



AZACES TRAUMA-INFORMED SCHOOLS TOWN HALL

Recommendations Report

December 4, 2023

Introduction

On December 4, 2023, approximately 70 stakeholders from across the state gathered virtually to consider and discuss the use of trauma-informed practices in Arizona's schools. Participants were provided with a brief overview of Adverse Childhood Experiences and the value of trauma-informed practices in addressing them. The factual overview material (attached to this report) included the following overview of ACEs:

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are negative experiences and circumstances, either acute or ongoing, experienced by children and youth under 18yo. These experiences impact our physiological and neurodevelopmental sensations and often activate our system to respond with fight, flight, or freeze behaviors unconsciously. When a person (e.g. student or teacher) feels unsafe or dysregulated, moving into the survival brain is a biologically correct response. ACEs impact our abilities to learn and use executive functioning and memory, which can lead to academic deficits, chronic absenteeism, and more.

In addition to the background materials, participants heard from Tucson Superintendent Dustin Williams. Then, participants divided into two separate groups with Arizona Town Hall facilitation teams who led each group in a consensus-based discussion of the same questions. After the groups finished their separate discussions, they joined together, shared their reports and collectively committed to individual actions to help implement the ideas and recommendations agreed upon. Below are the statements from the individual groups and the actions individuals committee to take from this program.

The Importance of Trauma-informed Practices

Group 1

Children, families, and our communities deserve to be seen, heard, and supported. Of note, experiencing trauma such as removal from their parents or Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) impacts children's development and can affect their lifelong skills.

Teachers, community partners, and those who care for children must understand and implement trauma-informed practices in order to help children regulate their emotions and build strong bodies and brains. Trauma-informed practices give a sense of safety and address the underlying experiences and emotions of children. Trauma-informed practices also build up resiliency which helps children respond to their trauma and to develop skills necessary to thrive. These essential approaches can even lead to families breaking the cycle of generational trauma, which results in families healing, growing, and becoming regulated adults. Trauma-informed practices should be embedded across schools and other learning settings with all staff members to ensure consistent support that nurtures children's needs.

Additionally, teachers and those who care for children have the right to have their needs addressed such as practicing radical self-care. Self-care is an ethical obligation. We can experience secondary trauma by hearing from and working with those who have experienced trauma. Trusting,

supportive, collaborative networks are critical for success. When teachers and other caregivers take care of themselves, they can better take care of the children and parents they serve.

Families and children in the community deserve to have resources that address, mitigate, and respond to trauma. Having the information about ACEs, for example, helps us reflect on and understand how to approach our work with compassion and empathy. In turn, this helps us better meet parents where they are at, since we have the same shared goal of success for children.

Group 2

Trust and transparency as well as clarity and consistency are vital to trauma-informed care. It is also important to be consistent with messaging. If someone is facing eviction, for example, it's important to explain the process and manage expectations of available resources.

It is also vitally important that we do not require people to retell their story, essentially re-traumatizing them. It's important to de-escalate and avoid re-triggering.

We must also make sure we're culturally relevant and treated holistically. All adults helping kids must be able to share their vulnerabilities and create safe space so all who are supporting kids are providing trauma-informed services. It's necessary to hold space for people in pain to make sure we're building a community with kindness and support for everyone. We must be aware of what's going on community-wide and be prepared to deploy our resources and quickly put our training into practice.

Knowing that actions can invoke a response that we all must be aware of is imperative. We must create a safe and comfortable environment that is customizable to the person seeking help. Sometimes, the typical signs of trauma are not evident. It is important to practice as if everyone has experienced trauma to meet the needs of all people. Trauma responses can vary widely. Some of the children who get missed are those who have no response – those who are quiet and still. There can be a tendency to assume that the child is managing well, but they're not.

Self-regulation designed to build resilience is vital to make sure your best self is showing up to help others. We must ask open-ended questions to make sure you understand rather than quickly coming up with a response. When we get involved with trauma-informed care, it's important to differentiate between reacting and responding. Reactions based on emotions frequently lead to poor decisions. We must implement strategies such as ACE (Adverse Childhood Experiences) victims to help young people respond appropriately.

If a child is traumatized, there is an immediate impact. But we frequently try to combat behavior with potential trauma. We must avoid the cyclical impact of trauma.

The Importance of Trauma-informed Practices

Group 1

We have the opportunity to make school a place that children want to go where there are trusting, positive, empathetic, engaging relationships that help all children feel a sense of belonging and support. At the local level, schools can create calm rooms for children to focus. Schools can also prepare materials in a resource space where families can access what they need to thrive such as clothing, food, and access to other necessary items. Further, people-first language is core to trauma-informed practices. For example, we can say "children who have experienced trauma" rather than "traumatized children". Program leaders like principals must also be on board and actively support trauma-informed environments.

Federal and state policies as well as adequate funding are needed to create the space and the support to implement trauma-informed practices. One question we wonder is, "How much do teachers know about trauma-informed practices?" and "How is it included in teacher preparation programs in higher education?" The practices can be used to address the holistic learning experience for children. State policies can help guide what is required for teachers as they design their educational spaces and

curriculum to be trauma-informed. Trauma-informed practices should be embedded within teacher preparation programs and training to ensure those entering into educational spaces have the tools and skills necessary to support optimal development.

Group 2

It's important that the whole school and community continue learning how to be effective practitioners of trauma-informed care. CIBITS – Cognitive Behavioral Intervention for Trauma in Schools, which is a skills-based, child group intervention that is aimed at relieving symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder, depression, general anxiety, and other issues can be a fantastic resource. But many students are not in the brain state they need to be to participate, so this must be only one resource among many. We must also be informed about what an ACE score is and how to best treat in response to it. Research shows we can't necessarily treat trauma based only on ACE because there are factors like frequency and duration that are not recorded. We must look at varying factors of trauma and treat them accordingly. Traditional ACE study is also not measuring community, history, and a wide variety of traumas, including racism, poverty, violence outside the home, foster care, and other factors.

Additionally, in any system, it's important to make accommodations. The flexibility piece can be difficult in rigid systems, but the state can work to become more relationship focused. Treating from the perspective of curiosity is vital so we can understand how to make it safe for more people. Everyone must be considered when creating regulations around trauma-informed care. MTSS (multi-tiered systems of support) could be used, meaning that different ways of providing care are used. For example, sometimes group conversations are appropriate, but sometimes one-on-one care is appropriate. Care must also include parents, families, and other care givers so students are being cared for holistically and their support system is extended across the board.

One of the things we can do to make sure caregivers are supported is not “traumatizing our school systems” meaning regulations need to be enacted to protect individuals in institutions. As part of the system's support, we must destigmatize and make conversations easier. This is not an issue that should solely be addressed by educators and bring more people into the conversation. We are living in a state of sensitized stress. Providing some sort of restorative practice can be a great equalizer for people coming into the schools from all different spaces. This can level the playing field that allows people to learn and teach in a calmer, more regulated environment.

Implementation of Trauma-informed Practices

Group 1

In local communities, a team approach is needed, including trauma-informed ways to handle behavior and better understanding of how to work with parents. We have to center the voices of parents and young people through culturally sensitive and responsive approaches. This is particularly important for children who have been marginalized such as students who are LGBTQIA2S+, dual language learners, children who are unhoused, and children of immigrant parents. Young people have a voice, and we must make sure we are listening to what they want and need. We must take the time to listen and understand children's and families' social and cultural competencies and experiences. For example, trauma that parents have faced affects their home-life. Working with a school can also be triggering to a parent based on their past experiences. Academic test scores cannot be great if the children are experiencing trauma.

Our vision is to shift from the heavy focus on standardized tests to more holistic measures that help us identify children's health and wellness and how children's succeed in terms of their social-emotional resiliency, self-regulation, self-management, and other important lifelong success skills.

Group 2

We must support the adults providing childcare with programs like PRISM (flourishlearninggroup.com/prism).

All people play a role in trauma-informed care – everyone from the bus driver to the principal are caregivers and should be trauma-informed. Trauma-based care should be integrated into every person as part of a daily practice. We cannot work in silos. We must nest these practices into what schools are already doing to make it easier for teachers and others to implement trauma-informed care. Collaborative efforts to secure funding are also effective for sustaining programs. Educating city leaders and community responders like firefighters and police officers is imperative.

Anybody who interacts with a child – especially the first interaction of the day – should be trauma informed. Discipline and unstructured time can create more vulnerable situations but can also require trauma-informed care. We can't change events that traumatized, but we can have a positive impact on how a child can rebound from it.

Neurosequential Model of Education (NME), Neurosequential Model of Therapeutics (NMT) is how the brain is affected at different times, and this must also be considered when providing trauma-informed care. There isn't a curriculum for those going to school to learn to be teachers. Adding this to their education would be beneficial. Teacher colleges should include a curriculum of trauma-informed practice to prevent "surprises" when children express a behavior.

Comprehensive School Physical Activity Programming (CSPAP) is another tool – having physical activity and kinetic learning is important to make activity a cornerstone to solve multiple health-related issues. Moreover, non-academic expressive arts programs are also highly effective for self-expression, building confidence and increasing self-esteem.

The greatest opportunity to implement trauma-informed care is starting in our own lives. When we constantly work to practice regulation and operate from a fully integrated brain, we're better able to care for others. Vulnerability allows for vulnerability and can create a culture of safety. It is a good reminder to those around us that we are all human and we can all ask for help at times.

When organizations work to be trauma-informed certified, we must start from the top down and include all people who are involved so the wholistic approach can be maintained throughout the organization. This must also include a personal and community practice.

Individual Commitments to Action

Recognizing that the power to change the future begins with each individual, participants committed to take personal actions based on their experience and discussions during the Arizona ACES Consortium Trauma-Informed Town Hall. Below are individual actions that were shared.

I WILL...

- Find one person and/or organization to partner and collaborate with.
- Learn to honor current pronouns and use gender-inclusive language.
- Work on being intentional with my interactions with others.
- Listen to understand instead of respond.
- Be an advocate with and for my colleagues to recognize our own trauma responses and practice better self-care so that we can better serve our students.
- Be more intentional about showing up with empathy, leading with curiosity rather than assumptions.
- Practice self-regulation, I just downloaded the Mood Meter App.

- Commit to using a trauma-informed lens in all situations.
- Advocate for my team and school representatives that we work with to practice self-care to better serve the youth we work with.
- Advocate for the youth that go through our programs to practice self-care.
- Commit to including trauma-informed & (Social-Emotional Learning) SEL practices into the conversation as we build a multi-tiered system of support for my district.
- Be open and empathetic to all cultures, beliefs, and genders to be a safe place for those with trauma to express their anxieties, stress, and concerns.
- Continue to support educators and educational spaces in creating systems that are integrated, whole-person centered, and equitable.
- Commit to sharing the knowledge and information about Adverse Childhood Experiences.
- Highlight what trauma informed practices our district currently has in place and how we can continue to build upon and strengthen those to support our students and our staff.
- Work to connect schools to their community to address school needs.
- Prioritize and transparently practice my own personal and professional sustainability so that I can create space for others to do the same and show up as my best trauma-informed, healing-centered self to support my family, friends, colleagues and communities.
- Continue to learn the best practices in Trauma-informed care and keep advocating for my students.
- Continue to model best practices, share knowledge with colleagues, support families to the best of my ability with the resources I have, and advocate at the higher levels.
- See whether the local Elementary / Middle School in its "behavioral plan" is trauma informed for the "badly behaving second graders".
- Include a trauma-informed and a strength-based lens into all programs I create for youth and communities to help mitigate trauma in the world.
- Continue to teach, share, and encourage trauma informed practices and support in the local schools where I am connected - as well as commit to continue to learn and grow in these areas myself.
- Continue to educate myself on trauma-informed practices and better support the families I work with on a daily basis.
- Continue to support and encourage my school community as they embark on their journey to implement trauma-informed practices.

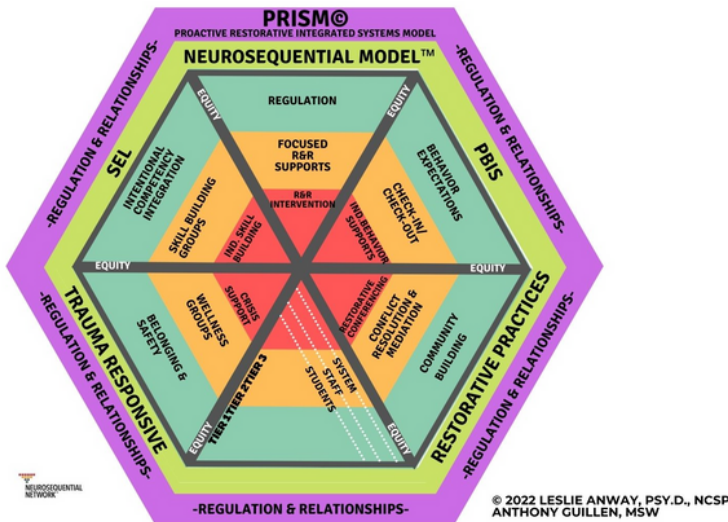
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Therefore, ACEs awareness is imperative to ensure students are healthy, safe, engaged, and supported to be ready to learn and succeed.

How Do We Create Trauma-Informed & Resilient Schools?

Trauma-Informed Schools-Based Practices



 Trauma-informed practices focus on creating a safe school culture, building relationships, and supporting students' self-efficacy.

 Trauma-informed environments allow educators the opportunity to collaborate in a way that supports all students' mental and physical health so that learning can occur.



Resilient schools =
Everyone.
Together.



Building resilient schools, akin to vibrant communities, starts with shifting the focus to holistic social conditions and systemic inequities. Transforming policies, environments, and systems at all levels is crucial. Central to this is fostering community-driven solutions, nurturing trust, and empowering community engagement. Collaborating across multiple sectors is essential for innovative, efficient progress. Emphasizing equity, with no one-size-fits-all solutions, ensures that strategies are informed by those in communities facing the greatest challenges, creating a tailored and inclusive approach to resilience.

BENEFITS OF TRAUMA-INFORMED SCHOOLS

- Increase in staff retention and wellness
- Increased student motivation, learning, and achievement
- Cost Savings
- Engaging community
- Stronger Workforce

TRAUMA-INFORMED SCHOOLS IN ACTION

- Cottonwood-Oak Creek School District-
Superintendent Steve King-
<https://vimeo.com/681883999>
- San Carlos Unified School District-
Superintendent Dr. Deborah Dennison-
<https://vimeo.com/620212578>
- Pima County School Superintendent
Dustin Williams-
<https://www.schools.pima.gov/programs/resilient-schools>