Trauma-Informed Approaches in Minnesota Schools

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Agenda

• Not an Adverse Childhood Experience (ACEs) presentation
• Not a Trauma Sensitive Schools presentation
• What this is: overview of some of the work that we have done in MPS over the past 3 years
• What we have learned about trying to develop trauma sensitive schools in a large, urban school district
• Future ideas about how to continue to move this work forward

Framework for Developing Trauma Sensitive Schools

1. ACES/Trauma Sensitive Schools 101
2. Overarching Guiding Values for Trauma Sensitive Schools
3. Brief introduction of SEL in MTSS/PBIS framework
4. Reflective Consultation and Conversation
5. Self Assessment of SEL practices/interventions at each tier
6. Importance of Self Care
Developing Trauma Sensitive Schools

• Exposure and awareness building regarding impact of ACEs
• Collectively developing trauma-informed beliefs, assumptions and attitudes collectively
• Ongoing professional development, group and individual reflection and discussion
• Alignment of current policies, practices and programs that support trauma sensitive environments at school and district level
• Safe environment for staff to practice trauma sensitive approaches and get support and coaching without performance implications
• Availability and encouragement of self care

6 Key Elements

1. Adults must adaptively change behaviors, assumptions and beliefs.
2. Much of what we need to create trauma-sensitive schools already exists.
3. All school staff need to be involved in the professional development and reflection process.

6 Key Elements

4. School leaders must create an environment where it is safe for adults to share & reflect on beliefs and practices.
5. Focus on student engagement with positive school wide plans linked with positive classroom engagement.
6. High quality, relevant instruction to engage students is essential for learning.
Brief ACES 101 review - Fundamental Beliefs

- Ideally, the whole school participates in ACES/Trauma Sensitive Schools 101 professional development.
- Central Nervous System’s main job is to help us adapt to stay alive.
- What is repeatedly experienced is what gets WIREd into our brains and physiology.
- This is where “hope” lies for schools - we can intentionally CHOOSE what “repeated experiences” we want our students to have.
- Our experiences and the adaptations necessary to “survive” those experiences get WIREd by biology.
- “Misbehavior” in one setting may be a successful adaptation in other settings and environments.

Overarching Guiding Values for Trauma-Sensitive Schools

- Repeated messages and experiences are vital to creating a cultural and climate that promotes and nurtures resilience.
- Collaboratively school need to develop values and guiding principles.
- WI Dept. of Public Instruction created these values:
  - Safety
  - Empowerment
  - Collaboration
  - Trust
  - Choice

Compassionate instruction and discipline principles

- Always empower, never disempower
- Provide unconditional positive regard
- Maintain high expectations
- Check assumptions, observe and question
- Be a relationship coach
- Provide guided opportunities for helpful participation

From The Heart of Teaching and Learning
Brief Introduction of SEL in MTSS/PBIS

Comprehensive Social Emotional Learning and MH

School(s) should implement social emotional learning (SEL) and mental health programs, interventions and strategies that will address the needs of ALL students.

Schools should have programs, interventions and strategies at each tier so that ALL students get the support they need when they need it.

WI – Trauma Informed Values in PBIS
Continuum of Behavioral and Mental Health Services at Jenny Lind Elementary

Teacher
- Supports classroom
- Supports
- Classroom
- Classroom

Behavior Dean
- Reviews
- Reviews
- Reviews

School Social Worker
- Supports individual plans
- Supports
- Supports
- Supports

School Psych
- Complete
- Complete
- Complete

SEL Social Worker
- Supports
- Supports
- Supports

Washburn Therapist
- Sees students
- Sees students
- Sees students

Reflective Consultation and Conversation
- During ACES 101 training with all staff hopefully you took some time to do some active reflection exercises to help staff reflect on:
  - What is working well and they should keep doing
  - What they might like to change
  - What supports they need to make these changes
  - Committing to meet on a regular basis to reflect on progress and discuss success and challenges
- Different mechanisms exist to have these regular reflections:
  - Staff meetings
  - Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)
  - Facilitated by expert consultant or staff/peer lead
  - Documenting what interventions and strategies are working at your school

Self Assessment of SEL practices/interventions at each tier
- School should do a self assessment/inventory of what social emotional learning (SEL) and mental health (MH) practices, interventions and programs they have at each of the 3 tiers
- Starting with what practices, interventions and programs you have ask: are they being used appropriately and they being implemented with fidelity?
- Then identify the gaps you have at each tier
- Go slowly with learning and implementing new interventions to build up confidence and know what works at your school
- Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) is a great resource for best practices
Examples of Programs/Practices

- MindUP, Yoga Calm and Zones of Regulation
- Prevention and early intervention groups using evidence based curriculums
- Universal Social Emotional Learning (e.g., Second Step)
- Skill building groups
- Responsive Classroom
- Restorative Practices
- Positive Relationships are an evidence based practice

Classroom Strategies to establish: SAFETY

- Clear and consistent rules for managing behavior and setting limits
- Accommodations to meet individual strengths and needs
- Predictable structure, relationships, and environment
- Reduce bullying and harassment
- Use seclusion/restraint only as a last resort
Classroom Strategies to establish: **EMPOWERMENT**

- Embed mental health and social emotional instruction into curriculum by teaching:
  - coping skills
  - self-regulation skills
- Provide guided opportunities for meaningful participation
- Maintaining high behavioral & academic expectations
- Build on strengths and build competency

**Importance of Self Care and Safe Environment for Adults to Experiment**

- Taking care of ourselves is critical for us being our best and modeling our best for students and families and colleagues
- Self care must not be seen as a luxury but rather an ethical duty and essential part of our job
- Building leaders should promote and actively model self-care and create an environment where self-care is valued
- School leaders must create an environment where it is safe for adults to share & reflect on beliefs and practices

**Impacts of Secondary Trauma**

- **Emotional:** anger, sadness, grief, guilt, depression, hopelessness, numbing, over-burdened
- **Physical:** headaches, stomachaches, chronic exhaustion, or hyper-arousal, illness, sleep problems
- **Personal:** isolation, withdrawn, increased risk for alcohol or substance use, pessimism
- **Workplace:** avoidance, minimizing, unmotivated, job dissatisfaction, inability to empathize, distancing student/co-workers
Responses to Secondary Trauma

- Coping with external trauma by compartmentalizing - avoiding feeling and thinking, yet the pain goes into our very bodies
- Warning signs, including:
  - A sense that I can never do enough ("My to-do list is a mile long" or "It doesn't matter what I do, I never seem to be making a dent in my pile")
  - Deliberate Avoidance ("I leave my email box full" or "I don't return phone calls")
  - Inability to empathize ("I feel emotionally asleep, numb or apathetic")
  - Grandiosity ("If I don't do this, no one will!" or "No one can do it as well or the same way I do")

Personal Resilience Plan

- What creates stress in my life?
- What helps me stay balanced physically and emotionally?
- What helps me to manage my energy?
- What helps me to quiet my mind and calm emotions?
- Who can I connect with for support and a sense of belonging?

Relationships Trump ACEs

*Schools, classrooms, and educators can help promote and strengthen resiliency by ensuring that school is: nurturing, stable and engaging.

*Positive, healthy relationships with students and other school staff are the key to creating and sustaining resilient and healing environment.
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