Introduction
COVID-19 requires schools to be more adaptable and creative than ever before. Educating students, supporting staff, and fulfilling the key roles that schools play in keeping communities well all demand leaders and educators to step into uncharted territory. All of this change is taking place during a time where leaders and educators are also navigating the stress created by a global pandemic, concerns about the well-being of kids and families, and new financial hardships. For these reasons, and more, applying our trauma lens and following the principles of trauma-informed for decision making and communication is essential. In partnership with our Educational Leader's Workgroup, Alive & Well Communities invites you to review the following recommendations, which are for educators, by educators.

Principles in Action: Decision Making

- We are already seeing how COVID-19 is disproportionately impacting Black and Brown communities. Physical safety includes physical well-being. Decisions should acknowledge and address how Black and Brown members of your school community will be disproportionately impacted. Specific solutions that directly target this inequitable impact should be stated.

- Before COVID-19 began, educators and families already had varying levels of trust and distrust of school districts. Leaders should remember that distrust they feel from their staff or families is real and this is a time where districts must work to be transparent in how and why decisions are made. Collaboration during times of stress and quick, intense decision making is often forgotten. Decision-making processes must be outlined by leadership with an intentional focus on allowing as many stakeholders as possible to participate in the process. Not all decisions can be collaborative, but where there is room for collaboration, it is essential to prioritize.

- Many people are feeling a distinct lack of control during this crisis. Choice and empowerment are essential components of well-being and resilience. Where is there room to allow students and families to choose methods for learning? How can staff choose to navigate their schedule given new childcare or online teaching demands?

Safety
Ensure physical and emotional safety, recognizing and responding to how racial, ethnic, religious or sexual identity may impact safety.

Trustworthiness
Foster genuine relationships and practices that build trust, making tasks clear, maintaining appropriate boundaries and creating norms for interaction that promote reconciliation and healing. Understand and respond to ways in which explicit and implicit power can affect the development of trusting relationships.

Choice
Maximize choice, addressing how privilege, power, and historic relationships impact both perceptions about and ability to act upon choice.

Collaboration
Honor transparency and self-determination, and seek to minimize the impact of the inherent power differential while maximizing collaboration and sharing responsibility for making meaningful decisions.

Empowerment
Encouraging self-efficacy, identifying strengths, and building skills which lead to individual pathways for healing while recognizing and responding to the impact of historical trauma and oppression.

Equity
A state of being in which an individual’s outcomes are no longer predictable by race or other demographic factor. The process of giving individuals what they need, not just what’s "equal".
• Decision-making must center equity. This means making sure that all students have what they need to be well and engaged in learning. This includes prioritizing food access for students and families, making sure students have access to reliable internet, and continuously adapting methods of support to meet the real time needs of students. Just as when children are in our buildings, we have to remain vigilant in ensuring that all kids have what the need to learn. For example, it shouldn’t be up to students to contact their school if they need internet access. Instead, we have to work to find out who needs the support and get it to them. Schools have the opportunity to lead the conversation in ensuring equitable access at a time when families are experiencing high levels of stress, mistrust, and competing priorities.

• Equity-centered decision-making also means having explicit considerations and instructions for supporting students with IEPs, 504s, or other disabilities or accommodations. Many students are receiving far fewer support services than they and their family are used to, while at the same time their parents or caregivers are put in new roles of navigating leading their child’s learning. As online learning decisions are made, considerations and advocacy for these students is important. Consider offering clear guidance to educators on how to best serve these students.

• Equity-centered decision-making should also include clear considerations for students and families experiencing homelessness or without safe and stable housing. The responsibility to these students of being able to access education and supportive services is more important now than ever. If you do not have one already, consider developing a clear, understandable resource that explains what you are doing to care for these families that is available for both students and staff. Offer educators instruction on how they can modify approaches to meet the needs of these students and have a plan for how meal or internet programs will reach these families most in need.

Principles in Action: Communication

Clear consistent, and regular communication is necessary for navigating COVID-19 in a trauma-informed way. *Keep these recommendations in mind:*

• Use multiple methods of communication to staff and families. This includes email, web-postings, robo-calls and more.

• In each communication, share and re-iterate the main goal of this time (*i.e. maintain the well-being of our school communities, making sure children continue to learn and grow, and ensuring that educators remain safe and well*).

• Many students and families are navigating grief because of the things that are being lost due to school closures. Validate and normalize that it is normal and natural to feel sad because of cancelled field trips or proms. It is appropriate to be worried about what will happen when testing sites for the ACT or SAT are closed. You do not have to have answers to these problems, but people benefit from hearing that you are thinking of them and understand the magnitude of those problems.
• As often as possible, validate the concerns people have. It's OK to acknowledge that this is a scary time with no clear precedence to rely on. Having anxiety and varying levels of capacity is normal. Use appropriate self-disclosure to humanize the experience of district and building leaders.

• Be as transparent as possible, even if this means being more transparent than usual. If decisions are being slowed or impacted by outside forces, share struggles so that staff and families can offer grace and creative solutions.

• Elevate community resources to families with clear explanations of what the services available are and how people can access them. If there are organizations or services in your community not doing enough, this can be a great time to ask families to help you advocate for other organizations helping to share the burden during this time.

• When deciding on methods of communication, consider the must vulnerable students in your district, including your students and families experiencing homelessness. How would you get them essential information? Make sure your communication plans centers these students in their processes.

• Send frequent messages with ideas to help teachers support their well-being during this challenging time. Many educators are navigating learning an entirely new skill set to teach online, teaching or caring for their own children, and trying to keep themselves and their families safe. This is stress and trauma on a community level. Again, it is paramount to avoid repeatedly using phrases like “let us know what you need.”
  ○ When individuals are activated by stress, identifying needs and communicating them can be extremely challenging. Instead of asking what they need, offer proactive solutions or suggestions.

• Communicate more than just concerns or serious decisions. Share messages of joy, hope, or learning. Invite members of your community to do the same.

**Schools, now more than ever, are guiding children and their families through uncertain times. Our schools are setting the precedent for how our communities respond to the needs of our children. You are leading us on this path, AND you are not alone. See below for additional supportive resources.**

As always, never hesitate to reach out to the Alive & Well team and let us know how we can show up for you in a meaningful and intentional way.

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**Supplemental Resources**

- [A Trauma-Sensitive Response to COVID-19 from Alive & Well Communities](#)
- [A Call to Action from Alive & Well Communities: Resist Racial Re-traumatization During the Public Health Response to COVID-19](#)
- [The Missouri Model for Trauma-Informed Schools Guidance Document](#)