We offer this Guide to encourage more schools to become whole-school trauma-sensitive environments, to support them in doing so, and to foster learning among schools and districts in Massachusetts and across the nation.

Chapter 3 – Advocating for Trauma-Sensitive Schools

Chapter 3 proposes how laws, policies, and funding streams need to change in ways that will empower schools to engage in this process. Good policies and good educational practice must go hand in hand if schools are to become trauma-sensitive learning environments. What works at the school level must inform laws and policies at the federal, state, and local levels. Through advocacy and increased dialogue, we seek to overcome institutional barriers and close the gap between holistic educational practice and policy. We make the following public policy recommendations:

1. All levels of government should articulate the clear, strong, and coordinated message that trauma-sensitive schools are a priority.

2. Laws, policies, and funding streams should support schools to create whole-school Action Plans that are organized according to the elements of school operations.

3. Professional development for educators, administrators, and allied professionals should provide opportunities to develop a shared understanding of trauma's impact on learning and build skills in using a whole-school, inquiry-based approach to creating trauma-sensitive schools.

4. Schools and outside agencies should collaborate to ensure that services are an integral part of trauma-sensitive whole-school environments and that they connect students to their school communities.

5. Schools and districts need adequate staffing to perform the administrative functions necessary for effective implementation.

6. Laws and policies should clarify that evidence-based approaches include those that encourage schools to engage in locally based, staff-driven evaluative inquiry.

A broad public-policy agenda is needed to advocate for laws, policies, and funding streams that enable schools to achieve the school-wide vision embodied in our definition: addressing trauma's impact on learning as a core part of the educational mission so that all students feel safe, welcomed, and supported.

Conclusion

We seek to foster and support the growing movement of schools and districts actively involved in creating school-wide trauma-sensitive learning environments that benefit *all* students. We write this book for educators so they can work in partnership with policymakers to secure the support they need to do this important work and for policymakers so they can understand what it takes to create a trauma-sensitive school. We look forward to the day when school-wide trauma sensitivity is moved out of the shadows to become part of daily educational practice. But everyone is needed —parents, students, administrators, educators, advocates, providers—to participate in advocating for laws, policies, and funding streams that support schools to become trauma-sensitive learning communities. Trauma-sensitive schools can make an enormous difference for children. Working together, we can turn the direction of education reform toward whole-school trauma sensitivity. We invite everyone to join in this effort.

Please visit our online learning community for creating and advocating for trauma-sensitive schools *traumasensitiveschools.org*.

Chapter 1

A Vision for a Trauma-Sensitive School

Each school will implement trauma sensitivity in its own unique way. However, a shared definition of what it means to be trauma-sensitive can bring educators, parents, and policymakers together around a common vision that can help them meet ongoing challenges. A trauma-sensitive school is one in which all students feel safe, welcomed, and supported and where addressing trauma's impact on learning on a school-wide basis is at the center of its educational mission. It is a place where an ongoing, inquiry-based process allows for the necessary teamwork, coordination, creativity, and sharing of responsibility for all students, and where continuous learning is for educators as well as students.

No single attribute of a trauma-sensitive school can be viewed as an isolated fragment; they are all interrelated, adding up to a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. Together they define ways to empower schools to understand and realize a shared vision.

For schools to achieve trauma sensitivity, it is important to clarify this vision to show what trauma-sensitive ways of responding to students can look like at school. Based on our past eight years of work in schools, and with the input of our partners, we have distilled six distinct but interrelated attributes of a trauma-sensitive school that are described in the first section of this chapter. A set of questions based on these attributes serves as a tool to help keep the vision of trauma sensitivity in the foreground as educators carry out the multiple daily demands of the modern education system. The attributes and associated questions help schools evaluate which efforts will lead the school toward the trauma-sensitive vision. Ultimately they help the school identify which efforts are successful, and which need more work, as they pursue the kind of change they are seeking.

Sustaining trauma-sensitive ways of thinking and acting will require a shift in the culture of a school, and the key elements of school

operations need to work together to support this shift. The second section of this chapter introduces the Flexible Framework for identifying how school operations can be brought into alignment to achieve the vision of trauma sensitivity. A second set of questions, based on these school operations, provides a tool schools can use to develop effective Action Plans that integrate trauma sensitivity into the daily school experience of its students, staff and families.

Attributes of a Trauma-Sensitive School

No single attribute of a trauma-sensitive school can be viewed as an isolated fragment; they are all interrelated, adding up to a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. Together they define ways to empower schools to understand and realize a shared vision.

Leadership and staff *share an understanding* of trauma's impacts on learning and the need for a school-wide approach

Awareness is the critical first step in creating a trauma-sensitive school. All staff—educators, administrators, counselors, school nurses, cafeteria workers, custodians, bus drivers, athletic coaches, advisors to extracurricular activities, and paraprofessionals—should understand that adverse experiences in the lives of children are exceedingly common and that the impact of these traumatic experiences on child development can play a major role in the learning, behavioral, and relationship difficulties faced by many students. These difficulties can include perfectionism, withdrawal, aggression, and inattention, as well as lack of self-awareness, empathy, and self-regulation. They can also include problems with spoken and written language and executive functioning.

Educators in a trauma-sensitive school understand that one of the most effective ways to overcome the impacts of traumatic experiences is to make it possible for students to master the school's academic and social goals. Children often interpret lowered standards as a validation of their own sense of worthlessness, a self-image created by their experiences. For many children, however, their trauma-related challenges cannot be addressed separately from learning goals; their reactions become intertwined with the learning process itself, acting as

a barrier to academic success. Therefore, trauma sensitivity is critical to high quality instruction. Addressing trauma's impact on learning at school does not require specialized curricula or programming, although planning and supports for individual children who are struggling will continue to be very important. Rather, trauma-sensitive approaches must be infused into the curricula, the school- and district-wide philosophy, the way educators relate to children, and all the daily activities of the classroom and school.[20]

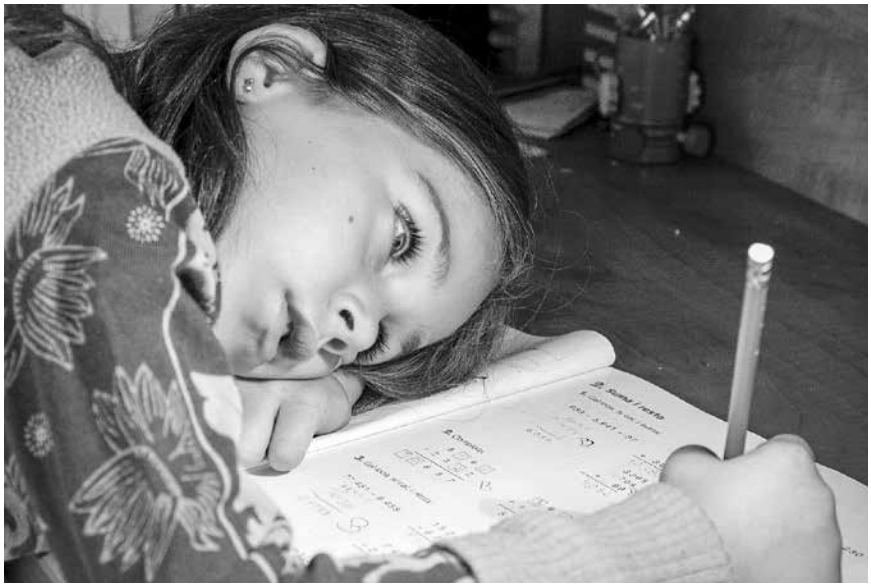
The school *supports all students to feel safe* physically, socially, emotionally, and academically

A child's traumatic response, and the associated difficulty in learning, is often rooted in real or perceived threats to his or her safety, undermining a fundamental sense of well-being. Therefore, it is important to ensure that students feel safe in the classroom, on the playground, in the hallway, in the cafeteria, on the bus, in the gym, and on the walk to and from school. Physical safety is clearly important, but so is social and emotional safety. Critically important as well is that children feel a sense of academic safety. That is, children need to feel safe enough to make mistakes as they

Children can feel unsafe for a host of reasons. They may bring with them to school traumatic effects from past experiences—some of which they may have been too young to remember—or have pressing fears related to what they are currently experiencing in school, such as bullying.

are learning, rather than cover up any gaps through distracting behavior or withdrawal. Educators in a trauma-sensitive school understand that helping students undertake what may feel like a risk, such as volunteering an answer to a math problem, can happen only in a classroom where every child knows that his or her contribution will be respected by adults and peers. And they recognize that students with seemingly unquenchable needs for attention may not respond to approaches that merely ignore the behavior because these students may in fact be looking for reassurance that they are safe.

Children can feel unsafe for a host of reasons. They may bring with them to school traumatic effects from past experiences—some of which they may have been too young to remember—or have pressing fears related to what they are currently experiencing in school, such as bullying. They may also have fears related to ongoing events outside of school—for example, an unsafe home or neighborhood—or be preoccupied with worry about the safety of a family member or friend, reinforcing the notion that their own security may be threatened. Structure and limits are essential to creating and maintaining a sense of safety for all students and staff at school, but that does not mean having rules that are followed



A student who appears lazy and not interested in completing work may actually be afraid to follow through out of fear of making mistakes. Approaches that address only the behaviors that appear on the surface often do not respond to a student's real needs.

Structure and limits are essential to creating and maintaining a sense of safety for all students and staff at school. With careful planning, all of the adults in the school can work together to provide a blanket of safety comprehensive enough to cover every space and every person in the school.

and enforced no matter what.[21] We are referring to structure and limits that provide a sense of safety through predictable patterns and respectful relationships, with adults in charge who convey confidence—through tone of voice, demeanor, a calm presence during transitions, and in other subtle and overt ways—that they will maintain each student's feeling of safety in the school. With careful planning, all of the adults in the school can work together to provide a blanket of safety comprehensive enough to cover every space and every person in the school.

The school *addresses students' needs in holistic ways*, taking into account their relationships, self-regulation, academic competence, and physical and emotional well-being

The impacts of traumatic experiences can be pervasive and take many forms, and a traumatized child's presentation may mask, rather than reveal, his or her difficulties. For example, a middle school student who pushes adults away may in fact long for their help but be afraid of betrayal. A high school student who appears lazy and not interested in completing work may actually be afraid to follow through out of fear of making mistakes. Approaches that address only the behaviors that appear on the surface often do not respond to a student's real needs. A broader, more holistic approach is required to understand the needs that underlie a student's behavioral presentation and to provide supports and build skills that respond to those needs.

Educators maximize children's opportunities to succeed at school, despite the adversities they may have endured, by bolstering them in four key domains: strong relationships with adults and peers; the ability to self-regulate behaviors, emotions, and attention; success in academic and nonacademic areas; and physical and emotional health and well-being.[22]

In reality, skills in these four areas are inseparable; there is a complex and systemic interaction among them. Academic competence

is connected to self-regulation and fewer behavior problems; relationships help children modulate their emotions and foster success in both academics and self-regulation.[23] Physical and emotional health is the overall foundation for learning.

A trauma-sensitive school recognizes that these domains are inextricably linked and understands the critical role they play in helping students be successful. A trauma-sensitive school bolsters *all* children in these four areas, knowing that many of them will need a great deal of support in building these skills, which must be practiced in context, meaning in the classroom, the hallways, the lunchroom, and elsewhere. Applying this holistic perspective both at the school-wide level and on behalf of individual children requires time for educators to meet and brainstorm creative solutions that address student needs. Schools have found that this time can be integrated into existing planning blocks, not necessarily requiring yet another set of special meetings. The point is to be sure that a holistic approach based on these four core domains is part of how the school is run on a day-to-day basis and that children needing extra help developing these skills will receive that assistance.

The school *explicitly connects students to the school community* and provides multiple opportunities to practice newly developing skills

Helping children build skills addresses only part of what is needed to help them learn. The loss of a sense of safety caused by traumatic events can cause a child to feel disconnected from others. Typically, the child is looking to those at school to establish or restore feelings of security and connection with the school community. Too often we respond negatively to a child who is seeking attention or whose behavior is confusing or oppositional, when the child may be desperately in need of connection to peers and adults. We too easily discipline students for an inappropriate response to an adult, labeling it disrespect, rather than recognizing it as the student's halting or awkward effort to relate.[24] It is essential for staff to understand that all students have a need to engage in the school community, even those who may seem to be pushing us away.

Helping students make positive connections to other members of the school community, providing opportunities for them to use their newly developing skills in context, and supporting them as they become fluent in participating fully in the community are essential elements of a trauma-sensitive school. Equally important is creating a culture of acceptance and respect in this community of learners, focusing on building a school and classroom culture where everyone is seen as having something significant to offer and is encouraged and supported to do so.

A trauma-sensitive school makes deliberate efforts to engage parents and caregivers and help them connect to the school community in meaningful ways. As their parents become involved, students can begin to feel that they and their families are truly part of the life of the school community.

For many students, their sense of connection to school is enhanced when their parents feel welcomed and respected in the school community. A trauma-sensitive school makes deliberate efforts to engage parents and caregivers and help them connect to the school community in meaningful ways. As their parents become involved, students can begin to feel that they and their families are truly part of the school community.

The school *embraces teamwork* and staff share responsibility for all students

Expecting individual educators to address trauma's challenges alone and on a case-by-case basis, or to reinvent the wheel every time a new adversity presents itself, is not only inefficient, but it can cause educators to feel overwhelmed. A trauma-sensitive school moves away from the typical paradigm, in which classroom teachers have primary responsibility for their respective students, toward a paradigm based on shared responsibility, requiring teamwork and ongoing, effective communication throughout the school. In a trauma-sensitive school, educators make the switch from asking *What can* I *do to fix this child?* to *What can* we *do to support all children to help them feel safe and participate fully in our school community?*[25] Otherwise, the positive impacts one teacher might have made in his or her classroom can too easily be undone when a child gets in line for the bus, walks into a

In a trauma-sensitive school educators make the switch from asking "what can I do to fix this child?" to "what can we do as a community to support all children to help them feel safe and participate fully in our school community?"

chaotic hallway, or enters the lunchroom. Opportunities for adults to share effective strategies are lost. Trauma-sensitive schools help all staff—as well as mental health providers, mentors, and others from outside the school who work with staff and students—feel part of a strong and supportive professional community that shares responsibility for each and every child and works as a team to address the impact of trauma on learning.

Addressing the impacts of trauma takes the solidarity of a whole community. Acknowledging the harmful experiences many children endure can be unsettling; for some educators it can also evoke uncomfortable memories of adversities they experienced in their own childhoods. The human need for safety and security is so powerful that at times even the most caring adults may feel the urge to turn away from facing the impacts of trauma. If they raise the issue of trauma when discussing students' needs, educators must trust that they will be supported by their colleagues and leaders. They must also feel confident that a structure will be in place to address a struggling student's needs holistically and that their colleagues will join together in this difficult work.[26]

By providing meaningful, confidential ways for parents and caregivers to share their knowledge of, and insight into, their children, educators can help them gain a sense of trust in the school.

This focus on teamwork extends to partnering with families. By providing meaningful, confidential ways for parents and caregivers to share their knowledge of, and insight into, their children, educators can help them gain a sense of trust in the school. As this trust deepens, it becomes possible for parents and teachers to discuss a child's strengths and interests, openly share concerns, and work together to address sensitive issues that might be affecting a student's school performance. These issues may range from everyday ups and downs to more serious issues, such as medical issues, divorce, adoption, foster care, homelessness, or other losses. Students will benefit greatly from the consistent approaches that can be forged through the strong home-school partnerships that result from this teamwork.

Leadership and staff *anticipate and adapt* to the ever-changing needs of students

Research describes the endless number of experiences that can have traumatizing impacts on children. A whole community can be adversely affected by an episode of violence or other tragedy that may reverberate particularly strongly for students in the school. Sometimes a troubling event may occur within the school. On top of this, we know that children bring dramatically different experiences into school from year to year as the surrounding community changes due to economic pressures, immigration patterns, and other factors. Often these changes can result in large turnovers in the school population, even within the same school year. Likewise, there might be high levels of staff turnover from year to year, creating a sense of instability. When schools and classrooms are constantly confronted with changes, the equilibrium of the classroom or school can be upset.

Educators and administrators in a trauma-sensitive school do their best to adapt to such challenges flexibly and proactively so that the equilibrium of the school is maintained despite inevitable shifts and changes. They try to plan ahead for changes in staffing and policies. And taking the time to learn about changes in the local community can, in some cases, help them to anticipate new challenges before they arise.

Of course, many disruptions to a school's equilibrium are simply not predictable, and it is important to be aware that, whether expected or not, they may leave the staff extremely unsettled. A school can spend much time, resources, and energy feeling "thrown off." A trauma-sensitive school is prepared for these reactions and views them as opportunities to stop and reflect on goals and successes, but then moves quickly ahead, making plans to accommodate any new needs or issues that have arisen.

Trauma-Sensitive Vision Questions

The Trauma-Sensitive Vision questions, based on the above attributes, are offered to encourage active reflection and thoughtful inquiry on ways to achieve the vision of a trauma-sensitive school. They serve as a touchstone or reminder to keep the vision in clear view as schools identify priorities and plan, implement, and evaluate their action plans. An example of using the Trauma-Sensitive Vision questions might be to ask,

How will addressing a given priority or taking a specific action:

- deepen our **shared understanding** of trauma's impacts on learning and the need for a school-wide approach?
- help the school effectively **support all students to feel safe**—physically, socially, emotionally, and academically?
- **address students' needs in holistic ways**, taking into account their relationships, self-regulation, academic competence, and physical and emotional well-being?
- **explicitly connect students to the school community** and provide them with multiple opportunities to practice newly developing skills throughout the school?
- support staff's capacity to **work together as a team** with a sense of shared responsibility for every student?
- help the school **anticipate and adapt** to the ever-changing needs of students and the surrounding community?

The Flexible Framework

Schools sometimes take on new initiatives with a sense of excitement that can keep them from taking the time to consider all the pieces that need to be in place and anticipate the institutional barriers that might hinder effective implementation. In order to support the culture change required to make progress toward the trauma-sensitive vision, it is important for schools to "cover the bases" and make sure that trauma sensitivity is infused into each aspect of the school. The Flexible Framework, which was first introduced in Volume 1 of *Helping Traumatized Children Learn*, is based on six familiar and important school operations that schools should keep in mind as they implement trauma sensitivity on a school-wide basis:

1. **Leadership** by school and district administrators to create the infrastructure and culture to promote trauma-sensitive school environments

2. **Professional development** and skill building for all school staff, including leaders, in areas that enhance the school's capacity to create supportive school environments

3. **Access to resources and services**, such as mental health and other resources, that help students participate fully in the school community and help adults create a whole-school environment that engages all students

4. **Academic and nonacademic strategies** that enable all children to learn

5. **Policies, procedures, and protocols** that sustain the critical elements of a trauma-sensitive school

6. **Collaboration with families** that actively engages them in all aspects of their children's education, helps them feel welcome at school, and understands the important roles they play [27]

Each of the six school operations contained in the Flexible Framework has been thoroughly explicated elsewhere. Chapter 2 of the first volume of *Helping Traumatized Children Learn* contains a lengthy discussion of each element. The *Massachusetts Model Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan* and the Framework in the *Final Report of the Behavioral Health and Public Schools Task Force* (both discussed in Chapter 3 of this volume) also contain many examples that are relevant to each operation.

Flexibility is key in addressing the role of trauma at school. While the six components of the Flexible Framework remain constant, the *content* of Action Plans will not look the same at any two schools. Each school has its own strengths and challenges. The idea is to ensure that every critical area of operations is taken into consideration when generating ideas, considering actions, and tailoring solutions that fit the school's own community and the prioritized needs of its students. Using the Flexible Framework helps avoid a situation in which staff are left wondering why sufficient professional development, connections to mental health services, or policies to cement new approaches into place were not included in an Action Plan, why the initiative did not withstand inevitable changes in leadership, or why many students and parents felt left out.

Flexible Framework Questions

The Flexible Framework questions help educators ensure that their Action Plans take into account all the important elements of school operations. The questions also help identify institutional barriers as well as strengths that may become relevant as the school works to achieve its intended goals. The Flexible Framework questions lead educators to inquire:

- What role does school and/or district **leadership** play in implementation?
- What **professional development** is necessary for implementation?
- What resources, supports, or **services** need to be in place for students, families, and/or staff?
- What classroom **strategies**—both **academic and nonacademic**—support implementation?

- What **policies, procedures, or protocols** do we need to review, revise, and/or develop?

- What do we need to do to ensure that **families** are active partners in helping with implementation?

Using the Trauma-Sensitive Vision Questions and Flexible Framework Questions

The Trauma-Sensitive Vision questions and the Flexible Framework questions, used together, are essential to the process of making whole-school trauma sensitivity an ongoing and familiar part of how the school is run. The two tools do not substitute for the process a school engages in to determine its own priorities and select the actions it will take to address them. Rather, their purpose is to assist the school, during the course of this process, to keep the focus on the whole-school vision while developing an Action Plan that infuses trauma sensitivity into the daily operations of the school.

The more often staff use the Trauma-Sensitive Vision questions and the Flexible Framework questions, the more it will become second nature to identify priorities that call for trauma-sensitive approaches and to plan and implement school-wide actions to address them. As successes grow and understanding deepens, regular use of these tools will become an integral part of the school culture and begin to organize the thinking behind identifying priorities and solving problems. Based on the experiences of schools we have observed, the key to success is a willingness to engage in the kind of process described in the Guide in Chapter 2 that includes a large portion of the staff, harnesses their creativity and professional wisdom, and fosters excitement about working in interdisciplinary ways to address the needs of all children, including those who have faced adversity.

Before beginning Chapter 2, we suggest that you review the Flexible Framework on pages 47-76 in Volume 1 of *Helping Traumatized Children Learn*. Although this Framework should not be considered a set of solutions for a particular school, it is full of the accumulated experience and professional wisdom of numerous trauma-sensitive educators.

Chapter 2

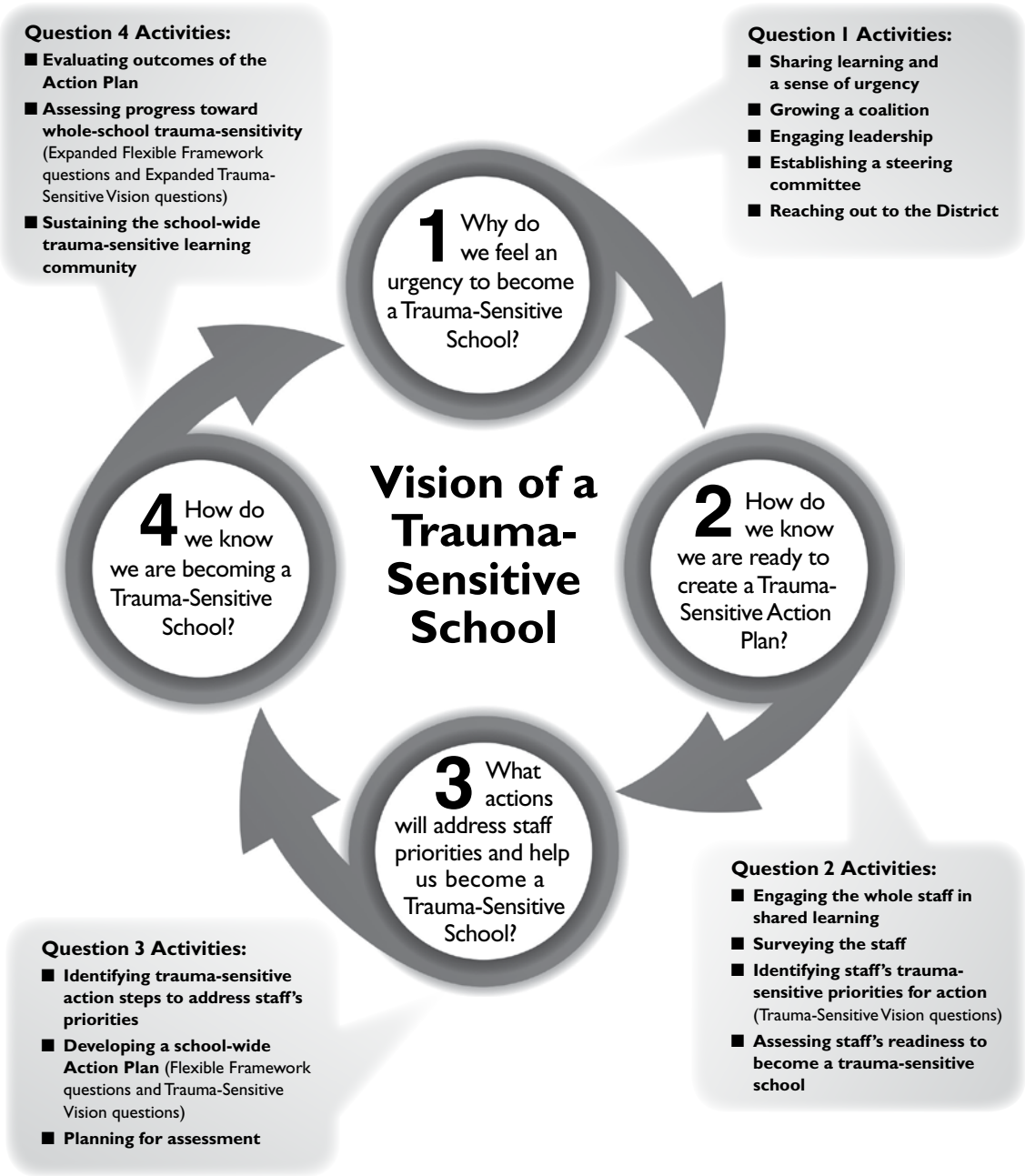
Guide to Creating a Trauma-Sensitive School

Introduction

Since the publication of Volume 1 of *Helping Traumatized Children Learn*, many educators have asked us: *How can I make my school trauma-sensitive?* Until now, we have referred them to other educators and school systems that are putting trauma sensitivity into action. We continue to believe that whole-school trauma sensitivity will filter into education reform through this kind of sharing; our website is designed to assist in such exchanges. We now have enough on-the-ground experience to begin to refine what we have gleaned from working with and observing schools and districts in the process of implementing whole-school trauma sensitivity, and we have benefited from research on organizational and educational change. We thank the educators who carefully reviewed our drafts, provided vignettes, and shared their invaluable insights. Without them, we could not have created this Guide.

Core concepts in the Guide, including learning together, coalition building, identifying priorities, action-planning, and evaluation, are all part of what many well-run schools already do. What is different at trauma-sensitive schools is that the new awareness about trauma's impact on learning becomes a primary motivator for taking action. This is where the process begins—with an individual's or a small group's sense of urgency about the need for trauma-sensitive approaches. Through more learning and reflective conversations, this sense of urgency grows into a deeper awareness of the pervasive role trauma plays at school and how addressing it can improve students' educational accomplishments. From this foundational awareness, a small coalition can engage the entire staff in trauma-sensitive action-planning. The process described in this Guide empowers educators to look holistically at their school's infrastructure and gain greater clarity about the ways in which its school operations may be encouraging or hindering success. It describes a process for overcoming these barriers so that the school can address its priorities in trauma-sensitive ways. The goal of using this process is for schools to become trauma-sensitive learning communities where new ideas and expansive thinking are nurtured and where synergy and teamwork make it possible for complex issues to be explored.

Process for Creating a Trauma-Sensitive School



Chapter 2 is organized around four essential questions that stimulate the deep thinking and collaboration needed to empower a school staff to better address the unique needs of its own students and staff. Through the spirit of learning and inquiry engendered by these questions, as well as the Trauma-Sensitive Vision and Flexible Framework questions, a school can move along a clear trajectory toward trauma sensitivity.

Unlike some educational programs that emphasize fidelity to a pre-established template, the process we describe is fluid and embraces the unique circumstances of each school community. We invite readers to apply the underlying principles in a way that fits the context of their school and the needs of their students and staff. Other than the time for planning and discussion, the process described in the Guide does not require additional resources.

We hope that through participation in our online learning community, *traumasensitiveschools.org*, educators will add their own ideas to those included in this chapter. We hope this chapter will be changed and enhanced as more and more educators create trauma-sensitive schools and then share their wisdom with us and with each other. This joint learning will also form the foundation for TLPI's other major focus, advocating for trauma-sensitive schools. Support from policymakers at the state and federal levels is critical to creating trauma-sensitive schools. Educators who lead their schools through the process described in this chapter will be able to inform the design of new laws and policies and advocate for their passage. Their perspectives will be crucial in building a broad movement to help all children, including those who have been traumatized, reach their educational potentials.

About the Vignettes

In this chapter, we share vignettes from schools that generously allowed us to observe them as they engaged in the inquiry-based process we describe in the Guide. The Lincoln School is used as an example throughout most of the chapter, allowing the reader to follow one school's experience throughout the whole process. A second school, the Roosevelt School, used a somewhat different approach from the Lincoln in the early stages of the process, so we share that as well. Both are actual schools, but these are not their real names. In addition, we include several other unnamed schools whose experiences are illustrative of key activities and concepts described in this Chapter. All of the schools are located in Massachusetts, include elementary and middle schools, and range from urban to rural.

Question 1

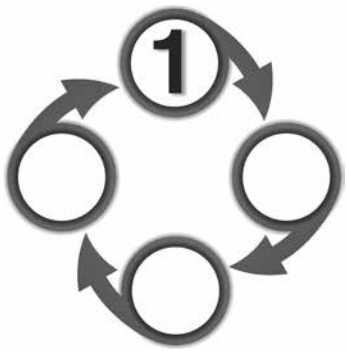
Why do we feel an urgency to become a Trauma-Sensitive School?

When staff approached me about becoming a trauma-sensitive school, I wanted to get a sense of how prevalent traumatic experiences might be among the students at our school. The school nurse, school psychologist, and I started by reviewing the records of students who were homeless or in foster care or otherwise had a known traumatic history. I was shocked when I realized how high the number of students was and stunned to see the overlap between these students and those who were functioning below grade level academically. While not all the children with traumatic histories were struggling, it was clear to me that adversity was a strong predictor of challenges in school and that we could not in good conscience ignore a plan for addressing the role of trauma in our school.

—The principal of the Roosevelt School,
a rural elementary school

Roadmap for Question 1

The effort to become trauma sensitive must be fueled by a strong sense of motivation. In this section, we describe steps for converting the urgency that individual staff members feel into a strong foundation for getting the whole staff invested. The goal is to form a small but growing coalition that includes school leaders and is able to articulate clearly why addressing the impacts of trauma on learning will help to achieve the staff's major priorities for the school and its students. Taking the steps outlined in Question 1 is critical preparation for later introducing trauma sensitivity to the whole staff in a thoughtful and effective way.



Articulating the Urgency

A sense of urgency about trauma sensitivity is the seed for making change. The first step is to articulate why trauma sensitivity is important for addressing the priorities in your school. In many schools, educators feel their most important priority is to increase academic achievement. In other schools, staff may be concerned that too many children are receiving punitive responses, such as suspensions, expulsions, and referrals to the office. Maybe staff are frustrated in their efforts to connect with parents, even as they realize that helping parents feel welcomed at school will surely help their children succeed. Perhaps staff feel the need for better communication with agencies or would like to view children in a more holistic way.

A sense of urgency about trauma sensitivity is the seed for making change. The first step is to articulate why trauma sensitivity is important for addressing the priorities in your school. In many schools, educators feel their most important priority is to increase academic achievement.

Any of these priorities can be the catalyst for becoming trauma sensitive. In some schools, educators will see trauma sensitivity as the solution to a pressing problem. In others, trauma sensitivity will be the way to take what the school already does well and ensure that it is reaching *all* the students in the school. Still other schools will discover the importance of trauma sensitivity as they seek to comply with new mandates, such as a requirement to adopt a bullying prevention plan. As long as staff feel a strong sense of motivation, all of these are legitimate sources for the urgency that is necessary to sustain the process described in this chapter.[28]

An assistant principal in an urban middle school described the urgency that he felt about how school discipline policies were negatively

affecting students. He began to talk about this urgency with others and found that his concerns were shared:

> *I was becoming concerned about the number of suspensions we had in our school. I was seeing no decline in sight. It seemed that the more students we suspended the more we needed to suspend. I felt caught in a spiral of never-ending punitive responses to our students. In conversations at faculty meetings we realized we were often suspending students who were experiencing all kinds of adversity outside of school. We needed to learn strategies for addressing their behavior in a trauma-sensitive way.*

When a sufficient number of leadership and staff make this type of connection between the priorities about which they feel strongly and trauma sensitivity, the motivation, or "driver," for creating a trauma-sensitive school is in place. A concrete plan is not needed at this early stage; an Action Plan will come later. Right now, it is best to start by helping colleagues see the connection between trauma sensitivity and the positive changes they would like to see for the school's students and staff. Such changes might include safer halls, more empathetic teachers, or improved discipline policies that recognize the reasons behind a student's behavior. Perhaps staff want to focus on academic achievement, fewer dropouts, fewer disciplinary actions, fewer office referrals, better communication within the school and with outside agencies, better connections with parents, or more sensitivity to the needs of students.

Growing a Coalition through Shared Learning

Sharing readings and having discussions with small groups of like-minded colleagues about the prevalence of traumatic experiences, their impacts on learning, and the need for whole-school approaches can start to build a consensus that trauma sensitivity is a way to address the school's priorities. These discussions lay the groundwork for growing an informal coalition of staff who share an interest in trauma sensitivity and hope to begin a process of change in the school.[29]

Here are some ways schools have developed a coalition through learning together:

- As preparation for a full faculty discussion in February, the principal of the Roosevelt School gave all staff a copy of Volume 1 of *Helping Traumatized Children Learn* at the beginning of the school year. He also included excerpts from the publication in his weekly e-mail newsletter, slowly exposing staff to key concepts over the first six months of the school year.

- In one district, a group of eight staff, comprised of teachers, a school adjustment counselor, and a behavioral specialist, formed a study group that met weekly for a year to read about and discuss trauma's impact on learning. They created a PowerPoint presentation, "Caring Instruction: Teaching Children Whose Lives Are Trauma-filled," and showed it to staff in all schools across the district during the course of the following year.

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Links to helpful readings and to research studies, including the ACE study, can be found as part of the online learning community at *traumasensitiveschools.org*

- The director of student support services in an urban district created an opportunity for leadership teams from all the elementary and middle schools to participate in district-wide professional development on the impacts of trauma on learning. Each school sent its assistant principal, school adjustment counselor, and instructional resource specialist to the presentation. The response was so enthusiastic that a second presentation was held for the principals of all the schools. At one elementary school, the Lincoln, both the principal and the assistant principal felt the material had particular relevance for their school, and they decided to provide a similar presentation for their whole staff.

- A middle school appointed the school counselor to become its resident expert on the impacts of trauma on learning. The counselor spent the summer reading about the subject, and then led a yearlong process of sharing that learning with others. She first provided a workshop to her student support colleagues, who then used what they learned to inform their discussions about individual students with teachers and paraprofessionals.

The Role of the Principal

Another essential component of building the coalition is ensuring that a school's leadership is invested.[30] We have seen groups work with great energy, without involvement from their leadership, and achieve short-term goals. However, sustainability and the capacity to shift the school's ecology require that the principal or headmaster make trauma sensitivity one of the school's priorities and participate as a key member of the coalition. The principal is needed to make sure all the actions related to trauma sensitivity are woven throughout the school and aligned with other ongoing initiatives, such as bullying prevention, dropout prevention, positive behavioral health, social-emotional learning, and others.

Where the efforts have begun without formal leadership, staff at many schools have worked to bring their principals on board by sharing materials from presentations they have attended or articles and books they have read and then engaging the principal in discussion. The sense of urgency to create a trauma-sensitive school can come from the bottom up or from the top down. But formal leadership must ultimately give permission for all staff in the school to be part of effecting change. Everyone's ideas, energy, and commitment are needed. Informal leadership will be essential in building this support. Teacher leaders and others who may not have formal leadership roles but who enjoy the trust and respect of their peers can engage additional staff by lending their credibility to the budding coalition.

The Role of Sounding Boards/Thinking Partners

School leaders have found it helpful to have a personal sounding board, or "thinking partner," to help them strategize. In some cases, the person in this role has been an outside consultant. Ideally, such a consultant should have a strong understanding of how to implement whole-school change and of trauma's impact on learning.

In some cases, fellow principals in the district have served as sounding boards for each other. At one school, a tight-knit, three-person leadership team within the same school became its own sounding board. When the sounding board is an insider, the person who takes on this role must be able to transcend the everyday functioning and relationships at the school and bring a fresh set of eyes to the discussion.

A robust online learning community can provide opportunities for problem solving and feedback, but is best regarded as a supplement to, not a replacement for, the sounding board. Leaders are invited to join the online learning community at *traumasensitiveschools.org* to access the additional support and reflection that can be found in an interactive community.

Whether the sounding board is an outside consultant or someone from within the district, regular meetings should be built into the principal's schedule. These meetings provide a confidential opportunity for reflection, support, feedback, problem solving, brainstorming, and planning. They are an opportunity for the principal to step back and look at the big picture, addressing barriers or challenges that may have emerged. A good sounding

Addressing Reluctance

As with any new initiative, staff will embrace trauma sensitivity with varying degrees of enthusiasm. Some will immediately want to become involved, and others will observe for a while and then decide to participate. The steering committee should also anticipate that some staff members, hopefully only a few, will not support the initiative. They may voice objections like "I grew up with difficulty, and I made it fine, so these kids should be able to as well," or "This sounds like we are going soft on discipline with these kids, and I don't think that's right." Generally, as the initiative evolves, opposition decreases. Reluctant staff members tend to be won over as fellow educators report improvements in student progress, fewer disciplinary actions, and their own lowered stress levels. Nevertheless, leaders should remain attentive to the concerns of those who are reluctant.[32]

board provides guidance and coaching by posing reflective questions, such as "How do you think it's going?" and "Where do you want to take this now?" The principal needs to feel comfortable enough with the sounding board to answer these questions candidly. The sounding board can help principals keep the effort to become a trauma-sensitive school on the front burner.

The Role of the Steering Committee

As interest in trauma sensitivity starts to take root, the need arises for the focused attention of a leadership group or steering committee, led by the principal, to take on the many tasks that lie ahead.[31] This steering committee functions much like a work group, closely collaborating with, and on behalf of, the entire school staff, strategizing, continually reporting back, soliciting input, and obtaining approval on the planning the group has undertaken.

Whatever title the steering committee chooses (some examples are Trauma Team, Trauma Resource Team, and Ecology Committee), it ensures that planning and actions stay focused on becoming a trauma-sensitive school. The members of the steering committee serve as guardians of the overarching vision, making sure that it does not get lost in the nuts and bolts of implementation. The principal at the Roosevelt Elementary School described his school's steering committee as follows:

> *A group of teachers who were enthusiastic and eager to get started formed a Trauma Resource Team, which I chaired. The team could see that, while there was great enthusiasm among a small group of educators, we needed to think creatively about how to get others to participate. We agreed as a committee to meet regularly*

and use several strategies to introduce key concepts about trauma and its impact on learning to the rest of the staff.

The formation of the steering committee marks the transition from an informal, ad hoc coalition to a more formal working group. Among those whom the principal should include on the committee are staff members who have been participating in the shared learning and who have demonstrated a commitment to building a trauma-sensitive school. As the initiative progresses, the committee may decide to expand membership, perhaps by including a representative from each grade level or by issuing an open invitation.

District Support

Although many individual schools have successfully worked to become trauma sensitive, the best opportunity for sustained culture change comes when multiple schools become trauma sensitive with the support of their district. This allows them to learn and build capacity together.

One district organized meetings where principals met in groups to give each other feedback.[33] Another district adopted a district-wide vision and then used a school-by-school approach, helping one school get started while seeding the next. Efforts such as these build capacity across the district, strengthen motivation, and facilitate the free flow of information and ideas among schools. They minimize interruption when administrators and staff leave or transfer to other schools in the district. Even if the district has not yet made creating trauma-sensitive schools a priority, it is very helpful for a school to find at least one supporter at the district level. At a minimum, the school should inform someone in the central administration about its efforts to become trauma sensitive and keep this person updated on the progress of the initiative.

State Support

When the state becomes involved and makes clear at the highest leadership level that trauma-sensitive schools are necessary to bolster the learning of all children, the district and school levels have the imprimatur to put trauma sensitivity on the "front burner." While we

Sharing learning with colleagues, growing a strong coalition, getting buy-in from formal and informal leaders, establishing a steering committee, and reaching out to the district for support should lay the groundwork for being able to answer the essential question that guides this first part of the process.

are certainly not suggesting that districts and schools wait for their state to develop capacity and provide support, the Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative believes that state and federal leadership in this area will be absolutely critical. The policy agenda in Chapter 3 calls for support at the state level to help schools and districts do this work.

Conclusion

Taking the steps described above—sharing learning with colleagues, growing a strong coalition, getting buy-in from formal and informal leaders, establishing a steering committee, reaching out to the district for support—should lay the groundwork for being able to answer the essential question that guides this first part of the process: *Why do we feel an urgency to become a trauma-sensitive school?* Articulating the answer, as the principal of the Roosevelt School did in the vignette that begins this section, will give shape and voice to the work and serve as the foundation for introducing the concept of trauma sensitivity to the whole staff. Our online community provides an opportunity for schools to document and share their answers to Question 1 with other schools that have decided to embark on the process of becoming trauma sensitive.

Question 2

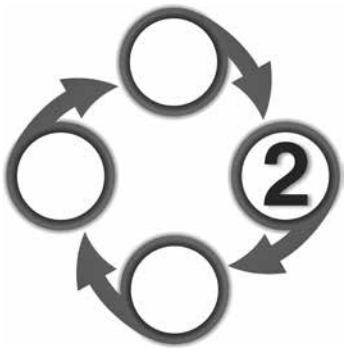
How do we know we are ready to create a Trauma-Sensitive Action Plan?

We had dedicated teachers at our school who became masters in collecting and analyzing data and planning interventions to address the needs of each child. We had high expectations for each student, but we couldn't make gains in academic achievement: our achievement scores made us the lowest-performing school in our district. We did everything we could think of, but some missing piece was keeping us from making progress. My assistant principal and I attended presentations about trauma sensitivity that were held by our district. We were aware that our students dealt with much adversity—from gunshots to home invasions to homelessness and foster care. That so many students came to school every day, despite the challenges they faced, always amazed us. The district-wide presentations gave us a strong motivation to become a trauma-sensitive school. We knew we needed to go deeper—our teachers were very good at teaching, but there was something more we needed to do. We had our entire staff read Helping Traumatized Children Learn *and participate in presentations and discussions on trauma's impact on learning, and they, too, started to realize that trauma sensitivity was the missing piece. Now that it made sense to everyone, we surveyed staff and had discussions to determine what our priorities for action would be.*

—The principal of the Lincoln School,
an urban elementary school

Roadmap for Question 2

In this section, we describe steps schools can take to expand the sense of urgency felt by a small but significant coalition to an entire staff that is ready to develop and implement a trauma-sensitive Action Plan. First, a school should provide opportunities for the whole staff to engage in shared learning about the prevalence and impact of trauma and what it means to become a trauma-sensitive school. The principal, with the help of the steering committee, must then assess whether a critical number of the staff feels a sense of urgency, has a shared understanding, and is committed to the vision of becoming a trauma-sensitive school. It is also important to assess whether staff has coalesced around some short-term, achievable priorities that will lead the school toward trauma sensitivity. If the staff is motivated and has clarified which priorities it would like to address, then the school is ready to go forward and develop a school-wide Action Plan.



Extending the Urgency through Shared Learning

Just as the initial coalition needed time to get its arms around new information about trauma and its impact on learning, the whole staff also needs time to learn together and develop a collective sense of urgency. We recommend a professional development presentation for the entire staff as one way to accomplish this goal. The presentation should cover the core concepts of trauma sensitivity: the prevalence of trauma; trauma's impact on learning, behaviors, and relationships; the need for a whole-school approach; and the attributes that define the vision of a trauma-sensitive school.

Schools should carefully consider the timing and format of a whole-school presentation, so as to maximize its effectiveness. The following examples illustrate two approaches to whole-school professional development:

- The Lincoln School held a formal presentation provided by an expert in creating trauma-sensitive schools. Recognizing the essential role played by each of the adults in her building, the principal asked all staff to attend the presentation. She arranged coverage for the custodian, the cafeteria workers, the nurse, and the secretary to participate along with teachers, student support staff, and paraprofessionals. At the next full staff meeting, the presentation was followed up with an in-depth discussion.

- At the Roosevelt School, the principal used a faculty meeting to have a full staff discussion. After having spent the first six months of the school year sharing information on the impacts of trauma on learning with staff through his weekly newsletter (see page 38), he held a full faculty meeting in February. At the meeting, the principal and members of the Trauma Resource Team led small groups in discussing vignettes from the first volume of *Helping Traumatized Children Learn*, exploring the similarities between the students described in the book and the students they had in their classrooms. The second part of

the meeting included more text-based discussions about trauma's impact on relationships, behavior, and academics and the need for a whole-school approach.

These examples demonstrate the benefits of deliberate planning and a creative format for getting buy-in from staff. Staff must be given time to learn and then to process their learning together.

Surveying the Staff

Irrespective of the format or timing of the presentation, it is crucial to elicit the staff's reaction to what has been presented. The principal at the Lincoln School developed a brief survey to gather this information. We have found this survey to be very helpful, and schools in Massachusetts have been using it regularly.

The survey is designed to be distributed at the conclusion of professional development for the entire staff. If the school uses a different approach, like a faculty meeting rather than a formal presentation as the principal at the Roosevelt School did, the steering committee will have to decide when it feels the major concepts have been covered, and distribute the survey at that time.

Staff Survey Questions

1. What are your reactions to the information you have received?
2. What ideas do you have about weaving trauma-sensitive approaches into the fabric of our school?
3. What challenges or barriers must we overcome in order to create a trauma-sensitive environment at our school?

The survey questions embody the new understanding of whole-school trauma-sensitivity that comes from looking through the Trauma Lens. Even in their simplicity they reveal helpful information. The staff's responses to the survey questions can indicate whether they are beginning to integrate this new understanding and whether they see

the need for trauma-sensitive ways of thinking and acting now that they know about trauma's impacts on learning. Responses can also show whether they understand the need for a whole-school approach to sustain these trauma-sensitive ways of thinking and acting. Together, these responses all shed light on the staff's readiness to move forward with action-planning.

Here are some of the staff's responses to the survey at the Lincoln School:

1. What are your reactions to the information you have received?

"The information about how trauma affects brain development will be very helpful in understanding students and the obstacles they face to achieve academically."

"The workshop was a reminder of all the different issues students are coming to school with. It really made me wonder what my students had been experiencing the night before. It also made me think about a couple of students who, I had noticed, had some behavior changes."

"After attending the workshop I can already see those specific behaviors in some of my students that I previously misunderstood."

"I learned that trauma impacts a child's academic performance. Many of the children cannot process information."

2. What ideas do you have about weaving trauma-sensitive approaches into the fabric of our school?

"We need to have a procedure for bringing up concerns to a team, and as a team to brainstorm strategies for success."

"All children should be able to feel free to form trusting relationships with adults and modulate their emotions. This means having all faculty members on the same page and being advocates for their students."

"I think adult support is extremely important, and sometimes students having issues need another safe place to go if they are not functioning appropriately in the classroom."

"Try to look at each child with the thought of what may have happened before school to affect their behavior."

3. What challenges or barriers must we overcome in order to create a trauma-sensitive environment at our school?

"Our curriculum can create 'stress' to keep on teaching when common sense says to stop and deal with a child's problem. Also, we have more than one or two traumatized children in each classroom. Teachers can feel overwhelmed. We need consistent, on-going help from guidance."

"Time is an issue. We don't have enough time to be able to talk together about our individual students in a deep way to really understand them and to make sure that everyone who deals with them is on the same page."

"We need to realize as a school that punitive responses will not help; they will not result in reducing inappropriate behaviors. We need to be able to teach students how to manage their behavior. Many of them need to build this skill to avoid being in trouble all the time."

"One of the challenges that I perceive is our ability as a school staff to establish positive relationships with our parents. I think our students would feel more trust in us if they knew we were working more closely with their parents."

Analyzing the Survey and "the Buzz"

After the survey is administered and collected, the principal and the steering committee should meet to review the survey responses. The survey responses, the "buzz" in the school, and

knowledge of the school community should give the committee enough data to make an initial assessment of the staff's readiness to move forward with action-planning. More specifically, the steering committee should use the information it has to look for evidence of two core aspects of readiness: whether a critical mass of the staff appears motivated to embrace the vision of a trauma-sensitive school, and whether there seems to be consensus among staff about the short-term priorities that the school can address by becoming trauma sensitive.

Do enough staff members share the urgency to become a trauma-sensitive school?

At the Lincoln School, the answers to the survey solidified the steering committee's view that staff had begun to embrace the vision of a trauma-sensitive school. Although staff was already aware of the multiple difficulties many of their students faced, many of the survey answers demonstrated a new recognition that traumatic experiences can impact learning: "I can already see those specific behaviors in some of my students that I previously misunderstood," and "I learned that trauma impacts a child's academic performance … [m]any children cannot

A shared vision is necessary for any effort that hopes to result in whole-school change. Having a common vision sets the direction and motivation for staff to work toward the same end.

process information." The answers also indicated motivation to work together as a team: "All faculty members [need to be] on the same page," and "We don't have enough time…to make sure that everyone who deals with [individual students] is on the same page." The statement, "Our students would feel more trust in us if they knew we were working more closely with their parents," reflected a deep understanding that relationships with parents help children feel safe at school. Taken as a whole, the survey responses echoed many of the attributes of a trauma-sensitive school. An interest in a whole-school approach was indicated by the statement, "We need to have a procedure for bringing up concerns to a team," and by, "We need to realize as a school that punitive responses will not help." The Lincoln School steering committee interpreted all of these responses as endorsements of the vision of a trauma-sensitive school described in Chapter 1. The responses demonstrated a willingness by staff to work together toward becoming a trauma-sensitive school.

Has staff coalesced around a set of short-term priorities that will help lead to trauma sensitivity?

It is important that staff drive the setting of priorities to ensure that there is buy-in. At this point, the steering committee's job is to review the survey responses and see if they cluster into some obvious categories that suggest priorities the staff seems motivated to address. The second survey question—*What ideas do you have about weaving trauma-sensitive approaches into the fabric of our school?*—is particularly likely to generate priorities for action, but the other two questions are equally important sources of information. Challenges and barriers, the subject of the third question, are often priorities that have been framed in a different way.

The Lincoln School's steering committee found that survey responses clustered around five general themes: *Helping students feel safe through better relationships with adults; improving mental health linkages inside and outside of school; forging better connections with parents; developing procedures for sharing information; and addressing the need for additional student support staff*. Discerning these themes is not an exact science but rather a matter of using the group's wisdom to interpret the comments of their colleagues. Further, this interpretation should not be based exclusively on the survey

responses. The steering committee at the Lincoln School also factored in what it had learned through the informal conversations that had been taking place in the building since the whole-staff presentation occurred. They were able to use multiple sources of information to take the pulse of the staff. If it is hard for the steering committee to discern any themes or if it is not possible to see many overlaps in thinking, this may be a sign that the staff is not yet ready to identify a set of priorities and move forward to action-planning. Perhaps more opportunities for learning are necessary.

Arriving at Priorities through Whole-School Discussion

Once the steering committee analyzes the survey, the principal should convene a second school-wide meeting and facilitate a discussion among all staff. Through a deep and candid conversation about the themes identified by the steering committee, the principal should try to help the staff reach consensus on the set of priorities that will guide the action-planning process. Using the Trauma-Sensitive Vision questions on page 53, the staff should also consider how the priorities they have identified will help to make their school more trauma sensitive.

The discussion at the school-wide meeting should include an opportunity for the staff to give feedback about whether the categories the steering committee created are accurate reflections of the staff's thinking. At the Lincoln School, the principal sent staff a compilation of the anonymous survey responses before the meeting, along with the steering committee's list of themes, to give them time to review the themes and be prepared for the discussion. An open conversation about the themes helped everyone deepen their thinking and refine their ideas.

As the Lincoln School staff discussed the first theme—*helping students feel safe through better relationships with adults*—they realized that the wording did not fully capture what they hoped to address. Better connections to adults were surely important, but so were better relationships with peers, the need for smoother

transitions into the school day, and the need for a regular opportunity for teachers to "take everyone's temperature" before diving into the lessons of the day. As staff spoke and shared concerns, a more comprehensive theme emerged—*helping students feel calm and safe to focus on learning as soon as they walk in the door*.

As the priorities are emerging, it is important to ensure that they will bring the school closer to the vision of a trauma-sensitive school. We suggest distributing the Trauma-Sensitive Vision questions as a handout or posting them in the room as a visual aid for guiding this discussion. At this time the purpose is not to answer each of the questions individually, but rather to remind staff in general terms of the attributes of a trauma-sensitive school as they consider their priorities.

Trauma-Sensitive Vision Questions

How will addressing this priority:

1. deepen our ***shared understanding*** of how trauma impacts learning and why a school-wide approach is needed for creating a trauma-sensitive school?
2. help the school effectively ***support all students to feel safe—*** physically, socially, emotionally, and academically?
3. ***address students' needs in holistic ways,*** taking into account their relationships, self-regulation, academic competence, and physical and emotional well-being?
4. ***explicitly connect students to the school community*** and provide multiple opportunities for students to practice newly developing skills throughout the school?
5. support staff's capacity to ***work together as a team*** with a sense of shared responsibility for every student?
6. help the school ***anticipate and adapt*** to the ever-changing needs of our students and the surrounding community?

Discussing the themes in this way, elaborating and deepening them where necessary, helped the staff coalesce around a set of concrete priorities for moving forward. The other four themes (*improving mental health linkages inside and outside of school; forging better connections with parents; developing procedures for sharing information; and addressing the need for additional student support staff*) were discussed as well, but the staff and steering committee did not feel the need to re-frame these. The steering committee left the meeting with the five themes staff had identified, charged with considering which one or ones would become the priority or priorities for the school's Action Plan.

Sometimes the discussion that emerges from using the Trauma Sensitive Vision questions reveals a need to help staff reframe themes or emerging priorities that seem to be counterproductive or *not* particularly trauma sensitive. For example, a common reaction to the whole-staff presentation is the notion that trauma sensitivity requires screening and identifying all children who have had traumatic experiences. In fact, this is not recommended and could be quite harmful. In addition to stigmatizing some children, this approach also reinforces the idea that trauma sensitivity is solely about applying interventions to *particular* children instead of creating a safe whole-school environment for *all* children. Rather than simply dismissing this kind of misconception, leadership can help lead staff through a process of reframing it. Asking about the *reasoning behind* it gives staff a chance to articulate the underlying "good intention." Perhaps there is a genuine concern among teaching staff that they lack adequate knowledge about students to meet their needs appropriately. Once this good intention is on the table, staff can have a deeper, more nuanced discussion about how to address the concern without stigmatizing students, compromising confidentiality, jeopardizing safety, or undermining the whole-school focus of the effort.[34]

It is also not uncommon for some of the themes or priorities to emerge out of staff concerns that are initially stated in a negative way. For example, the survey question about barriers might result in a number of staff sharing the view that many parents in the school are not as involved as they could be. The principal at the Lincoln School employed an effective strategy, which was to reframe negative priorities in the form of a question. By asking, *How can we communicate better with parents and*

align with their needs and concerns?, a good leader can shift the discussion to a future-oriented focus on solutions.

Thinking Ahead to Assessment

Usually, these whole-staff discussions relating priorities to the attributes of a trauma-sensitive school are popping with descriptions of the kinds of observable changes in practices and behavior the school will ultimately want to track as it charts its progress toward the long-term vision of becoming a trauma-sensitive school. It is important to start writing down the observable changes in students and in the school culture that staff hope to see as a result of addressing their priorities. This will lay the groundwork for the steering committee to think about how to assess the results of its Action Plan down the road.

Connecting priorities to the vision of a trauma-sensitive school also serves as a litmus test for the principal and steering committee as they assess readiness for moving forward. One observer of the meeting in the Lincoln School described the palpable enthusiasm in the room as this conversation took place. By the end, staff were "chomping at the bit" to move forward with creating a trauma-sensitive Action Plan. If connecting priorities to the vision of trauma sensitivity does not generate this kind of enthusiasm, it may be that the staff is not ready to move forward, the right priorities have not been identified, or more learning is needed. If this is the case, the meeting will provide the principal and steering committee with food for thought as they regroup and consider next steps.

Conclusion

Taking time for everyone in the building to learn together and generating a whole-school discussion about the staff's priorities are crucial steps in helping the steering committee answer the question, *How do we know we are ready to create a trauma-sensitive Action Plan?* It is critical to get an honest answer to this question before moving forward. Are enough staff members committed to the vision of a trauma-sensitive school? Has the staff coalesced around priorities? Depending on the answers to the survey, some steering committees have found this to be the right time to stop and consider how best to address reluctance. Sometimes a school is just not quite ready to put the pieces in place. For schools that are ready, the steps outlined above should result in a growing urgency among staff and serve as an exciting launch for the steps ahead. Having a clear sense of the staff's priorities will help the steering committee move on to the next part of the process: generating an Action Plan that is directly responsive to those priorities.

Question 3

What actions will address staff priorities *and* help us become a Trauma-Sensitive School?

After the end-of-year meeting at our school, at which the whole staff coalesced around five priorities, our steering committee met during the summer. We narrowed down the list of five and selected as our first priority: helping students feel calm and safe to focus on learning as soon as they walk in the door. It was clear from the buzz during and after the meeting that staff felt deeply about taking on this priority. Part of the reason is that it offered a trauma-sensitive opportunity to focus us as a team on setting conditions for improved learning. We felt that other staff priorities could be addressed through an overarching focus on safety and connectedness at the start of the day. We also pondered whether we could reduce office referrals by addressing this priority. Securing more student support staff and knowing more about what might be going on for children without infringing on confidentiality were also important priorities, but we couldn't go in too many directions at once. We had to table these two issues for later. Once we agreed on the top priority, we began action-planning. I can tell you that the discussion was popping with excitement. Someone—and I honestly can't tell you who came up with this—suggested that we hold a morning gathering or meeting in each class at which students could connect with adults and with each other at the start of the day. We could teach social skills, integrate our student support staff, and more. We thought this would help children calm down and feel connected at the beginning of the day so they could spend more time on the learning process.

—The principal of the Lincoln School

Roadmap for Question 3

This question marks a crucial moment in the process of becoming a trauma-sensitive school. It is where all of the staff's thinking, ideas, and conversations finally get translated into a plan for concrete action. The steering committee needs to determine which of the priorities identified by staff should be addressed first. For each selected priority, the steering committee then brainstorms a set of actions that will address that priority and also help the school become more trauma sensitive. As the Action Plan takes shape, the steering committee will use the Trauma-Sensitive Vision and Flexible Framework questions to ensure the actions will lead to whole-school trauma-sensitivity. Finally, the committee develops a plan to assess the effectiveness of implementation. When the Action Plan is complete, it is presented to the whole staff for feedback. Then the school is ready to dive in and begin taking action.

Deciding Where to Start

It is likely that the whole-school discussion (pages 52-55) will generate several priorities. The steering committee begins action-planning by determining which of these priorities the school should address first. Even though the staff may feel that all of the priorities are critical, it is important to be realistic and choose one or two to start. Down the road, the staff or steering committee might decide it is time to return to the others as it develops future Action Plans.

In selecting initial priorities, the steering committee should consider which ones seem most pressing, achievable in the short term, and likely to lead the school furthest down the road toward trauma sensitivity.[35] The goal of this first Action Plan is to leverage the greatest amount of improvement for students while still ensuring that the staff will feel the satisfaction that comes from seeing short-term, concrete results. Using this process over time, schools will be able to address additional priorities through subsequent whole-school trauma-sensitive Action Plans.

Brainstorming Actions

The steering committee next needs to reach consensus on the key actions the school will take. The actions need to address each of the chosen priorities and also help the school move closer to realizing the vision of a trauma-sensitive school. Determining which actions will accomplish these dual goals requires the steering committee to synthesize all of the ideas that have been sparked in previous discussions. It also calls on all of their creativity, professional wisdom, and intimate knowledge of students' needs and the school's strengths and challenges. It is difficult to delineate exactly how the conversation will proceed at any one school because this depends on the synergy that comes from a group of creative colleagues brainstorming together.[36] Although difficult, schools have found this to be one of the most exciting and energizing parts of the whole process.

We offer the Flexible Framework in the first volume of *Helping Traumatized Children Learn* (see pages 47-76) as a compilation of ideas from educators and others working directly in schools. These ideas can stimulate the steering committee's thinking, but are not intended to take the place of brainstorming.

At the Lincoln School, the steering committee chose to implement morning meetings as a vehicle for addressing the staff's priority of *helping children transition calmly and feel connected at the beginning of the day.*

At the Lincoln School, the steering committee chose to implement morning meetings as a vehicle for addressing the staff's priority of *helping children transition calmly and feel connected at the beginning of the day*. In addition to responding directly to a need identified by staff, morning meetings would also go a long way toward making the school trauma sensitive. Using the Trauma-Sensitive Vision questions at this point in the process can help clarify how the steering committee's proposed actions will move the school closer to the vision. The questions make clear that implementing morning meetings would establish a consistent and predictable start to the day and support students to build self-regulation and relationship skills, increasing their capacity to access the curriculum. They also highlight how planning for morning meetings would encourage teamwork and collaboration among staff.

Using the Flexible Framework to Develop an Action Plan

Once the steering committee has identified its major actions, answering the Flexible Framework questions (see page 61) will ensure that the Action Plan weaves trauma sensitivity throughout all of the school's core operations. The questions remind everyone that all the school operations are interconnected. As the steering committee considers these questions, it is important to think both about how each operation can potentially *support* implementation of the action and how it can potentially serve as an institutional *barrier* to implementation.

At the Lincoln School it seemed at first that implementing morning meetings would be relatively easy: the principal just needed to find some extra time in the morning schedule and instruct the teaching staff to hold the meetings. However, when the steering committee used the Flexible Framework questions to analyze this action in light of school operations, they identified several challenges that suggested the need for additional action steps:

Leadership: Because it was an underperforming school, the district required the Lincoln School to meet all "time on learning" standards in order to increase test scores. The principal would have to convince district leadership that morning meetings would help students build social-emotional skills while also improving their language arts skills. Further, she would try to make the case that helping students transition calmly first thing in the morning would increase their time on learning and make it more effective throughout the day. The principal would also have to make time in the schedule for educators to jointly plan the meetings so that teaching and learning goals would be consistent throughout the school. These planning meetings would also provide the opportunity to brainstorm solutions to challenges that might arise.

Professional Development: The steering committee recognized that teachers needed professional development to learn how to implement morning meetings effectively; however,

Flexible Framework Questions

- What role does school and/or district leadership play in implementation?
- What professional development is necessary for implementation?
- What resources, supports, or services need to be in place for students, families, and/or staff?
- What classroom strategies—both academic and nonacademic—support implementation?
- What policies, procedures, or protocols do we need to review, revise, and/or develop?
- What do we need to do to ensure that families are active partners in helping with implementation?

the school had no funding for such an effort. Fortunately, two teachers had previously been trained to implement morning meetings, and the steering committee asked them to provide in-house professional development. The committee asked the school psychologist and social worker to help skill-build with teachers and other staff, focusing on techniques for talking to students about their emotions. These techniques would help staff support students who might become dysregulated during the meetings (and at other times throughout the day).

Access to Resources and Services: The steering committee realized that some of the neediest—and most traumatized—students would have great difficulty sitting still and participating in circle discussions. This realization gave rise to the idea of having the school's counselors and special educators circulate among classrooms during the meetings, both to provide explicit training in social skills and to support individual students who might be triggered by the discussions. This would require a review of staff schedules to ensure availability.

Academic and Nonacademic Strategies: The steering committee discussed ideas about how to realize additional academic benefits through the implementation of morning meeting. They decided to hold monthly school-wide brainstorming sessions with faculty to develop a "school-wide word of the week" that would be introduced in the morning meetings and would focus attention on a particular aspect of social-emotional awareness. The word of the week would both help students understand and articulate their feelings and also lay the foundation for school-wide, cross-grade reading, writing, and art projects. The librarian agreed to display books related to the word of the week at all grade levels to support classroom activities.

Policies and Procedures: The school's tardy policy required that a student coming in late could not enter the classroom without first going to the office and filling out a tardy slip. The steering committee could see that this would cause some of the students most in need of smooth morning transitions to miss a significant portion of the meetings. It explored strategies for transferring the tardy procedure to the

Once the steering committee has identified its major actions, answering the Flexible Framework questions will ensure that the Action Plan weaves trauma sensitivity throughout all of the school's core operations. The questions remind everyone that all the school operations are interconnected.

classroom, where it would be addressed at the conclusion of the morning meeting. Reducing time spent in the tardy-slip line would get children into the classroom more quickly, increasing their opportunity to learn social skills and to benefit from the calming morning routines embedded in the meetings. Having the teacher fill out the tardy slip would also provide an opportunity for the teacher to engage the student personally first thing in the morning.

Collaboration with Families: The steering committee decided that the school would send regular notices home to parents about the weekly objectives of the morning meeting. This would enable the school to share examples of the activities being used so parents could reinforce the skill-building at home, facilitating a consistent approach in responding to students. The committee decided to host a series of pancake breakfasts in the fall at which staff would introduce the morning activities. They also asked the student support staff to develop a parent education program about children's social and emotional development, including strategies for how school and home could work together to support each child's growth.

By analyzing all the aspects of school operations, the steering committee was able to foresee challenges that might arise in implementing the school's actions. This process sparked their creativity and inspired ideas—like instituting a school-wide word of the week—that had not initially occurred to them. Most importantly, it helped them brainstorm all the specific action steps that would be necessary for effective and sustainable whole-school implementation.

Using the Flexible Framework to Organize Action Steps

After the steering committee has used the Flexible Framework questions to analyze their proposed action, it will be a relatively straightforward task to create an Action Plan, organizing the action steps according to the six elements of the Framework. The Action Plan that resulted from the Lincoln School's analysis is on page 64.

The Lincoln School Action Plan

1. Leadership

a. Clear with district the new procedure for handling tardy arrivals
b. Clear with district the use of time for morning meetings
c. Reorganize grade-level meetings to allow for periodic cross-grade brainstorming
d. Set up a parent-teacher team to organize pancake breakfasts

2. Professional Development

a. Invite the two staff members with training on how to run morning meeting to provide an in-service training
b. Allocate professional development time to build staff skills in leading morning meeting activities, expanding the repertoire of relationship-building approaches to use with students, and facilitating peer-to-peer connections
c. Survey staff to determine what other skills they feel they need training to develop

3. Access to Resources and Services

a. Schedule student support staff and special education teachers to be present at morning meetings and for follow-up sessions with individual students if needed
b. Schedule skill-sharing sessions among all student support staff and provide time for them to develop and offer training/consultation to teaching staff in areas where they have particular expertise

4. Academic and Nonacademic Strategies

a. Explore curriculum-based opportunities to weave social-emotional learning into all academic and non-academic subjects
b Use morning meeting as a strategy to improve access to the curriculum
c. Develop common language to be used school-wide to refer to social-emotional needs
d. Consider group work in classroom to be learning opportunities for teaching and practicing social skills

5. Policies and Procedures

a. Develop a new, classroom-based procedure for tardy arrivals, focused on a welcoming, rather than a punitive, approach
b. Develop a problem-solving orientation to use with families of students who are chronically late to school

6. Collaboration with Families

a. Share with families information about the morning meetings
b. Develop a parent education program, which would provide opportunities for parents to learn more about supporting their children's social and emotional development and alternative ways to respond to their behavior
c. Weekly communication with families about the social-emotional learning goals of the week, with some "Tips to Try at Home" to reinforce student learning and facilitate consistent approaches at home and school

Looking at the Action Plan through the Trauma Lens

After the steering committee develops an Action Plan with a whole-school focus, answering the Trauma-Sensitive Vision questions helps make sure the chosen actions will move the school closer to being trauma sensitive. Returning to the attributes of a trauma-sensitive school ensures that the plan is aligned with the long-term vision. This is important because it is easy to lose sight of the vision when the staff's energy turns to planning and implementing concrete steps.

Trauma-Sensitive Vision Questions

How will taking this action:

1. deepen our ***shared understanding*** of how trauma impacts learning and why a school-wide approach is needed for creating a trauma-sensitive school?
2. help the school effectively ***support all students to feel safe—*** physically, socially, emotionally, and academically?
3. ***address students' needs in holistic ways,*** taking into account their relationships, self-regulation, academic competence, and physical and emotional well-being?
4. ***explicitly connect students to the school community*** and provide multiple opportunities for students to practice newly developing skills throughout the school?
5. support staff's capacity to ***work together as a team*** with a sense of shared responsibility for every student?
6. help the school ***anticipate and adapt*** to the ever-changing needs of our students and the surrounding community?

The Lincoln School's use of the Trauma-Sensitive Vision questions resulted in this analysis:

Helping students feel calm first thing in the morning would help establish a school-wide feeling of safety. This would lay the foundation for a successful day of learning. Morning meeting would also provide a context for students to practice their newly developed skills. Further, it would support students in several areas:

- forming relationships with adults (through teachers handling the tardy issue with understanding) and peers (by teaching social skills)
- learning self-regulation (by teaching specific techniques for identifying and modulating emotions)
- fostering academic success (by helping students transition smoothly to school and be available to learn, and by using the word of the week and related school-wide reading/ writing activities)

Finally, the coordination required to implement morning meetings consistently across the school and the use of a school-wide word of the week would provide opportunities for teamwork and collaboration among staff.

Planning for Assessment of the Action Plan

Once the steering committee has used the Flexible Framework and the Trauma-Sensitive Vision questions to review its Action Plan, the next step is to consider how to assess progress after the action steps have been implemented. The whole-staff discussions described in Question 2 (see pages 52-55) are really the start of planning for the assessment, as those conversations naturally generate ideas about the observable changes staff will want to see as their priorities are addressed.

The steering committee should think creatively about the kinds of data it will use to track progress. Traditional data that educators routinely collect will be important. For example, two quantitative measures the Lincoln School planned to look for were decreased numbers of office referrals during the first half of the day and a reduction in the number of students who were tardy. Just as important, though, were qualitative measures that included observations and anecdotes about student and staff behavior. The Lincoln School's steering committee predicted that the staff might see more students using the language and techniques taught in the morning meetings' social skills curriculum. This would be an observable indication that this learning was taking root throughout the school. Additionally, simple measures such as more community members saying good morning to one another and the overall sense of an improved mood in the school first thing in the morning were also identified as possible measures of success. These indirect measures are valuable data points in recognizing a shift in attitudes and values in the school.

As part of planning the assessment, the steering committee should brainstorm a list of all the data—quantitative and qualitative—that it anticipates using to gauge progress. It should be clear about *how* it intends to collect each type of data. Looking at office referrals might be as simple as running a report. A strategy for assessing the overall mood in the school will probably require more thought and planning. Finally, the committee should consider a timeline for *when* it will collect its data. In the Lincoln School, for example, when would it be reasonable to expect to see a decrease in tardiness? If a survey of some kind were going to measure the staff's satisfaction with the implementation of morning meetings, when would it first be given to staff, and at what intervals would it be repeated? All of these considerations will inform the school's assessment plan.

Of course, it is important that the assessment plan tracks how the action steps are moving the school toward increased trauma sensitivity. The Lincoln School did this by using the Trauma Lens to develop a set of assessment questions they could use to track their own progress toward becoming trauma sensitive:

1. Are we seeing evidence of student learning in the areas of self-regulation, relationship building, and academic success? What sort of evidence do we see?

2. Is staff sharing ideas and tips about running morning meetings (working together as a community)?

3. Are we successful in engaging parents' support of the morning meetings and of the skills we are teaching there? How do we know this?

4. Are there indications that students are feeling safer in school? What are they?

Sharing the Action Plan with the Whole School

Next, the Steering Committee shares the Action Plan, including a plan for assessing the school's progress, with all the faculty and staff. It is important to discuss the details of the Action Plan when all staff are present and to invite questions and feedback, have a full discussion of the points raised, and clarify or add additional ideas into the plan that the steering committee may not have considered. At the Lincoln School, the steering committee worked over the summer to develop the Action Plan, and it was shared at the first staff meeting of the school year.

Conclusion

Using the Flexible Framework and the Trauma-Sensitive Vision questions helps the steering committee answer: *What actions will address staff priorities and help us become trauma sensitive?* Taking the time to identify actions that accomplish *both* of these goals helps ensure that the long-term vision of trauma sensitivity remains a focus of action-planning *and* that staff's short-term priorities are addressed through whole-school implementation. It is important to remember that this first Action Plan can only begin the process of trauma sensitivity. Making the shift to a cohesive, trauma-sensitive ecology will require regular use of the Trauma-Sensitive Vision and Flexible Framework questions, as staff continuously uses the inquiry-based process to identify and address their own priorities.

We encourage schools to share their plans on *traumasensitiveschools.org*, so that others can benefit from their creative ideas.

The next section discusses how the steering committee can use its assessment plan to monitor progress toward the long-term vision. It also describes the reviewing, reflection, and renewal that will help the school sustain its efforts to become trauma sensitive.

Question 4

How do we know whether we are becoming a trauma-sensitive school?

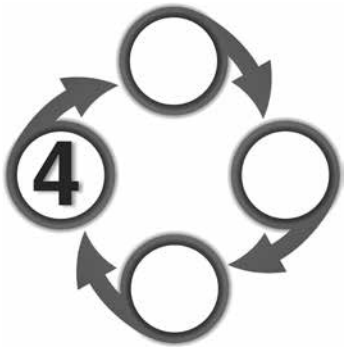
Teachers are acutely aware of which students in the school are regularly sent to the office. A member of our steering committee—in fact, the principal—overheard a conversation in the faculty lunchroom, where a teacher asked a colleague if her fourth-grade student, Jill, had moved, because she was no longer seen in the office. Jill's teacher replied that Jill hadn't moved, but explained why she hadn't been in the office: "In the morning we have her checking in with the school adjustment counselor to help her feel settled and transition to school more smoothly. It's made a tremendous difference in how she does throughout the day, and she has been much more available to learn. There are far fewer times when she needs to leave the room." Hearing about this creative solution was a learning experience for those staff members who were present. Later, the story about Jill was shared at a faculty meeting, providing an opportunity for the whole staff to reflect and share this "lesson from practice."

—The assistant principal of an urban elementary school

Roadmap for Question 4

What is noteworthy about this scenario is not only that the school had found a thoughtful solution to help a student spend more time on learning and less time in the principal's office, but also that the school recognized the value of using this small but important success as a learning moment to be shared with everyone. This scenario demonstrates the spirit of inquiry and learning that is characteristic of a trauma-sensitive school.

This section first focuses on measuring the effectiveness of the steering committee's Action Plan and then discusses ways to assess the broader culture change that should start to take place in the school. Accomplishing the goals of the Action Plan is only the first step in becoming a trauma-sensitive school. It is by repeatedly using the Flexible Framework and Trauma-Sensitive Vision questions to analyze and implement staff priorities that a school comes to internalize a way of thinking that is characteristic of whole-school trauma sensitivity. Using these two tools together allows this habit of thinking to infuse the culture and operations of the school. But how will the staff know that progress is taking place and that this transformation is starting to happen? Observing and documenting the culture change is the focus of this section.



An Ongoing, Dynamic Process

Assessing progress is a continuous process. It is important for the steering committee to maintain its schedule of regular meetings so that the Action Plan remains at the forefront of the school's agenda. Regular meetings also provide an opportunity for the plan to be tweaked and changed as challenges arise and new ideas emerge. In Question 3, we described how the staff at the Lincoln School continued to modify their Action Plan in an organic way as they went about implementing a morning meeting. Although the description may read as if the steering committee did everything at once, the alterations to the plan—like the addition of the word of the week—in fact emerged over time. An ongoing, dynamic culture of inquiry, learning, and innovation is the goal that the principal and steering committee aspire to create by using this process.

This dynamic culture must also be inclusive. While the steering committee is primarily responsible for developing the Action Plan and assessing its effectiveness, it is crucial that the rest of the staff be actively included in implementation. Having priorities that were identified by staff at the beginning helps ensure they will be motivated to participate in the ongoing effort. In addition to presenting the Action Plan (and its assessment plan) to the staff for feedback, some steering committees have also found it helpful to take fifteen or twenty minutes at each faculty meeting to update the whole staff on the progress of the plan, share outcomes as they become available, and solicit suggestions for improvements. When helpful and appropriate, the steering committee should also consider involving those outside the school—district staff, community agencies, and, most importantly, families—in discussions about implementation and assessment of the Action Plan.

Observable Measures of Progress

Throughout the ongoing assessment of the Action Plan and the school culture change that leads to trauma sensitivity, we encourage the steering committee to pay attention to the two types of measures that earlier informed the development of its assessment plan in Question 3.

The first of these is qualitative changes in the practices and behaviors of faculty, staff, and students. The vignette that starts this section reflected a number of qualitative changes: Jill was no longer experiencing the dysregulation that had made her a "frequent flyer" in the office, and teachers were sharing Jill's success with each other, demonstrating their joint efforts to help *all* students in the school, not just those assigned to their specific classrooms.

At another school, the steering committee also began to notice similar important changes, as one of its members explained:

> *As we met to review the efforts at our school, we often shared our observations with each other. In one meeting, a teacher remarked that she had seen a fellow fifth-grade teacher, Hannah, outside at recess, teaching her kids to play soccer. This was a first; Hannah had always spent recess in the classroom while her paraprofessional took the kids outside. Another committee member said that Rick, a third- grade teacher, had volunteered to lead the "lunch bunch" social-skills group that day. This had also never happened before. If we didn't identify the changes we were seeing through looking at specific adults and specific students, we wouldn't have realized the full extent of the success of our efforts. And let's face it—sometimes we might observe that a teacher, although trying really hard, is still responding to students in reactive ways. But we would also note, "There's such an effort there. We can see the willingness. Maybe we can brainstorm some suggestions with her."*

The steering committee should attempt to record these anecdotes as they occur so that individual students and staff can be recognized for their positive contributions, and so that there is a concrete way to track these changes over time.

The second type of measure involves the outcome data that schools routinely collect, including both school-wide measures and measures of individual student success. This can include measures such as time on learning (e.g., better attendance, fewer tardys, and reduced office referrals); academic achievement (including state-, district-,

We invite educators to share their anecdotes on *traumasensitiveschools.org* so that others can be inspired by these seemingly small but, in fact, very meaningful successes.

and school-based measures of student growth and proficiency); and parent involvement (e.g., attendance at parent-teacher conferences and other school functions). Many schools have included outcomes related to reducing punitive approaches to discipline. An assistant principal in a middle school shared how his school tracked its numbers of disciplinary suspensions:

> *We took a twofold approach to reducing suspensions. First, we adopted trauma-sensitive approaches to decrease the behaviors that lead to suspension. This involved improving our communication system and devising a universal pass that students could request if they needed to take some time outside the classroom to calm down. We arranged with the school secretary that if a student came down to the office with the pass, she would have some simple task available for the student, giving him/her a chance to be "helpful/successful" and eventually be able to return to class. Second, we increased our use of alternatives to suspension whenever appropriate. This included meeting with the parent and the student in lieu of suspension, which built a "bank of good will" with parents that made them more likely to join with us in addressing student behavior issues. With these school-wide strategies, we dramatically reduced both the need to suspend and the frequency of decisions to suspend. During the first year after we implemented these trauma-sensitive changes, there were literally no suspensions or expulsions in the first three or four months, and for the remainder of the year the number was dramatically reduced from the previous year, when we had suspension numbers in the triple digits.*

By sharing both types of outcome data—qualitative and quantitative—with the rest of the staff, the principal and the steering committee can help generate momentum and propel the school toward trauma sensitivity by marking the culture change as it happens. This can also be an antidote to the reluctance that some staff members may have shown prior to observing these positive changes. Celebrating big and small successes along the way not only keeps the staff motivated, but also

provides opportunities for ongoing learning. Of course, it is important to be honest and transparent with the staff and also share the challenges that arise in implementation.

Focusing the Assessment Process

While tracking observable measures of success, it is important to consider three questions.

Are we accomplishing the actions in our Action Plan?

The first and most basic question the steering committee needs to consider is whether all of the steps in the Action Plan have been or are being carried out. In the example from the Lincoln School, the committee had to make sure that morning meeting was instituted in all the classrooms. Some actions, such as getting district approval to move the tardy procedure to the classroom, might be one-time events that can be checked off when complete. Other actions, like implementing reading and writing activities based on the word of the week, are ongoing and more complex; assessing these actions may be more difficult. In either case, if the actions have not been accomplished, the committee has a list of specific steps in the Action Plan that it can review as it attempts to determine the cause and revise the plan accordingly.

At this point, returning to the Flexible Framework questions can be helpful to the steering committee. If, for example, it is proving difficult to get morning meeting off the ground, thinking through each of the core operations of the school can help identify what barriers are getting in the way and suggest potential solutions. Maybe there are glitches the steering committee did not anticipate when it went through the Framework questions as part of the action-planning process. Even if the action steps are being implemented effectively, it is still important to look back at the Framework questions so the steering committee can learn what it did well.

As the steering committee develops increased familiarity with using a whole-school approach, it may be helpful to use the following, more expanded, version of the Framework questions.

Expanded Flexible Framework Questions

How might each of the following components be serving as a support or a barrier to implementation?

1 What role does school and/or district leadership play in implementation?

Consider the following:

- actions by school and/or district leadership
- other initiatives already in place in the school
- supports for staff
- staffing arrangements

2. What professional development is necessary for implementation?

Consider the following:

- professional development topics for the full staff
- specialized topics for teachers and student support staff
- how the school's own experts and those in the community can help staff extend and reinforce the learning that begins in trainings and enhances skills through mentoring and consultation

3. What resources, supports, or services need to be in place for students, families, and/or staff?

Consider the following:

- the resources/services necessary for students, staff and/or families, including linguistically, culturally, and clinically appropriate services
- current collaborations with community providers, including ease of access and responsiveness, to determine which ones work well and which need to be reinforced/enhanced
- new services and collaborations that need to be built
- the barriers that currently exist to students' access to appropriate community services that support their school success
- procedures that support the frequent communication required for effective coordination between school-based and community-based behavioral health providers and teachers

4. What academic and nonacademic classroom strategies support implementation?

Consider the following:

- academic and nonacademic approaches being used in classrooms
- opportunities for student skill-building in the classroom and during unstructured parts of the day (lunch, recess, etc.)
- how to ensure that all educators throughout the building are consistently implementing and reinforcing the classroom approaches necessary to support implementation
- opportunities for enhancing the curriculum/classroom approaches already in place in the school

5. What policies, procedures or protocols do we need to review, revise, and/or develop?

Consider the following:

- a review of all policies, procedures, or protocols to determine which need to be adjusted, added, or deleted
- a close review and adjustment of policies related to confidential communication within the school or between the school and family
- a close review and adjustment of policies related to school discipline
- how to ensure that any changes to policies or procedures are adequately and accurately communicated to the entire school community

6. What do we need to do to ensure that families are active partners in helping with implementation?

Consider the following:

- what role families play in the school
- what information to share with families
- how to build on current family engagement efforts, including a review of the need to expand or revise these efforts
- how to ensure that the school is sensitive/responsive to particular cultural issues and needs, language barriers, etc.

These questions help ensure that all of the core school operations have been included in the Action Plan, and that their role as either a support or a barrier to school implementation has been addressed.

Are our actions addressing the staff's priorities in the ways we hypothesized?

Of course, it is possible that the actions have been fully implemented, but the data are not demonstrating what the steering committee had hoped to see. This second question asks the steering committee to look beyond the actions themselves and ensure they are having the intended effect on the staff's priorities. If not, perhaps the existing Action Plan needs to be adjusted in some way or actions that were not initially contemplated are needed.

Another school that, like the Lincoln School, chose to implement morning meetings proves to be a useful example here. When its steering committee met to review progress, both the anecdotal and

For many students, their sense of connection to school is enhanced when their parents feel welcomed and respected in the school community. A trauma-sensitive school makes deliberate efforts to engage parents and caregivers and help them connect to the school community in meaningful ways.

quantitative measures were very positive. While it appeared that students were feeling safer and calmer at the beginning of the day, the opposite was true in the lunchroom. Students continued to report incidents of bullying, and everyday it seemed there was some kind of outburst in the cafeteria. After some intensive brainstorming with other members of the staff using the Flexible Framework as a guide, the steering committee identified certain procedures that were being used in the lunchroom that undermined the strategies the morning meetings were employing in the classroom. Using the Framework, the steering committee identified the following problems: the cafeteria was a small space with only room for one line to funnel students in and out; the transition in and out of the lunchroom was too hurried and not enough time was being given to students to eat; the lunchroom staff was tense because they had to wash trays in time to be ready for the next shift of students and, as a result, they responded to student behaviors punitively. The committee worked to expand its priority so that a sense of safety and calm could happen, not only in the morning, but also at lunch time.

Even when the action seems to be right on target in addressing the identified priority, the Flexible Framework can help the steering committee focus on what led to success; this is important information for future efforts. For example, the steering committee at the Lincoln School identified professional development as a key component of the success of morning meeting: "We did a good job providing PD for everyone. All staff felt well-equipped to implement morning meeting effectively."

Has our Action Plan moved us closer to becoming a trauma-sensitive school?

This question urges the steering committee to return once again to the long-term vision of trauma sensitivity. Taken together, have the staff priorities and the actions designed to address them helped the school become more trauma sensitive? After the steering committee has become familiar with using the Trauma-Sensitive Vision questions, they can transition to this expanded version to aid them in assessing if the Action Plan has begun to result in the desired culture shift.

Expanded Trauma-Sensitive Vision Questions

1. How have our actions deepened leadership's and staff's shared understanding of how trauma impacts learning, relationships, and behavior, and why a school wide-approach is needed?

Consider leadership's and staff's understanding of the following:

- trauma is prevalent among the student population
- trauma plays a major role in the difficulties student face in learning, behavioral, and relationship issues
- students need support to develop skills to overcome these difficulties and succeed in school
- the goal is not to identify specific students but rather to create a whole-school environment that will support all students
- all students want to succeed, and educators need to look for the good intentions that underlie challenging behaviors

2. How have our actions helped the school effectively support all students to feel safe—physically, socially, emotionally, and academically?

Consider whether the school environment is:

- experienced by students as a safe place, including
  - physical safety
  - social safety
  - emotional safety
  - academic safety
- organized in such a way that all students' needs for safety are met
- based on a structure that maintains the balance between consistent expectations of all community members with the flexibility of a caring learning environment
- characterized by predictable routines and respectful relationships

3. How have our actions helped us to address all students' needs in holistic ways?

Consider whether the school focuses on:

- helping students succeed by supporting them to develop skills in four key areas that are critical to learning:
  - relationships with adults and peers

- ◆ self-regulation of emotions, behaviors, and attention
- ◆ sense of competence from achieving in academic and nonacademic areas
- ◆ physical and emotional health and well-being

- avoiding "misunderstanding" students by recognizing the connection between a student's presentation and his/her real needs

4. How have our actions helped us to explicitly connect <u>all</u> students to the school community and provide multiple opportunities for students to practice newly developing skills?

Consider whether the school focuses on:

- identifying ways to support students in making a positive connection to peers, adults, and activities
- helping individual students develop the specific skills they need to successfully make these connections
- collaborating with other staff to ensure a coordinated and comprehensive approach/plan for each student

5. How have our actions helped us to work together as a team with a sense of shared responsibility for all of our students?

Consider whether the school is a community of adults where:

- there is a structure and a culture in place that promote teamwork among educators
- staff share responsibility for all students and address together the impact of trauma on learning
- there is a process and a structure in place that can help staff figure out what to do when a child is struggling

6. How have our actions helped us anticipate and adapt to the ever-changing needs of our students and to impacts from the broader community?

Consider whether the school has in place:

- a process and structure to maintain equilibrium, help address changed circumstances, and recalibrate support as the needs of the school community shift

Moving beyond the First Action Plan

The school will know when it is time to consider identifying and addressing new priorities. At this point, the process begins anew. The steering committee can either return to priorities that were not addressed in the first Action Plan, or it can meet with staff to determine a revised set of priorities. The steering committee will develop a new Action Plan and continue with the process.

Conclusion: Becoming a Trauma-Sensitive School

As we have said, schools become trauma sensitive by engaging in an ongoing, iterative process of inquiry and learning using the Flexible Framework and the Trauma-Sensitive Vision questions. Whole-school trauma sensitivity is achieved by successfully accomplishing a first Action Plan, then a second one, then a third, and so on. In this concluding section, we share some of what we have learned from schools about important steps for extending the learning and the progress beyond the completion of the first Action Plan.

Continual Learning

Shared learning is ongoing in a trauma-sensitive school. Several schools have found that it makes sense to provide a formal refresher presentation on trauma sensitivity. Not only does this benefit new faculty and staff but it also reminds everyone of the prevalence and significant impact of traumatic experience on student learning, behavior, and relationships. We have seen it work well for staff to complete a slightly revised version of the post-presentation survey at the end of the refresher presentation. The benefits of the survey are twofold: the responses help the steering committee capture staff's newly developed thoughts and priorities, and it provides another opportunity for the staff to participate in reviewing the progress the school has been making.

Revised Staff Survey Questions

1. What are your reactions to hearing this information for a second time?
2. What new ideas do you have about continuing to weave trauma-sensitive approaches into the fabric of our school?
3. What challenges or barriers must we overcome to take the next steps in becoming a trauma-sensitive school?

Another very effective way to continue the learning is to become an active part of a learning community that extends beyond the walls of the school. Educators in other schools engaged in this process can be a source of inspiration and new ideas. This is one of the reasons many educators have told us that implementing trauma sensitivity across the entire district is the optimal approach. Sharing challenges and successes and creating linkages within a district can reinforce a school's efforts. However it is done, connecting with other educators accelerates the learning and provides an opportunity to share solutions to challenges.

Expecting the Unexpected

Schools and their surrounding communities are changing all the time. Anticipating and adapting to change is one of the core attributes of a trauma-sensitive school. There will be new students, new faculty, changes in administration, and the latest initiatives and mandates from policymakers. As the process of becoming trauma sensitive moves forward and evolves, the steering committee has to factor change into its planning. It must be open to outcome data—positive and negative—that it did not set out to observe, and it must be nimble and flexible in responding.

A Spiraling Process

Guided by using the Trauma-Sensitive Vision and Flexible Framework questions in tandem, a trauma-sensitive school continually reviews and adjusts its Action Plan and identifies and addresses new priorities. Ultimately, the school will develop a foundation of integrated learning and experience, leading to an ever-deepening understanding and more expansive actions; these, in turn, build momentum, propelling the school to further effective and sustainable actions. We can think of this as a spiral: the energy of continued forward progress fuels further growth and change, providing educators the opportunity to participate actively in building a safe and supportive school community.

The online learning community at *traumasensitiveschools.org* contains discussion forums that provide an opportunity to learn from and partner with schools in other districts and states.

Once the process of using the Flexible Framework and the Trauma-Sensitive Vision questions is embedded in the culture of the school, it essentially becomes "the way we do things around here." As the school increasingly uses these tools, one might hear:

- concerns about a child's sense of safety
- discussions at a child study meeting about assessing and addressing not only a student's academic progress but also his or her relationships with adults and peers; self-regulation of emotions, behaviors, and attention; and physical health and well-being
- teachers talking about ways to enhance academic safety in their classrooms
- staff discussing how to move away from reactive approaches to behavior and toward more proactive, relational, and empathetic approaches

- educators partnering closely with parents so that parents feel safe to share their thoughts about why a child might be struggling

- staff exchanging ideas on how to reconnect students who are disengaged

These changes are just the beginning. By using the Flexible Framework and the Trauma-Sensitive Vision questions in the context of a process of change, a school can create a dynamic, trauma-sensitive learning community, one in which everyone feels part of a team, engages in reflection and inquiry, and works together to connect students and families to the school community. It is a proactive approach that makes it possible to look ahead and consider what needs to happen next and that values both informal and formal information to assess progress. A trauma-sensitive school will prepare all students—including those who have endured traumatic experiences—to become thoughtful and engaged members of the school community.

Chapter 3

Advocating for Trauma-Sensitive Schools

The long-term public policy goal is that each school will become a trauma-sensitive environment where students feel safe, welcomed, and supported and where addressing trauma's impact on learning is at the center of the educational mission.

Schools can become environments that enable all children, including those who have faced overwhelming adversity, to focus, behave appropriately, and learn. To achieve this important goal we need a broad public policy agenda that engages every level of the public education infrastructure: national, state, district, regional, and local. Educators need the education system to establish conditions in which whole-school trauma sensitivity can flourish. When policymakers organize laws and policies according to the basic operational functions of schools rather than the siloed concerns of particular initiatives or programs, they enable teachers and administrators to think and plan in whole-school ways. When they permit schools to engage in an inquiry-based process of teamwork, planning and self-reflection, they empower educators to create dynamic learning communities capable of tailoring effective local solutions to pressing educational problems. When the federal and state infrastructure shifts to support this kind of holistic educational practice, educators will be in the best position to translate the new understanding that comes from looking through the Trauma Lens into sustainable culture change in their schools.

This means that *advocating* for the laws, policies, and funding mechanisms necessary to support trauma-sensitive schools is an indispensable counterpart to educators' efforts to *create* individual trauma-sensitive schools at the building level. Furthermore, the same ideas that guide the transformation of individual schools can also guide our advocacy efforts—starting with urgency, building a coalition, securing buy-in from leadership, generating action plans, reviewing outcomes, recalibrating efforts, and cycling through the process again. The Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative (TLPI) pledges to continue its work at the forefront of these complementary and intertwined efforts, supporting both educators and policymakers as they strive to help traumatized children learn.

Trauma-sensitive schools, while *necessary* for the school success of children impacted by trauma, are also *beneficial* to many other students, whether or not they have had overwhelming life experiences. Every student will learn more, build better relationships with teachers and classmates, experience greater self-esteem, and become more engaged in the life of the school when he or she is surrounded by a safe and welcoming trauma-sensitive environment. We prioritize the following recommendations, which are intended to help policymakers establish the conditions that will enable educators to make trauma sensitivity part of the core educational mission of their schools—thereby improving the school success of countless students.

Policy Recommendations[37]

1. **All levels of government should articulate a clear, strong, coordinated message that trauma-sensitive schools are a priority.**
   Now is a critical time for leaders at the federal, state, and local levels to capitalize on the tremendous energy that exists for reforming public education and articulate a clear, strong message to the public that safe and supportive school environments are essential to learning and can increase the success of all students. The broad-based, interdisciplinary coalition necessary for changing public policy can start in many places—advocacy organizations, community groups, parents, students, educators, universities, state departments of education, legislatures, or foundations. And the urgency that focuses the coalition's attention on trauma sensitivity can grow from many education priorities—achievement and accountability, exclusionary discipline, dropout prevention, or truancy reduction, to name a few. The critical piece is for those in leadership positions to join the coalition, however it may start, and to communicate the connection they see between the education priorities they care about and their sense of urgency for trauma sensitivity. Delivering such a message through executive proclamations, public endorsements, legislative findings, agency memoranda, letters to the editor, op-ed columns, and many other channels will raise awareness about

the impact of trauma on learning and help educators and the general public feel the sense of urgency that is the catalyst for trauma-sensitive schools.

2. **Laws, policies, and funding streams should support schools to create whole-school Action Plans that are organized according to core school operations.** Policymakers increasingly ask schools to undertake multiple initiatives associated with creating safe, healthy, and welcoming environments. Important initiatives like social-emotional learning, positive behavioral supports, antibullying, and dropout prevention can become discrete silos, leaving schools to manage many obligations at once, which often results in fragmented implementation. Infusing reforms with a common structural foundation based on school operations will help solve this problem by allowing schools to *align the many initiatives* they are asked to implement. When laws and policies support schools and districts to engage in action-planning organized around their basic operational functions (as defined by the Flexible Framework), educators can identify the strikingly similar actions that cut across all of these initiatives, increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of their efforts. Each new initiative is then allowed to function as part of an integrated whole, rather than as just one more disconnected part. While Framework-based action-planning, on its own, does not require additional resources, existing federal and state funding streams on which many schools rely should also be structured to support a school's capacity to engage in a process like that described in the Guide in Chapter 2.

3. **Professional development for educators, administrators, and allied professionals should provide opportunities to develop a shared understanding of trauma's impact on learning and build skills in using a whole-school inquiry-based approach to creating trauma-sensitive schools.** Raising awareness among all professionals who work in schools about the prevalence of traumatic experiences in childhood and the impacts these experiences can have on learning, classroom

behavior, and relationships is an important first step. However, creating trauma-sensitive schools also requires professional development that goes deeper and supports staff to build skills in inquiry-based teamwork, priority-setting, trauma-sensitive action-planning and school-wide implementation. We have worked with our partner Lesley University to convene two interdisciplinary symposia on teacher education, to host a series of day-long institutes, and to help design and pilot several courses on trauma and learning. This collaboration has taught us two important lessons: 1. professional development on trauma and learning is most effective when delivered at the *in-service* or *graduate* level, so that professionals have enough experience to put it to use, and 2. professional development is most likely to lead to whole-school change when *school- or district-based teams* participate in learning about trauma sensitivity together. Accordingly, Lesley now offers a series of graduate-level courses in trauma and learning designed for teams of educators from individual schools and districts. Whether professional development is provided by a credit-granting institution or incorporated into a school's or district's own in-service offerings, it should cover the topics discussed on pages 50–57 in Volume 1 of *Helping Traumatized Children Learn* and pages 7–10 of Appendix A in the *Final Report of the Massachusetts Behavioral Health and Public Schools Task Force* (both documents can be accessed by visiting *traumasensitiveschools.org*).

4. **Schools and outside agencies should collaborate to ensure services are an integral part of trauma-sensitive whole-school environments and that they connect students to their school communities.**

   Trauma-sensitive schools simultaneously support students at three interrelated levels. First, they foster the learning and well-being of all students by weaving trauma-sensitive approaches throughout the whole school. Second, they intervene early with preventive supports and services when students begin to experience barriers to school success. Third, they provide intensive services and participate in coordinated care with other

agencies for the small number of students who demonstrate significant needs. In order to support students effectively at all three levels, schools need access to trauma-informed[38] and culturally, linguistically, and clinically appropriate services for those who need them. Whether these services are provided inside the school, perhaps as part of special education, or whether schools help students and families access these services in a community-based setting, a goal of the services should always be to help students build skills that will enable them to be successful at school. For both internally and externally available services, it is important that providers collaborate with classroom teachers and other school staff to provide multiple opportunities for students to practice these skills in context. The key is that services be delivered in a manner that better connects students to their school communities, rather than isolating them further.

5. Schools and districts need adequate staffing to perform the administrative functions necessary for effective implementation.

Becoming a trauma-sensitive school requires engaging families in the activities of the school, identifying professional development needs, mapping available resources, providing support to classroom staff, documenting outcome data, aligning trauma sensitivity with other key initiatives in the school, establishing relationships and partnerships with community agencies, and, under ideal circumstances, coordinating with district officials and other schools in the district. The principal and the steering committee will undertake or assist with many of these functions. However, our work in schools throughout Massachusetts and as part of a statewide task force (see page 93) has taught us that implementation is most effective when a senior-level administrator at the school and/or district level is assigned primary responsibility for these functions. While each school and district will operationalize this differently, there are several critical questions that should guide the planning of stakeholders and policymakers in all jurisdictions:[39]

- Which of these functions can be performed by the principal and steering committee and which require additional support?

- Which administrative functions are appropriately allocated to the district level and which to the school level?

- What is an effective staffing level for carrying out these functions and what are the necessary professional qualifications?

- How should this position differ in different contexts: rural and urban districts, small and large districts, elementary schools and high schools?

- When is a new position required and when can these functions be carried out by reallocating responsibilities among existing positions?

- What are the implications for funding and what creative, cost-effective funding mechanisms can be developed?

6. **Laws and policies should clarify that evidence-based approaches include those that encourage schools to engage in locally based staff-driven evaluative inquiry.** The current wave of education reform has prioritized evidence-based programs and approaches. Often, this gets translated to mean approaches grounded in quantitative data generated by empirical research studies that, where possible, employ a double-blind controlled-trial research design. The Guide in Chapter 2 encourages schools to track and record quantitative data, whether or not as part of an official research study. However, we also strongly recommend that laws and policies support schools to engage in a staff-driven, inquiry-based process that generates critical evidence for identifying and implementing locally tailored solutions to educational problems. Research on organizational change suggests that staff-defined data emerging from this kind of process can play a powerful role in driving

positive educational change at the local level. When educators are empowered to determine the kinds of outcome measures—both quantitative and qualitative—that will constitute meaningful sources of evidence for their decision making, they often feel a greater sense of investment in efforts to improve their schools. As laws and policies come to recognize and incentivize this kind of evidence-based approach, it is also important that they establish feedback loops through which the rich and highly contextualized data generated by local learning communities can be shared with those setting education policy at the highest levels.

Implementing the Recommendations in Massachusetts: *An Act Relative to Safe and Supportive Schools*

The recommendations above will already be familiar to many in Massachusetts. They very closely parallel—and in some instances echo almost verbatim—recommendations made by the state's Behavioral Health and Public Schools Task Force. This interdisciplinary Task Force was established by the legislature in 2008, as part of the omnibus *Act Relative to Children's Mental Health*, to help schools improve educational outcomes for children with behavioral health challenges.[40] To reach this goal, the Task Force was charged with developing a Behavioral Health and Public Schools Framework, based on the six elements of the Flexible Framework, to assist schools in creating safe and supportive environments with collaborative services. The Task Force was also instructed to develop and pilot an assessment tool based on the Framework and to make recommendations for improving the capacity of schools to implement the Framework. TLPI was grateful to be appointed to the Task Force by the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education. The Task Force met for two-and-a-half years as it developed and piloted its Framework and Self-Assessment Tool in thirty-nine schools across the state. Its seminal Final Report to the governor and legislature in August 2011 (accessible on *traumasensitiveschools.org*) brought together the professional wisdom of contributors from many disciplines, from all levels of the education infrastructure, and from both inside and outside government.[41] This policy agenda reiterates many of the Task Force's recommendations because they were designed

to establish general conditions that would allow all of the many specific initiatives necessary for creating safe and supportive schools—including trauma sensitivity—to flourish in our state.

In 2013, *An Act Relative to Safe and Supportive Schools* was filed in Massachusetts. This legislation would implement the Task Force's recommendations—and, by extension, most of the recommendations outlined above. The bill articulates in a set of legislative findings that "a safe and supportive learning environment is a necessary foundation for increasing academic achievement, enhancing healthy development, and improving educational outcomes for all children" (see policy recommendation 1, above). The law would establish and codify a Safe and Supportive Schools Framework—based on the six elements of the Behavioral Health and Public Schools Framework—designed to help schools align the many initiatives associated with creating safe and supportive schools, including trauma sensitivity (see policy recommendation 2). It would require all schools in the Commonwealth, starting in 2016, to create and implement action plans for becoming safe and supportive using an online self-assessment tool based on the Framework. (See policy recommendations 2 and 6.) The legislation instructs the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) to create a Safe and Supportive Schools Grant Program that would fund exemplar schools (see policy recommendation 2). As of this writing, the legislation has not been enacted, but the Massachusetts legislature took a proactive step and, for FY2014, appropriated funds for DESE to create a Safe and Supportive Schools Grant Program (see page 100 for a description). The legislation also requires DESE to provide technical assistance to help schools use the online self-assessment tool and implement their Action Plans, and host regional conferences where the grantee schools can share their expertise (see policy recommendation 6). Finally, the law would create a state-level Safe and Supportive Schools Commission to assist DESE with statewide implementation, learn about successes and challenges on the ground, access data generated by use of the online self-assessment tool (see policy recommendation 6), and issue annual reports that include further recommendations to the legislature, particularly regarding statewide professional development needs (see policy recommendation 3), schools' access to clinically, culturally, and linguistically appropriate

services (see policy recommendation 4), and mechanisms for addressing staffing requirements (see policy recommendation 5).

The legislation is intended to be very cost effective; the only provisions that would impact the state budget are the Safe and Supportive Schools Grant Program (for which the FY14 appropriation was $200,000; see page 100), the regional conferences to be hosted by DESE, and DESE's staffing of the Safe and Supportive Schools Commission. Under the legislation, each school and district will develop its own Action Plan and will determine for itself whether to prioritize actions that require local expenditures. The goal is for Framework-based planning and assessment to become integral to the way schools operate, rather than to be a new program or add-on that costs more money and then goes away when there are budget cuts. If the Commission identifies common needs across the state as it learns about schools' and districts' efforts, it can include recommendations for additional funding in its annual reports to the legislature, which might result in new legislation or budgetary appropriations.

Why "Safe and Supportive" and not "Trauma-Sensitive" Schools?

In our view, the role of laws, policies, and funding streams is to establish the conditions that are necessary for trauma sensitivity to flourish. Our participation on the Behavioral Health and Public Schools Task Force taught us that the same legal and policy conditions necessary for trauma sensitivity are also necessary for a wide range of other important education reform initiatives: promotion of behavioral health, bullying prevention, dropout prevention, truancy reduction, social and emotional learning, positive approaches to discipline, and others. The Task Force conceptualized all of these initiatives, including trauma sensitivity, as essential components of creating "safe and supportive schools" and recommended using this term to bring all the initiatives together using the Flexible Framework elements.

The Safe and Supportive Schools bill, based on the Task Force's recommendations, attempts to set conditions that will lead to Framework-based whole-school action-planning in schools and districts

across the Commonwealth so that all of these initiatives can thrive. The law's requirement that schools complete an online self-assessment and develop Action Plans organized according to the basic operational functions in the Framework—and its establishment of an infrastructure of technical assistance, regional trainings, and a statewide commission all designed to support implementation—is intended to help educators build the skills necessary to engage in whole-school inquiry-based priority-setting and action-planning. The common Framework-based planning process embodied in the law will, over time, also help educators see structural overlaps among all the initiatives and identify synergies and efficiencies that make implementing initiatives easier and their efforts more effective for students. A statewide infrastructure that supports this kind of planning furthers TLPI's long-term public policy goal because it greatly facilitates any individual school's or district's efforts to become trauma sensitive and because it helps educators align trauma sensitivity with other initiatives that are important to them.

While it is appropriate and necessary for law to create this supportive infrastructure for schools, it is not possible for law to manufacture the particular sense of urgency about trauma sensitivity that is necessary to sustain any particular school's effort to become trauma sensitive. Educators must come to feel this sense of urgency on their own. Therefore, TLPI has not pursued legislation requiring all schools to become trauma sensitive and did not advocate to have the Trauma-Sensitive Vision questions incorporated into this pending legislation. Instead, we advocate for laws and policies to put conditions in place that will allow trauma sensitivity to flourish in those schools where educators do feel the sense of urgency and have decided to move forward.

Evolving Advocacy for the Flexible Framework

An Act Relative to Safe and Supportive Schools represents the culmination of many years of advocacy in Massachusetts. Individual schools have piloted the Flexible Framework. New laws and policies have been organized according to its six elements. Over time, more and more educators, policymakers, advocates, and parents have joined the growing consensus that whole-school approaches, organized around the six elements of school operations delineated in the Flexible Framework,

can support educators to transform their school cultures and enable all children to learn.

For those in other states who may be interested in pursuing a similar advocacy agenda, we share below the various laws and policies in Massachusetts that have incorporated the organizational structure of the Flexible Framework. These laws and policies were not mapped out ahead of time by design. Rather, each one represents a particular urgency that policymakers in our state were called upon to address at a given moment. Our role as advocates has been to offer the Framework as a tool to policymakers as they have tackled various education reform issues. Throughout this advocacy we have been particularly grateful for the leadership of our Department of Elementary and Secondary Education in raising awareness about and promoting the use of the Framework at both the state and local levels.

Each of the laws and policies described below has played an important role in helping Massachusetts become ready for a statewide requirement that schools develop Action Plans to create safe and supportive environments by using a common, overarching framework based on school operations. For such a requirement to be effective, stakeholders at all levels of the education system must be familiar with the Framework approach. A track record of concrete successes can demonstrate the value of the Framework. And a vocal interdisciplinary coalition will greatly increase the likelihood of passing laws. Mechanisms for elevating the voices of both parents and students are also critically important.[42] Where such groundwork has been laid, legislation like An Act Relative to Safe and Supportive Schools can serve as a model for advocates and policymakers in other jurisdictions. (Links to each of these laws and policies can be found on *traumasensitiveschools.org*.)

"Trauma-Sensitive Schools" Grant Program

In 2004, the Massachusetts legislature enacted MGL c. 69, § 1N, which instructs the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) to establish a grant program to assist school districts with "the development and establishment of in-school regular education programs and services to address within the regular education school program the

educational and psychosocial needs of children whose behavior interferes with learning, particularly those who are suffering from the traumatic effects of exposure to violence."[43] DESE accordingly established the Safe and Supportive Learning Environments (SSLE) Grant Program, which has come to be known as the "Trauma-Sensitive Schools" Grant Program. At its height, individual schools received grants of up to $25,000 per year to experiment with trauma-sensitive approaches.[44] The Flexible Framework was developed in conjunction with innovative grantee schools. TLPI then collaborated with the administrator of the grant program at DESE to adopt an evaluation tool for the grantees that was based on the six elements of the Flexible Framework.

Massachusetts Behavioral Health and Public Schools Task Force

In 2008, TLPI participated in the Children's Mental Health Campaign, a coalition of organizations that successfully advocated for passage of an omnibus Act Relative to Children's Mental Health.[45] TLPI participated in successful advocacy for a section of the law designed to help schools improve educational outcomes for children with behavioral health challenges. To reach this goal, as discussed above, the law established the Behavioral Health and Public Schools Task Force, which met for two-and-a-half years to develop and pilot the Behavioral Health and Public Schools Framework, based on the six elements of school operations contained in the Flexible Framework. It also developed and piloted a Framework-based Self-Assessment Tool schools can use to create a plan that will increase their capacity to address the educational needs faced by their students with behavioral health challenges. In August 2011, the Task Force issued its final report and recommendations to the governor and legislature.[46]

Model Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan

In 2010, the Massachusetts legislature passed a comprehensive antibullying statute that, among other things, required DESE to develop a model Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan that school districts throughout the Commonwealth could use in developing their own local plans, also required by the law.[47] The law required that the model plan be organized according to the six school operations in the Behavioral Health and Public Schools Framework. DESE's Model

Plan[48] has been used by many schools and districts as a blueprint for developing their own bullying prevention and intervention plans.

Guidance on Bullying Prevention and Special Education Students

The Massachusetts bullying prevention statute also contained provisions requiring the IEP Teams for students with autism spectrum disorders, students with disabilities impacting social skills development, and students whose disabilities make them vulnerable to bullying, teasing and harassment to incorporate into these children's IEPs strategies that help them avoid and respond to incidents of bullying.[49] In order to assist educators and parents with IEP development for these students, DESE collaborated with Massachusetts Advocates for Children, including TLPI, and other advocates to draft and publish a resource guide titled *Addressing the Needs of Students with Disabilities in the IEP and in School Bullying Prevention and Intervention Efforts*.[50] This resource guide is organized according to the six elements of the Framework and weaves together suggested strategies and considerations at both the *whole-school level* and the *individual student level* for families and educators completing the IEP process.

Guidelines for the Implementation of Social and Emotional Learning Curricula

The Massachusetts bullying prevention statute also required the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to "publish guidelines for the implementation of social and emotional learning curricula in kindergarten to grade 12." The law defined social and emotional learning as "the processes by which children acquire the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to recognize and manage their emotions, demonstrate caring and concern for others, establish positive relationships, make responsible decisions, and constructively handle challenging social situations."[51] DESE used the Framework in organizing the guidelines.[52]

Turnaround Schools Accountability Regulations

In 2010, as required by An Act Relative to the Achievement Gap, DESE promulgated new regulations governing the corrective action to be taken when schools are identified as underperforming according to

the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act. These regulations require schools so identified to implement eleven essential elements of effective schools in order to improve their performance. In order to accomplish the element "addressing students' social, emotional, and health needs," schools are required to create safe school environments that reflect the Behavioral Health and Public Schools Framework, which again is based on the Flexible Framework.[53]

Truancy Prevention Program Certification Process

For 2012, the Massachusetts legislature passed a comprehensive reform of the Commonwealth's Child in Need of Services (CHINS) system. Among the law's many provisions, it encouraged schools to establish truancy prevention programs that "evaluate the level of out-of-school support for students and families and address conditions that make students more likely to become truant." It also required DESE "to adopt regulations establishing a truancy prevention program certification process" and required that the process be "consistent with the behavioral health and public schools framework developed pursuant to section 19 of chapter 321 of the acts of 2008."[54] (As of this writing the regulations have not yet been promulgated.)

Safe and Supportive Schools Grant Program

In FY2014, the Massachusetts legislature approved a budget line item appropriating $200,000 for DESE to establish a Safe and Supportive Schools Grant Program.[55] The budget line item requires that schools receiving funding through the program implement Action Plans based on the Framework and use the self-assessment tool developed by the Behavioral Health and Public Schools Task Force. The line item also requires that districts with grantee schools create plans to support the implementation of the school-based plans.

Boston Public Schools Code of Conduct

In 2013, Boston Public Schools revised its Code of Conduct[56] to emphasize the need for safe and supportive whole-school environments that help students build social and behavioral skills through preventive, positive approaches to discipline. The Code encourages schools to tailor local solutions by organizing their actions according to the six elements of the Framework.

Conclusion

TLPI's hope is that incorporating an organizational structure based on core school operations into state- and district-level education reforms will continue to lay the groundwork for an overarching Framework, based on school operations, that will help schools align the many initiatives necessary for creating safe and supportive schools. Ultimately, this will ensure that our primary constituency—children traumatized by exposure to violence and other adverse childhood experiences—have access to the trauma-sensitive schools they need in order to be successful despite the adversities they have encountered. At the same time, *all children*—whether or not they have endured traumatic experiences or need specialized services—will also be supported by these whole-school trauma-sensitive environments to focus, behave appropriately, and learn.

Conclusion

Noted education theorist Robert Elmore reminds us that "school reform must happen from the 'inside out.'" New practices in classrooms will take hold when educators enthusiastically embrace them and then modify their school structures to accommodate these new ways of teaching.[57] Since the publication of *Helping Traumatized Children Learn*, Volume One, TLPI has learned from "early adopter" schools about how they do just that.

It has been our great joy to watch schools in Massachusetts experience the excitement that goes along with seeing the ways that trauma sensitivity can improve school success for their students. These schools have shown us how trauma-sensitive learning communities can overcome institutional barriers and improve learning, behavior, and relationships both for students who are traumatized and those who are not.

In our role as advocates we, too, have experienced the excitement and empowerment of creating a state-wide trauma-sensitive learning community. Working across disciplines with educators, parents, students, behavioral health providers, policymakers and policy advocates, gradually, over time, it has been natural and logical to advocate to modify laws, policies, and funding streams that allow for more holistic practice. We have seen how these changes in policy can accommodate new ways of trauma-sensitive thinking and acting in schools.

This Guide will grow and change as more schools use it and add their ideas and discoveries, and as policymakers join the learning community. The voice of students must be elevated. The issue of cultural competency with respect to trauma's impact at school must be explored and addressed. Working together, we can find ways to include students and strengthen cultural sensitivity. There will be additional issues that require our attention. As a learning community- online and off, we can expand our understanding of trauma's impacts on learning and advocate together for the change we know is necessary.

Appendix A: H.3528 — An Act Relative to Safe and Supportive Schools,

WHEREAS, a paramount goal of the Commonwealth is to ensure that all children receive a high quality education that enables them to reach their full potential and become responsible citizens who positively contribute to their communities and the Commonwealth; and

WHEREAS, a safe and supportive learning environment is a necessary foundation for increasing academic achievement, enhancing healthy development, and improving educational outcomes for all children; and

WHEREAS, the Massachusetts Behavioral Health and Public Schools Task Force developed a framework and accompanying self-assessment tool that facilitates the creation of safe and supportive learning environments in schools;

THEREFORE, it shall be the policy of the Commonwealth to support and promote the statewide implementation of the safe and supportive schools framework in order to create safe, healthy and supportive learning environments in schools and districts across the Commonwealth.

SECTION 1. Chapter 69 of the General Laws, as amended by section 2 of chapter 240 of the acts of 2012, is hereby amended by adding after section 1O the following section:-

Section 1P. (a) As used in this section the following words shall, unless the context clearly requires otherwise, have the following meanings:--

"Behavioral health", the social, emotional, mental and behavioral wellbeing of all students.

"Board", the board of elementary and secondary education.

"Department", the department of elementary and secondary education.

"Framework", the safe and supportive schools framework established under subsection (b).

"Safe and supportive school environment", a safe, positive, healthy and inclusive whole-school learning environment that (i) enables students to develop positive

relationships with adults and peers, regulate their emotions and behavior, achieve academic and non-academic success in school and maintain physical and psychological health and well-being; and (ii) integrates services and aligns initiatives that promote students' behavioral health, including social and emotional learning, bullying prevention, trauma sensitivity, dropout prevention, truancy reduction, children's mental health, the education of foster care and homeless youth, the inclusion of students with disabilities, positive behavioral approaches that reduce suspensions and expulsions and other similar initiatives.

"Self-assessment tool", the safe and supportive schools self-assessment tool established under subsection (b).

(b) The behavioral health and public schools framework developed under section 19 of chapter 321 of the acts of 2008 shall henceforth be known as the safe and supportive schools framework. The framework shall provide guidance and support to schools to help them create safe and supportive school environments that improve education outcomes for all students, and shall be organized according to central elements of school operations which shall include but not be limited to: (i) leadership; (ii) professional development; (iii) access to resources and services; (iv) academic and non-academic supports; (v) policies and protocols; and (vi) collaboration with families. Each school district and individual public school shall implement the safe and supportive schools framework in order to: (i) organize, integrate and sustain school and district-wide efforts to create safe and supportive school environments and (ii) coordinate and align student support initiatives.

The self-assessment tool developed by the behavioral health and public schools task force under section 19 of chapter 321 of the acts of 2008 shall henceforth be known as the safe and supportive schools self-assessment tool. The self-assessment tool shall be organized according to the elements of the framework and shall be used by schools to: (i) assess their capacity to create and sustain safe and supportive school environments for all students; (ii) identify areas where additional school-based action, efforts, guidance and support are needed in order to create and maintain safe and supportive school environments; and (iii) create action plans to address the areas of need identified by the assessment.

The board shall develop procedures for updating, improving or refining the safe and supportive schools framework and the safe and supportive schools self-assessment tool, in consultation with the safe and supportive schools commission established under subsection (f).

c) Each school shall develop and update an action plan to create and maintain a safe and supportive school environment for all students. The action plan shall be

developed by the school principal, in consultation with the school council established under section 59C of chapter 71, and shall be incorporated into the annual school improvement plan required under section 1I; provided, however, that the district superintendent may approve an alternative process and schedule for developing school action plans. Nothing in this section shall be construed as limiting the ability of the school principal to appoint a team for the purpose of developing the school's action plan; provided, however, that such team shall include a broad representation of the school and local community and the principal shall make every effort to include teachers and other school personnel, parents, students and representatives from community-based agencies and providers.

School action plans shall be designed to address the areas of need identified through the use of the self-assessment tool described in subsection (b), and shall include the following: (i) action steps and strategies for addressing the areas of need identified by the assessment; (ii) a timeline for implementing the action steps and strategies; (iii) outcome goals and indicators for evaluating the effectiveness of the initiatives and strategies set forth in the plan, which may include attendance and graduation rates, bullying incidences, number of student suspensions, expulsions and office referrals, truancy and tardiness rates, time spent on learning and other measures of school success; and (iv) a process and schedule for reviewing the plan annually and updating it at least once every 3 years.

(d) Each school district shall include in its 3 year district improvement plan required under section 1I a description of the steps the district will take to support the district-wide implementation of the safe and supportive schools framework and to facilitate regional coordination with behavioral health providers and other community organizations.

Each district shall publish on its website all school action plans created under subsection (c) for each school in the district.

(e) The department shall facilitate and oversee the statewide implementation of the safe and supportive schools framework. The department shall: (i) provide technical assistance to schools on using the self-assessment tool and developing school action plans, and to districts on coordinating with community service providers and developing strategies to facilitate the district-wide implementation of the framework; (ii) develop and disseminate model protocols and practices identified in the framework; (iii) establish a "Safe and Supportive Schools" grant program, subject to appropriation, wherein grantees shall pilot and share with other schools an effective process for developing and implementing school action plans; (iv) update its website to include the framework, the self-assessment tool, best practices and other information related to the implementation of the framework; (v) host regional trainings for schools and districts, subject to appropriation; and (vi) provide administrative support to the safe and supportive schools commission established

under subsection (f), subject to appropriation. Nothing in this section shall be construed as limiting the ability of the department to contract with individuals, external partners or other entities to support the functions established under this section; provided, however, that the department shall consider opportunities for education collaboratives or other regional service organizations to coordinate and disseminate training, technical assistance and information to school districts on the implementation of the framework.

(f) There shall be a safe and supportive schools commission to collaborate with and advise the department on the statewide implementation of the framework. The commission shall also support and provide feedback on the statewide implementation of the framework by the department. The commission shall consist of 18 members: 1 of whom shall be the commissioner of elementary and secondary education, or his designee, who shall serve as co-chair; 1 of whom shall be the secretary of education, or his designee; 1 of whom shall be a school superintendent appointed by the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents; 1 of whom shall be a school committee member appointed by the Massachusetts Association of School Committees; 1 of whom shall be a school principal appointed jointly by the Massachusetts Secondary School Administrators' Association and the Massachusetts Elementary School Principals Association; 1 of whom shall be teacher appointed jointly by the Massachusetts Teachers Association and the American Federation of Teachers Massachusetts; 1 of whom shall be a director of special education or director of student support services appointed by the Massachusetts Administrators for Special Education; 1 of whom shall be an executive director of an education collaborative appointed by the Massachusetts Organization of Education Collaboratives; 1 of whom shall be a school psychologist appointed by the Massachusetts School Psychologists Association; 1 of whom shall be a school social worker appointed by the Massachusetts Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers; 1 of whom shall be a school adjustment counselor or guidance counselor appointed by the Massachusetts School Counselors Association; 1 of whom shall be a school nurse appointed by the Massachusetts School Nurse Organization; 1 of whom shall be an advocate with experience in education, behavioral health and the impact of trauma on learning appointed by Massachusetts Advocates for Children; 1 of whom shall be a representative of the Parent/Professional Advocacy League appointed by the Parent/Professional Advocacy League; 1 of whom shall be a student appointed by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education Student Advisory Council; and 3 members to be appointed by the secretary of education: 1 of whom shall be a former member of the behavioral health and public schools task force who participated in the development and statewide evaluation of the self-assessment tool; 1 of whom shall be a former member of the behavioral health and public schools task force with experience implementing the framework; and 1 of whom shall be a representative from a community-based organization that provides services as part of the children's

behavioral health initiative and that provides mental health services in schools. The commission shall select a co-chair from among its appointees. In selecting commission appointees, priority shall be given to individuals who either were members of the behavioral health and public schools task force or who represent schools that have experience implementing the framework.

The commission shall: (i) investigate and make recommendations to the board on updating, improving and refining the framework and the self-assessment tool as appropriate; (ii) identify strategies for increasing schools' capacity to carry out the administrative functions identified by the behavioral health and public schools task force; (iii) propose steps for improving schools' access to clinically, culturally and linguistically appropriate services; (iv) identify and recommend evidenced-based training programs and professional development for school staff on addressing students' behavioral health and creating safe and supportive learning environments; (v) identify federal funding sources that can be leveraged to support the statewide implementation of the framework; (vi) develop recommendations on best practices for collaboration with families, including families of children with behavioral health needs; and (vii) examine and recommend model approaches for integrating school action plans, required under subsection (c), with school improvement plans and for using the framework to organize other school and district improvement processes.

The commission may collect and review data and feedback from schools as they complete the self-assessment tool and develop school action plans, and may convene stakeholders to facilitate solutions to challenges as they arise during the implementation process. The commission may request from the department such information and assistance as may be necessary to complete its work.

The commission shall consult with and solicit input from various persons and groups, including, but not limited to: (i) the office of the child advocate; (ii) the department of early education and care; (iii) the department of children and families; (iv) the department of mental health; (v) the department of public health; (vi) the department of youth services; (vii) the department of developmental services; and (viii) any other parties or entities the commission deems appropriate.

SECTION 2. Subsections (b) through (d), inclusive, of section 1P of chapter 69 of the General Laws shall be effective as of June 30, 2016.

SECTION 3. The department of elementary and secondary education shall begin providing technical assistance required under subsection (e) of section 1P of chapter 69 of the General Laws on or before September 1, 2014.

SECTION 4. The safe and supportive schools commission established under subsection (f) of section 1P of chapter 69 of the General Laws shall conduct its first meeting not more than 90 days after the effective date of this act, and shall

meet no less than 4 times annually. The commission shall prepare and submit an annual progress report concerning the commission's activities with appropriate recommendations, together with drafts of legislation necessary to carry out such recommendations, if any, on or before December 31 each year. The commission shall submit such annual report to the governor and the clerks of the senate and the house of representatives, who shall forward the same to the chairs of the joint committee on education, the chairs of the joint committee on mental health and substance abuse, the chairs of the joint committee on children, families and persons with disabilities, and the chairs of the house and senate committees on ways and means. The first 3 annual reports shall include recommendations regarding: (i) federal funding sources that can be leveraged to support the statewide implementation of the safe and supportive schools framework; (ii) training programs and professional development for school staff on creating safe and supportive learning environments; (iii) improving access to clinically, culturally and linguistically appropriate services; and (iv) addressing the administrative functions necessary to carry out the implementation of the safe and supportive schools framework. The commission shall continue to submit such annual reports through December 31, 2023, after which the commission shall be terminated.

Notes

Executive Summary

1 These comments were provided as testimony to the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education on December 20, 2011, in Malden, MA. The testimony was offered in support of the recommendations of the Massachusetts Behavioral Health and Public Schools Task Force. The recommendations of the Task Force are discussed in detail in Chapter 3 (p. 93).

2 This book relies on the experiences of numerous schools in Massachusetts. As we turned to organizational and educational change literature, we saw the theories of many outstanding scholars in action in these schools. Their theoretical work demonstrates why these schools were successful in creating trauma-sensitive environments and helped us understand what tools might be helpful in the process. The seminal work of Peter Senge on organizational change was highly instructive, particularly for the importance of creating what he calls learning organizations . Senge, P. (2006). *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization.* New York: Doubleday. Senge defines learning organizations as "organizations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together." Ibid., p 3. Becoming a trauma-sensitive learning community forms the foundation upon which to create a school environment that can address the needs of students in trauma-sensitive ways. The work of Hallie Preskill and Rosalie Torres has fueled our understanding of how schools can concretize these ideas through an open-ended, inquiry-based approach that allows for local solutions and accountability. Preskill, H. and Torres, R.T. (1999). *Evaluative Inquiry for Learning in Organizations*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. John Kotter also provides a succinct and thoughtful description of the process of organizational change. He describes the necessary urgency, the need for a guiding coalition, a vision, a way to overcome institutional obstacles, shorter wins, and the need to "anchor" new approaches in the culture. Kotter, J. (1996). *Leading Change*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, p 21. Turning to experts in education and psychology, Robert Pianta, writing about the role of psychologists in supporting relationships between educators and students, argues that if professionals are "armed with a solid informational and theoretical base, [they] can design (and evaluate) local solutions to local problems for individual and groups of children." Pianta, R. (1999). *Enhancing Relationships between Children and Teachers*. Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, p.11. David Osher, a leader in the field of school improvement, has influenced our work by increasing our understanding of the ways that systems need to work together on behalf of students. See Osher, D.M. (2002). "Creating Comprehensive and Collaborative Systems. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 11, 91-99. We have also benefited greatly from his central focus on the importance of school culture and ecology. Osher, D., Kendziora, K., Spier, E., and Garibaldi, M.L. (In Press). School influences on child and youth development. In Z. Sloboda & H. Petras (Eds.), *Advances in Prevention Science, Vol. 1: Defining prevention science.* New York: Springer. Richard Elmore has informed our work at the policy level. He states that policymakers and administrators should base their decisions on a clear understanding of what is needed by the "smallest unit—the classroom and school—and to let their organizational and policy decisions vary in response to the demands of work at that level." Elmore, R.F. (2004). *School Reform from the Inside Out: Policy, Practice and Performance*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, p. 5. Our policy agenda has evolved directly from the work in schools and classrooms and we will continue our efforts to ensure that schools are given the supports they need to do this work. Michael Fullan, an education system change expert, describes the necessary tri-level engagement (school and community, district, and state) to sustain new ways of educating students. We keep this in mind throughout all our work, as well as his admonition that the goal is not total alignment of these three levels, but rather fostering "mutual interaction and influence within and across these three levels." Fullan, M. (2006). "Change Theory: A force for school improvement." Victoria, BC: Centre for Strategic Education, p. 11.

3 Collaborative Learning for Educational Achievement and Resilience (CLEAR), a model for trauma-informed educational practice for Pre K-12 education, uses a Response to Intervention framework in a structured 2-3 year professional and systems development model. It has three primary objectives: linking social emotional learning and trauma knowledge in classroom practices, integration of community behavioral health partners in schools,

and development of policies and practices to support teacher trauma-informed practices. CLEAR employs an adaptation of the Attachment, Self-Regulation, and Competence (ARC) Framework as the common vocabulary for staff development and decision-making. For a description of the ARC Framework, see Kinniburgh, K.J., infra note 22. Community partners provide targeted trauma-specific interventions as educational supports for vulnerable students. For a description of the CLEAR program, see http://extension.wsu.edu/ahec/trauma/Pages/ComplexTrauma.aspx (last visited on November 10, 2013).

4 The Compassionate Schools: The Heart of Teaching and Learning is an initiative sited in the Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI). It provides training, guidance, referrals, and technical assistance to schools to create Compassionate Schools that benefit all students who attend but focus on students chronically exposed to stress and trauma in their lives. OSPI has developed a handbook which is a helpful resource. Wolpow, R., Johnson, M., Hertel, R., and Kincaid, S. (2009). *The Heart of Teaching and Learning: Compassion, Resiliency, and Academic Success*. Olympia, WA: Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. For a description of this program, see http://www.k12.wa.us/compassionateschools/ (last visited on November 10, 2013).

5 UCSF Healthy Environments and Response to Trauma in Schools (HEARTS), a program of Child and Adolescent Services, Psychiatry Department, University of California, San Francisco – San Francisco General Hospital, aims to promote school success for students who have experienced complex trauma by creating school environments that are more trauma-sensitive, safe, and supportive of their needs. The goal is to increase productive instructional time and school engagement by collaborating with San Francisco Unified School District to provide prevention and intervention at many levels of the school community: student, caregiver, school staff, school district, and policy. HEARTS takes a public health approach to addressing trauma in schools, and has found that more safe and supportive school environments benefit not only traumatized children and youth, but also those who work with these students, including school personnel and student peers. For a description of this program, see http://coe.ucsf.edu/coe/spotlight/ucsf_hearts.html (last visited on November 10, 2013).

6 The goal of the Wisconsin state trauma-sensitive schools initiative is to ensure that children impacted by traumatic experiences can learn and be successful. The effort focuses on helping schools create a culture that prioritizes safety, trust, choice, and collaboration. A multi-disciplinary work group organized by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) came together to support schools in their journey to become more aware of the impact that trauma has on learning, behavior and development, and to foster school environments where all students can grow and learn. The work group has developed a "Trauma Tool Kit" that is posted on the DPI website and is available for any school to use. The Tool Kit is comprised of a slide presentation with detailed speaker notes to use in an in-service training, a resource guide for further readings, videos, and a trauma-sensitive school checklist (developed jointly by the Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative and Lesley University), along with other materials. The Wisconsin DPI and its work group partners have sponsored a variety of professional development events to spread the effort. To find these materials, as well as articles exploring how PBIS and RtI can be used in a trauma-sensitive school, see http://sspw.dpi.wi.gov/sspw_mhtrauma (last visited on November 9, 2013).

7 "Robert" (not his real name) made this statement when he and his mother received representation from the Education Law Clinic of Harvard Law School.

8 See Anda, R.F., Felitti, V.J., Bremner, J.D., Walker, J.D., Whitfield, C., Perry, B.D., Dube, S.R., and Giles, W.H. (2006). "The enduring effects of abuse and related adverse experiences in childhood: A convergence of evidence from neurobiology and epidemiology." *European Archives of Psychiatry and Clinical Neuroscience*, 256(3): 174-86. For an updated review of ACE findings and a description of subsequent developments with the study, see Anda, R.F., Butchart, A., Felitti, V.J., and Brown, D.W. (2010). "Building a Framework for Global Surveillance of the Public Health Implications of Adverse Childhood Experiences." *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 39(1): 93–98.

9 See Danese, A., Moffitt, T.E., Harrington, H., Milne, B.J., Polanczyk, G., Pariante, C.M., Poulton, R., and Caspi, A. (2009). "Adverse Childhood Experiences and Adult Risk Factors for Age-Related Disease: Depression, Inflammation, and Clustering of Metabolic Risk Markers." *Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine*, 163(12): 1135-43.

10 See Tishelman, A.C., Haney, P., Greenwald O'Brien, J. and Blaustein, M. (2010). "A framework for school-based psychological evaluations: Utilizing a 'trauma lens.'" *Journal of Child and Adolescent Trauma*, 3(4): 279-302.

See also Fairbank, J.A. (2008). "Epidemiology of Trauma and Trauma Related Disorders in Children and Youth." *PTSD Research Quarterly*, 19(1): 1-8.

11 For a helpful summary of how environmental influences can affect whether and how children's genes are expressed, see National Scientific Council on the Developing Child. (2010). *Early Experiences Can Alter Gene Expression and Affect Long-Term Development: Working Paper No. 10*. Cambridge, MA: Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University. A definitive review of recent research on the neurobiological consequences of child abuse and neglect has been completed by the Institute of Medicine and the National Research Council. See Petersen, A., Joseph, J., and Feit, M. (Eds.). (2013). *New Directions in Child Abuse and Neglect Research*. Washington, DC: National Academies Press.

12 A detailed summary of trauma's impact on academic performance, classroom behavior, and relationships can be found in Chapter 1 of the first volume of *Helping Traumatized Children Learn*. Cole, S., Greenwald O'Brien, J., Gadd, G., Ristuccia, J., Wallace, L., and Gregory, M. (2005). *Helping Traumatized Children Learn*. Boston, MA: Massachusetts Advocates for Children, pp. 21-41. This publication is available on www.traumasensitiveschools.org.

13 Terr, L.C. (1991). "Childhood Traumas: An Outline and Overview." *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 148(1): 10-20. For a detailed discussion of trauma as a reaction to stressful events, see Cole, S. et al., supra note 12, pp. 18-20.

14 In their definitive review of the research on child abuse and neglect, the Institute of Medicine and the National Research Council stated, "What [is] hopeful is the evidence that changing environments can change brain development, health, and behavioral outcomes." Petersen, A. et al., supra note 11, p. 4-37. David Osher and colleagues express similar hope, noting, "From the perspective of risk and protection, schools may function as a protective factor, creating a safe harbor, offering challenge and a sense of mission, fostering positive relationships…developing competencies…and providing students with access to social competencies." Osher, D. et al., supra note 2, p. 2. Mary Harvey, a psychologist and founder of the Victims of Violence Program, explains how the positive impact of community can mitigate the negative effects that can result from exposure to traumatic experiences. Schools, the communities in which children spend so much of their time, hold tremendous *potential* to become powerful factors in not only mitigating the negative impacts of exposure to traumatic experiences, but actually providing a community that is an "ecological fit." Dr. Harvey states that the "construct of '[ecological] fit' refers to the quality and helpfulness of the relationship existing between the individual and his or her social context. Interventions that achieve ecological fit are those that enhance the environment-person relationship—i.e., that reduce isolation, foster social competence, support positive coping, and promote belongingness in relevant social contexts." Harvey, M.R. (1996). "An Ecological View of Psychological Trauma and Trauma Recovery." *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, (9)1: 3-23; 7. See also Harvey, M.R. (2007). "Towards an Ecological Understanding of Resilience in Trauma Survivors: Implications for Theory, Research, and Practice." *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma*, 14(1/2): 9-32.

15 Most children who experience traumatic events will not require special education, although abused children are "more likely to have below average achievement scores, poor work habits, and 2.5 times more likely to fail a grade." Cole, S. et al., supra note 12, p. 40 (citing Shonk, S.M. and Cicchetti, D. (2001). "Maltreatment, Competency Deficits, and Risk for Academic and Behavioral Maladjustment." *Developmental Psychology*, 37(1): 3-17). Trauma should not be viewed as a new disability category and it is important to use a school-wide or a universal approach that crosses regular and special education.

16 The work of Howard Adelman and Linda Taylor of the UCLA School Mental Health Project (http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/) has been foundational in articulating the need for mental health services that are integrated into the fabric of schools. We agree with their assertion that, although "schools are not in the mental health business[,]…[a]ccomplishing their mission requires that [they] play comprehensive and effective roles in dealing with the broad range of psychosocial and mental health concerns that affect learning." Adelman, H.S. & Taylor, L. (2012). "Addressing trauma and other barriers to learning and teaching: Developing a comprehensive system of intervention." In E. Rossen and R. Hull (Eds.), *Supporting and Educating Traumatized Students: A Guide for School-Based Professionals* (pp. 265-86, 265). New York: Oxford University Press. They propose an "integrated framework" for conceptualizing how mental health services can fit into a broader comprehensive effort by schools to address barriers to learning. Taylor, L. and Adelman, H.S. (2004). "Advancing mental health in schools: Guiding frameworks and strategic approaches." In K. Robinson (Ed.), *Advances in school-based mental health* (pp. 2-1 to 2-23). Kingston, NJ: Creative Research Institute. There is a growing chorus of

researchers and practitioners who advocate for this kind of integrated approach; see, for example, Atkins, M.S., Hoagwood, K.E., Kutash, K., and Seidman, E. (2010). "Toward the Integration of Education and Mental Health in Schools." *Administration and Policy in Mental Health*, 37: 40-7; O'Connell, M.E., Boat, T., and Warner, K.E. (Eds.). (2009). *Prevention of Mental, Emotional and Behavioral Disorders among Young People: Progress and Possibilities*. Washington, D.C.: National Academies Press; Kutash, K., Duchnowski, A.J., and Lynn, N. (2006). *School-Based Mental Health: An Empirical Guide for Decision-Makers*. Tampa: University of South Florida; and Nastasi, B.K. (2004). "Meeting the Challenges of the Future: Integrating Public Health and Public Education for Mental Health Promotion." *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation*, 15(3&4): 295-312.

17 Tishelman et al., supra note 10, p. 284, describe the potential negative repercussions of screening, including embarrassing or shaming a child or family and creating further difficulties (e.g., concerns about involvement with child protection, safety, or potential criminal or immigration proceedings). Moreover, it is difficult to ensure that disseminating a child's trauma history is handled with appropriate care and responsiveness at a school and many experts feel that children who speak with their teachers about their experiences often later feel regret and withdraw from these much needed relationships. The Institute of Medicine and the National Research Council also discuss several possible pitfalls associated with screening for mental health issues at school, and many of their same concerns also apply to screening for traumatic experiences. See O'Connell et al., supra note 16, pp. 229-31. By noting these cautions, we do not mean to diminish the obligation of teachers to report any incidents of child abuse, but rather to warn against probing into the details of a child's trauma history. When students disclose an experience to an educator, it is very important to make appropriate referrals, understanding that addressing the educational consequences of traumatic experiences does not depend on having full information about particularities of the traumatic experience.

18 W. Norton Grubb has cautioned that "under pressure to improve … as quickly as possible," many schools "have adopted limited strategies and random interventions." Grubb, W.N. (2012). "Narrowing the Multiple Achievement Gaps in the United States: Eight Goals for the Long Haul." In T.B. Timar and J. Maxwell-Jolly (Eds.), *Narrowing the Achievement Gap: Perspectives and Strategies for Challenging Times* (pp. 57-76; 65). Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press. Ibid. He uses the term "programmitis" to refer to this "strategy of adopting relatively self-contained interventions" that are ultimately ineffective because they "leave the core of a school intact." Ibid. He urges schools to avoid becoming "'Christmas tree schools'…with bright shiny baubles or 'enrichment' programs hanging from a trunk and branches that are thoroughly rotten." Ibid. Linda Nathan, a national expert on urban education, echoes this same skepticism: "while 'sloganeering' each year about a different initiative might provide focus and boost scores for the short term, it doesn't necessarily create a community where everyone—teachers, students, administrators, and parents—feels a sense of ownership in developing students' intellectual potential." Nathan, L.F., infra note 34, p. 5. In order for a school to use externally developed programs effectively and stay away from the pitfalls Grubb and Nathan describe, it is important that any such programs "fit" appropriately with the context of the school's own environment and culture. Edison Trickett has described the appropriate interface between externally developed interventions and local community contexts in a wide variety of system change efforts, including education reform: "An ecological… perspective on community intervention…focuses on how interventions are *coupled with the host settings*, how factors in the community or setting context affect the relevance, fidelity, and impact of such interventions, and how, through collaborative relationships, local practices can be better understood and built upon as a community resource. In so doing, the concept of intervention is broadened from a focus on specific programs or activities to a more systemic perspective…inclusive of both the requirements of the intervention *and the culture, resources, and hopes of the organizations or communities involved*." Trickett, E.J. (2009). "Community Psychology: Individuals and Interventions in Community Context." *Annual Review of Psychology*, 60: 395-419; 413 (emphasis added).

19 Readers of *Helping Traumatized Children Learn, Volume 1* will note that a sixth element has been added to the Flexible Framework since the original writing—collaboration with families—and Academic Instruction and Nonacademic Strategies have been fused together into one element. At the time of the first edition, families were not an explicit part of the framework because we felt that families should be a part of each piece. Cole, S. et al., supra note 12, p. 47. However, schools have found that families often get left out of the work unless they are explicitly considered.

Chapter 1

20 Approaches to trauma sensitivity do not require specific programs, but rather embedding approaches throughout the district's curriculum. Cole, S. et al., supra note 12, pp. 47-76. For many helpful strategies, see Craig, S.E. (2008). *Reaching and Teaching Children Who Hurt: Strategies for Your Classroom*. Baltimore: Brookes Publishing. Additionally, the Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction has published its own handbook, supra note 4, with additional approaches.

21 Behavior plans for traumatized students that are based solely on providing external consequences for observable behaviors are often ineffective. Susan Craig has noted traumatized children's "resistance to behavior management techniques that assume an understanding of cause and effect." Craig, S. (1992). "The Educational Needs of Children Living in Violence." *Phi Delta Kappan*, 74: 67-71, 68. Relatedly, according to Bruce Perry, "The threatened child is not thinking (nor should she think) about months from now. This has profound implications for understanding the cognition of the traumatized child. Immediate reward is most reinforcing. Delayed gratification is impossible. Consequences of behavior become almost inconceivable to the threatened child." Perry, B. (2002). "Neurodevelopmental Impact of Violence in Childhood." In D.H. Schetky and E.P. Benedek (Eds.), *Principles and Practice of Child and Adolescent Forensic Psychiatry* (pp. 191-203, 200). Washington, D.C.: American Psychiatric Publishing.

22 The use of these four domains (caring relationships with adults and peers, self-regulation of emotions and behaviors, success in academic and non academic areas, and physical health and wellbeing) as the organizing structure for bolstering success at both the school-wide and individual child levels is an intellectual contribution of an interdisciplinary group of experts convened by TLPI. These conclusions are based on the work of Masten, A. and Coatsworth, J.D. (1998)."The Development of Competence in Favorable and Unfavorable Environments." *American Psychologist*, 53(2): 205-220; and Kinniburgh, K.J., Blaustein, M., Spinazzola, J., and van der Kolk, B. (2005). "Attachment, Self-Regulation, and Competency: A Comprehensive intervention framework for children with complex trauma." *Psychiatric Annals*, 35(5): 424-430. They are also based on numerous studies demonstrating the educational benefits associated with bolstering each of these areas for children. On the importance of caring relationships at school, see for example Connell, J. and Klein, A. (2006). "First Things First: A framework for successful secondary school reform." *New Directions for Youth Development*, 111: 53-66, 55 (stating that "[a]ll major school reform strategies share the hypothesis that better relationships between adults and students contribute to improved educational outcomes for students"). On the importance of helping children master self-regulation of emotions and behaviors, see for example Saxe, G.N., Ellis, B.H., and Kaplow, J.B. (2007). *Collaborative Treatment of Traumatized Children and Teens: The Trauma Systems Therapy Approach.* New York: Guilford Press (reviewing literature on the importance of self-regulation skills and calling upon all adults to help children gain competence in this area). On the connection between health and academic success, see for example, California Department of Education. (2005). *Getting Results: Developing Safe and Healthy Kids Update 5: Student Health, Supportive Schools, and Academic Success*. Sacramento, CA (citing Furstenberg, F.D. et al. (1999). *Managing to make it: Urban families and adolescent success*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press [finding that students have better grades and attendance when their health needs are met]). These four domains have also been proposed as an organizing structure for a more expansive way to conduct psychological evaluations of students with traumatic histories. See Tishelman et al., supra note 10.

23 A meta-analysis of 213 school-based, universal SEL programs involving 270,034 kindergarten through high school students found an average increase of 11 percentile points in achievement test scores among students receiving quality instruction in social emotional learning (SEL) from their classroom teachers. Durlak, J., Weissberg, R., Dymnicki, A., Taylor, R., and Schellinger, K. (2011). "The Impact of Enhancing Students' Social and Emotional Learning: A Meta-Analysis of School-Based Universal Interventions," *Child Development*, 82(1): 405-432.

24 In working with schools and on behalf of individual students, a tension can sometimes exist between behavioral and relational approaches to address student behavior. As already described above, students exposed to traumatic experiences can have particular difficulty establishing trust in relationships, and may require additional support to bolster their relationship skills and connect them to the school community. Some of the behaviors they may display stem from this lack of security in relationships. Aspects of whole-school positive behavioral interventions, such as clarifying expectations, focusing on a safe and predictable learning environment, and providing consistent positive

feedback to students will be very helpful to set a positive context. However, within that context, the preferred approach with individual students is a relational approach, building on the connection between the teacher or school counselor and the student. An educator who is proactive about forming relationships with students early in the year will be able to check-in with students on a frequent basis and ensure that the student feels the teacher's positive regard. This positive regard and strong connection can form the basis for helping students articulate and cope with their feelings in the moment, for modeling how strong emotions can be effectively managed, and for engaging students in processing what has happened. Ensuring that the student feels the teacher's positive regard throughout this process is essential. However, behavioral approaches, such as planned ignoring, placing children in time-out rooms disconnected from the school community, suspending students from school—all of which intentionally withhold the opportunity to connect—may exacerbate a student's underlying fears of rejection and deprive the student of a much desired opportunity for connection. David Osher and his colleagues state succinctly that, "Behavioral approaches alone will not develop supportive relationships between and among students and adults." Osher, D., Sprague, J., Weissberg, R. P., Axelrod, J., Keenan, S., Kendziora, K., & Zins, J. E. (2008). "A Comprehensive Approach to Promoting Social, Emotional, and Academic Growth in Contemporary Schools." In A. Thomas & J. Grimes (Eds.), *Best Practices in School Psychology V, Vol. 4*. Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists, p. 6 (citing Bear, G.G. (In press). "School-wide approaches to behavior problems." In B. Doll and J.A. Cummings (Eds.), *Transforming school mental health services: Population-based approaches to promoting the competency and wellness of children.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press). An excellent resource for developing behavior plans and contracts that avoid these pitfalls by merging a deep clinical understanding and best practices for students within a behavioral construct is Minahan, J. and Rappaport, N. (2012). *The Behavior Code: A Practical Guide to Understanding and Teaching the Most Challenging Students.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

25 This shift from "I" to "we" represents what Fritjof Capra describes as a shift from "mechanistic" thinking (which focuses on parts) to "holistic" or "ecological" thinking (which focuses on the whole). Capra argues that this shift in thinking is necessary to understand the complex relationships that characterize a school community. Capra, F. (1994). *From the Parts to the Whole: Systems Thinking in Education and Ecology*. Berkeley, CA: Center for Ecoliteracy.

26 Judith Herman articulates the need for teamwork among those engaged in "creating a protected space" that can support individuals who have experienced traumatic events. She calls this work "an act of solidarity." Herman, J. (1997). *Trauma and Recovery*. New York: Basic Books, p. 247.

27 See note 19, supra.

Chapter 2

28 Preskill and Torres identify and describe five possible "beginnings" for initiating an evaluative inquiry process in a learning organization: the "problem" beginning; the "change" beginning; the "opportunity" beginning; the "strength" beginning; and the "new direction" beginning. Preskill, H. and Torres, R.T., supra note 2, p. 72-4.

29 Kotter explains that a guiding coalition is always essential in the "early stages of any effort to restructure, reengineer or retool a set of strategies." Kotter, J., supra note 2, p. 52. In building the coalition, it is important to remember that, while shared learning is critical, this learning must ultimately be translated into a series of actions that use trauma sensitivity to improve outcomes for students. Michael Fullan warns that professional learning communities are excellent groundwork for change but they should not be viewed as the end point; learning together, while very important will not in and of itself change the culture of the school. Fullan, M., supra note 2, p. 6.

30 John Kotter states that the coalition should have enough key players to avoid the blocking of progress by those who are not participating. The members of the coalition should have positive reputations so their pronouncements will be taken seriously, and the coalition should be comprised of enough proven leaders to be able to drive the change process. Kotter states that management and leadership skills are both needed: the "former keeps the whole process under control, while the latter drives change." Kotter, J., supra note 2, p. 57.

31 Although some principals may delegate day-to-day facilitation of the committee's work to an assistant principal, it is important that the principal retain ultimate responsibility for the decisions and direction of the committee.

32 There may be personal reasons underlying a staff person's reluctance. One of these may be feeling worn out from their work addressing the needs of students who are traumatized. This is often referred to as "secondary trauma." Alternatively, a staff member might be reactive due to their own personal and/or family experiences. Understanding these reasons will help the principal and steering committee exhibit patience and compassion toward those who are demonstrating reluctance.

33 Michael Fullan explains: "[W]hen principals interact across schools in this way they become almost as concerned about the success of other schools in their network as their own school." Fullan, M., supra note 2, p. 10.

34 Linda Nathan describes the process of using deeper questions to reframe a difficult issue as part of a process of school change. She provides an example of how the staff at her urban school, where she was principal, remained frustrated over not getting homework back from students until the question was re-framed by asking "what is the purpose of homework?" When everyone agreed the purpose was to give students practice, the staff rallied around the successful solution of setting up homework opportunities during the day. Nathan, L.F. (2009). *The Hardest Questions Aren't on the Test: Lessons from an Innovative Urban School*. Boston: Beacon Press, p. 9.

35 Peter Senge describes the search for the leverage point, defining it as "small, well-focused actions [that] can sometimes produce enduring improvements, if they're in the right place." Senge, P., supra note 2, pp. 63-65.

36 We like to refer to this discussion as the "black box" conversation, where all the best thinking comes together in a dynamic way, but it is hard to delineate how the conversation proceeds or exactly how or when resulting ideas and solutions are generated. Theorists have applied the term "emergent behavior" to this kind of complex group-based problem solving. For example, Robert Goldstone and colleagues describe how "self-organized collectives of people create emergent group-level patterns that are rarely understood or intended by any individual." Goldstone, R.L., Roberts, M.E., and Gureckis, T.M. (2008). "Emergent Processes in Group Behavior." *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 17(1): 10-15; 10. Peter Miller also describes this phenomenon: "Whenever you have a multitude of individuals interacting with one another, there often comes a moment when disorder gives way to order and something new emerges: a pattern, a decision, a structure, or a change in direction." Miller, P. (2010). *The Smart Swarm: How understanding flocks, schools, and colonies can make us better at communicating, decision making, and getting things done*. New York: Avery, p. 29.

Chapter 3

37 Many of the recommendations outlined here are based on recommendations contained in the Final Report of the Massachusetts Behavioral Health and Public Schools Task Force, discussed in greater detail on page 93.

38 The federal Department of Health and Human Service's Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) defines trauma-informed care in the following way: "A definition of trauma-informed approach incorporates three key elements: (1) *realizing* the prevalence of trauma; (2) *recognizing* how trauma affects all individuals involved with the program, organization, or system, including its own workforce; and (3) *responding* by putting this knowledge into practice." See www.samhsa.gov/traumajustice/traumadefinition/ approach.aspx (last visited Oct. 23, 2013).

39 These questions are adapted from Behavioral Health and Public Schools Task Force. (2011). *Creating Safe, Healthy, and Supportive Learning Environments to Increase the Success of all Students*. Malden, MA: Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (available at www.doe.mass.edu/research/reports/0811behavioralhealth.pdf) (last visited Oct. 23, 2013). This report is also accessible on traumasensitiveschools.org.

40 "Behavioral health challenges" is a broad term that includes exposure to traumatic events, mental health, substance abuse, bullying, truancy, risk of dropping out, etc.

41 See Behavioral Health and Public Schools Task Force, supra note 39.

42 In Massachusetts, the Parent Professional Advocacy League (PPAL) has played a central role in mentoring both parents and students to share their personal stories in the public policy arena. The Boston Student Advisory Council (BSAC) has been a channel for students in the Boston Public Schools to participate in the public debate

surrounding both district and state policies. These organizations have been particularly effective because they invest time and energy coaching constituents in how to use the their experiences to inform policymakers in a way that balances the power of personal testimony with caution about the vulnerability and loss of privacy that can result from public self-disclosure.

43 MGL c. 69, Sec. 1N (b) (available at *h*ttps://malegislature.gov/Laws/GeneralLaws/PartI/TitleXII/Chapter69/Section1n) (last visited Nov.11, 2013).

44 The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education maintains a section of its website devoted to trauma-sensitive schools and to the Safe and Supportive Learning Environments grant program. See *www.doe.mass.edu/tss/* (last visited Oct. 23, 2013).

45 See Section 19 of Chapter 321 of the Acts and Resolves of 2008 (available at https://malegislature.gov/Laws/SessionLaws/Acts/2008/Chapter321) (last visited Oct. 23, 2013). This law is also accessible on traumasensitiveschools.org.

46 See Behavioral Health and Public Schools Task Force, supra note 39. This report is also accessible on traumasensitiveschools.org.

47 See Chapter 92 of the Massachusetts Acts and Resolves of 2010 (available at https://malegislature.gov/Laws/SessionLaws/Acts/2010/Chapter92) (last visited Oct. 23, 2013).

48 See Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. (2010). *Model Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan*. Malden, MA (available at www.doe.mass.edu/bullying/BPIP.pdf) (last visited Oct. 23, 2013). The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education also maintains a section of its website devoted to bullying prevention and intervention. See www.doe.mass.edu/bullying/ (last visited Oct. 23, 2013). The Model Plan is also accessible on traumasensitiveschools.org.

49 See Sections 7 and 8 of Chapter 92 of the Massachusetts Acts and Resolves of 2010 (available at https://malegislature.gov/Laws/SessionLaws/Acts/2010/Chapter92) (last visited Oct. 23, 2013).

50 See Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. (2010). *Addressing the Needs of Students with Disabilities in the IEP and in School Bullying Prevention and Intervention Efforts*. Malden, MA (available at www.doe.mass.edu/bullying/considerations-bully.html) (last visited Oct. 23, 2013). This Guidance is also accessible on traumasensitiveschools.org.

51 5 See Section 16 of Chapter 92 of the Massachusetts Acts and Resolves of 2010 (available at https://malegislature.gov/Laws/SessionLaws/Acts/2010/Chapter92) (last visited Oct. 23, 2013).

52 See Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. (2011). *Guidelines for Implementation of Social and Emotional Learning Curricula K-12*. Malden, MA (available at www.doe.mass.edu/bullying/SELguide.pdf) (last visited Oct. 23, 2013). These Guidelines are also accessible at traumasensitiveschools.org.

53 See 603 C.M.R. 2.03 (4)(b)(9) (available at www.doe.mass.edu/lawsregs/603cmr2.html?section=03) (last visited Oct. 23, 2013).

54 See MGL c. 69 § 1O (available at https://malegislature.gov/Laws/GeneralLaws/PartI/TitleXII/Chapter69/Section1O) (last visited Oct. 23, 2013).

55 See Line Item 7061-9612 of Chapter 38 of the Massachusetts Acts of 2013 (available at https://malegislature.gov/Budget/FinalBudget/2014) (last visited Oct. 23, 2013).

56 See Boston Public Schools. (2013). *Code of Conduct*. Boston, MA (available at *bostonpublicschools.org/files/2013-09-05_code_of_conduct_final.pdf*) (last visited Oct. 23, 2013).

Conclusion

57 Elmore, R.F., supra note 2, pp. 3-4.

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