

Trauma-Informed School**Definitions**

A **trauma-informed school** is one in which all students and staff feel safe, welcomed, and supported, and where the impact of trauma on teaching and learning is addressed at the center of the educational mission. A trauma-informed school creates school policies, practices, and cultures that are sensitive to the needs of traumatized individuals and ensure that all individuals (students, families, and staff) meet their maximized potential.

Trauma is the response to an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life-threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, or emotional well-being. Trauma can result from a single event (single-episode or acute trauma) or it can result from multiple traumatic events over time (complex trauma). There is a wide range of experiences that can result in trauma.

Trauma sensitive school acknowledges the prevalence of traumatic occurrence in students' lives and creates a flexible framework that provides universal supports, is sensitive to the unique needs of students, and is mindful of avoiding retraumatization.

A trauma-informed approach to education is intended to improve attendance, graduation rates, and reduce incidents of behaviors that can inhibit learning.

The Bethany Public School District (District) recognizes that the developmental impact of childhood and historical trauma increases student risk for, but not limited to, academic failure, severe attendance problems, severe school behavior concerns, and possible chronic health concerns, which negatively impact student engagement and learning.

The District will strive to create physically and emotionally safe and culturally responsive environments for all staff, students, and families through effective professional staff development in school procedures and school practices and instruction in the following areas:

1. understanding the widespread impact of trauma and the role schools play in promoting resiliency;
2. recognizing the signs and symptoms of trauma in students, families, and staff; and
3. integrating knowledge about trauma and social-emotional learning in children.

Administrators must consider a student's past and their possible experiences with traumatic events when building relationships, encouraging positive behavior, and gathering resources to assist students' success.

The District will develop methods to create positive student experiences that:

1. show students they belong as valued members of their class and school;
2. reinforce student feelings that they are helpful to their classmates and valued by adults;
3. teach the students techniques to reinforce their efforts to improve on their own success; and
4. provide the students with authentic evidence of academic competence.

INSTRUCTION

Regulation 6142.103(b)

These experiences are intended to lessen the feelings of failure, alienation, uselessness, and powerlessness created by adversity. Teachers will support students in making appropriately assertive efforts to identify reasons for the lack of success and address negative emotions undermining those efforts.

The District will create supportive parental relationships fostering positive teacher/parent communications on a frequent basis through proactive discussions of student progress, assignments, class plans, curriculum focus, and student challenges.

The District may consider creating multi-year relationships between individual teachers and groups of students to better follow student growth and progress over an extended period of time.

The implementation of a trauma-informed approach is viewed by the District as an ongoing organizational change process. Such an approach is not a program model that can be implemented and simply monitored. Rather, it is a profound paradigm shift in knowledge, perspective, attitudes, and skills that continue to deepen over time. A continuum of implementation involves movement through stages, beginning with becoming trauma aware and then progressing to trauma-sensitive in response to fully trauma-informed.

A multi-faceted approach shall focus on attendance policies that focus on causes, disciplinary policies that may incorporate restorative practices, curriculum development policies that focus on social and emotional learning, and student wellness policies that promote healthy behaviors.

The Superintendent or designee is directed to implement a trauma-informed approach to education through the application of culturally responsive trauma-informed practices in the District's school and programs.

Legal References: Connecticut General Statutes § 10-15b
 Connecticut General Statutes § 10-221
 Connecticut General Statutes § 10-222d
 Public Act 19-166

Regulation approved: December 9, 2020

Regulation revised: May 10, 2023

Source: CABE

INSTRUCTION

Regulation 6142.103 – Appendix A(1)

Trauma-Informed School Checklist

According to the Trauma Learning and Policy Institute out of Harvard Law School, distinguishing between trauma-sensitive and trauma-informed schools facilitates increased understanding of addressing the needs of children who have experienced developmental trauma. In order for all students to be able to access learning and experience social, emotional, and behavioral success, a trauma-sensitive school creates a culture where all “students feel safe, welcomed, and supported.” A trauma-informed school includes collaboration with mental health providers who have expertise in supporting children who have experienced developmental trauma. The following questions are designed to help determine a school’s current status in being trauma-sensitive and informed. For each question, if the answer is yes, please feel free to provide examples of how your school is addressing the question.

School-Wide Policies and Practices	Yes	No	Examples
1. Does the school have explicitly stated methods for ensuring there are predictable and safe environments (classroom and non-classroom settings) that are attentive to transition and sensory needs?			
2. Does the school have a trauma-sensitive action plan that identifies barriers to progress and evaluates success of which all staff is aware?			
3. Do all staff who provide educational services (teachers, paraprofessionals, special educators, etc.) consider the role trauma may have on accessing learning?			
4. Do the disciplinary policies balance accountability with trauma-sensitive responses?			
5. Do all staff have access to someone with expertise in developmental trauma for consultation and observation?			
6. Are there ongoing opportunities for professional development on trauma including how to strengthen relationships, identify outside supports, and incorporate practices that assist students in their capacity to regulate emotions, behaviors, and thoughts to better access learning?			
7. Does the school have explicitly stated methods for ensuring there are predictable and safe environments (classroom and non-classroom settings) that are attentive to transition and sensory needs?			
8. Does the school have a trauma-sensitive action plan that identifies barriers to progress and evaluates success of which all staff is aware?			
9. Do all staff who provide educational services (teachers, paraprofessionals, special educators, etc.) consider the role trauma may have on accessing learning?			
10. Do the disciplinary policies balance accountability with trauma-sensitive responses?			
11. Do all staff have access to someone with expertise in developmental trauma for consultation and observation?			
12. Are there ongoing opportunities for professional development on trauma including how to strengthen relationships, identify outside supports, and incorporate practices that assist students in their capacity to regulate emotions, behaviors, and thoughts to better access learning?			

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Regulation 6142.103 – Appendix A(2)

Classroom Strategies and Techniques	Yes	No	Examples
1. Are behavioral expectations communicated in clear, concise, and positive ways with common and consistent goals established for all students?			
2. When considering building competencies across domains, are students' strengths and interests incorporated into planning?			
3. Are activities structured in predictable and emotionally safe ways?			
4. Do teachers provide students opportunities to practice emotional, behavioral, and cognitive regulation in classrooms?			
5. Do teachers employ multi-modal strategies when teaching content?			
6. Do students have opportunities to experience facilitated healthy peer interactions in the classroom?			
Collaboration and Linkage to Mental Health	Yes	No	Examples
1. Does the school have policies and practices that describe how, when, and where to refer families for mental health supports that staff understands and implements?			
2. Does the school have access to trauma competent services for prevention, early intervention, treatment, and crisis intervention?			
3. Does the school have protocols in place that support students in transitioning back from short or long-term treatment placements that are designed to be tailored to a student's unique needs?			
4. Do staff have regular access to mental health providers who have expertise in developmental trauma to support their interaction with students and families?			
Family Partnerships	Yes	No	Examples
1. Do staff receive training in developing a broad repertoire of skills to actively and respectfully engage with families from diverse backgrounds?			
2. Does the school have multiple strategies that allow for flexibility in meeting individual family needs including alternate meeting places and times as well as ensuring interpreters and translated materials are available?			
3. Are staff trained in confidentiality and regularly practice that when communicating about students and families?			
Community Linkages	Yes	No	Examples
1. Does the school have ongoing relationships and partnerships with state human service and community-based agencies to facilitate access to resources?			
2. Does the school have the capacity to leverage funding in partnership with ancillary agencies in order to increase support available to students and families?			

Notes:

Trauma-Sensitive School Checklist

A trauma-sensitive school is a safe and respectful environment that enables students to build caring relationships with adults and peers, self-regulate their emotions and behaviors, and succeed academically while supporting their physical health and well-being.

This checklist is organized by five components involved in creating a trauma-sensitive school. Each component consists of several elements. Assess the school on each element. Consider if the element is not in place at all, is partially in place, is mostly in place, or is fully in place.

School-wide Policies and Practices

- School contains predictable and safe environments (including classrooms, hallways, playgrounds, and school buses) that are attentive to transitions and sensory needs.
- Leadership develops and implements a trauma-sensitive action plan, identifies barriers to progress, and evaluates success.
- General and special educators consider the role that trauma may be playing in learning difficulties at school.
- Discipline policies balance accountability with an understanding of trauma.
- Support for staff is available on a regular basis, including supervision and/or consultation with a trauma expert, classroom observations, and opportunities for teamwork.
- Opportunities exist for confidential discussion about students.
- School participates in safety planning, including enforcement of court orders, transferring records safely, restricting access to student-record information, and sensitive handling of reports of suspected incidents of abuse or neglect.
- On-going professional development opportunities occur as determined by staff needs assessments.

Classroom Strategies and Techniques

- Expectations are communicated in clear, concise, and positive ways, and goals for achievement of students affected by traumatic experiences are consistent with the rest of the class.
- Student's strengths and interests are encouraged and incorporated.
- Activities are structured in predictable and emotionally safe ways.
- Opportunities exist for students to learn and practice regulation of emotions and modulation of behaviors.
- Classrooms employ positive supports for behavior.
- Information is presented and learning is assessed using multiple modes.
- Opportunities exist for learning how to interact effectively with others.
- Opportunities exist for learning how to plan and follow through on assignments.

Collaboration and Linkages with Mental Health

- Policies describe how, when, and where to refer families for mental health supports; and staff actively facilitate and follow through in supporting families' access to trauma-competent mental health services.
- Access exists to trauma-competent services for prevention, early intervention, treatment, and crisis intervention.
- Protocols exist for helping students transition back to school from other placements.
- Mental health services are linguistically appropriate and culturally competent.
- Staff has regular opportunities for assistance from mental health providers in responding appropriately and confidentially to families.

Family Partnerships

- Staff uses a repertoire of skills to actively engage and build positive relationships with families.
- Strategies to involve parents are tailored to meet individual family needs and include flexibility in selecting times and places for meetings, availability of interpreters, and translated materials.
- All communications with and regarding families respect the bounds of confidentiality.

Community Linkages

- School develops and maintains ongoing partnerships with state human service agencies and with community-based agencies to facilitate access to resources.
- When possible, school and community agencies leverage funding to increase the array of supports available.

Source: **Lesley University**, Center for Special Education

Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative, Massachusetts Advocates for Children, and the Legal Services Center of Harvard Law School