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Trauma is often understood as a personal experience. For children of color and other marginalized groups, however, individual trauma experiences are nested in the context of collective trauma experienced by their communities and driven by racist and oppressive practices or policies implemented by institutions, including schools. In order for schools to realize their role as a potential source of systemic trauma, it is important to contextualize trauma within a sociopolitical framework. It is then that they can begin to reattribute responsibility for the outcomes associated with social marginalization away from the students, and to the system itself.

Experiences of trauma are associated with long-term, negative psychological, behavioral, and physical health consequences for our youth. However, resilience is also nested within collective and systemic contexts.

Schools can foster resilience when they own their responsibility as a potential source of trauma for students and families and then work to dismantle systems of privilege, discrimination, and oppression that result in inequities for students of color and other groups marginalized by their social identities. By definition, trauma-informed schools are a mechanism to promote collective resilience and to disrupt the systemic trauma that is often perpetuated by schools. When schools own their responsibility as a potential source of trauma – for both students and families – they can work to dismantle systems of privilege, discrimination, and oppression that result in inequities for students of color and other marginalized groups.

The harmful interruption of safety, agency, dignity, or belonging overwhelms our ability to cope with or integrate our experience of an event.

Experiences of trauma are embodied at multiple levels: individual, collective, systemic, intergenerational and/or historical.

Can be acute, chronic, cumulative, complex.
Among all US states, Louisiana has the 3rd highest number of children per capita who have experienced two or more traumatic life events\(^1\). In New Orleans, 90% of children have experienced community violence, 54% had someone close to them murdered, 42% had seen someone shot, stabbed, or beaten\(^2\).

\(^1\)KIDS COUNT Data Center from the Annie E. Casey Foundation
\(^2\)Gollub et al. (2019). PLoS ONE.

Students’ exposure to traumatic events also impacts the lives and work of the educators who serve them. The highly interpersonal nature of educators’ work paired with their daily interactions with students and families means that educators have ample opportunities to learn about student traumatic experiences and experience secondary traumatic stress (STS). Educators in New Orleans describe STS symptoms as worrying about student’s safety and well-being, having difficulty concentrating, and feeling helpless, anxious, and irritable\(^1\).

The COVID-19 pandemic made working conditions even more stressful for teachers as they struggled to learn new modes of teaching, feared for their health, and juggled family demands. Pandemic-related stressors have been associated with significant declines in teacher mental health and significant increases in burnout, resulting in an exodus from the profession.

Findings from our COVID-19 Impacts on Educator Well-Being report indicate that the mental health toll associated with the additional impact of COVID-19 is substantial and should not be overlooked by policy makers and school leaders as they plan for greater support and improved retention of educators moving forward.

Educators reported rates of emotional distress similar to or higher than those observed in a national sample of health care workers during COVID-19\(^2\).

Teaching has long been recognized as one of the most stressful jobs in the U.S., so supporting teachers is critical and creating trauma-informed schools may be one way to do that.

Consistent with findings from our educator survey at the beginning of the pandemic, Black educators rated their mental health more positively than White educators.

\(^1\)Fleckman et al. (2022). School Mental Health. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12310-022-09515-4

The rate of depression among educators is also higher than the rate observed in the US population (27.8%) in the middle of the COVID pandemic.

Consistent with findings from our educator survey at the beginning of the pandemic, Black educators rated their mental health more positively than White educators.

In a July 22, 2020, Times-Picayune op-ed, it was noted that the Orleans Parish School Board and then State Superintendent of Education John White “should look for funding to expand the trauma-informed learning collaborative launched in 2015 by the city health department with Tulane University’s psychology department and social service agencies [and that] should be a goal for the City Council and the Cantrell administration as well.”
Trauma-informed schools acknowledge and recognize the reality and impacts of individual, collective, and systemic trauma. They adopt policies and practices to create a safe and supportive school climate that promotes healing and prevents future trauma. Trauma-informed schools are designed to transform the school climate to promote feelings of physical, social, and emotional safety among students; positive student-teacher relationships; and culturally responsive discipline policies and practices. At the heart of this transformation is a mindset shift from “What’s wrong with you?” to “I wonder what this student needs.” and “What’s possible for this student?”

With school systems and staff stretched thin, we prioritize mindset shifts and concrete strategies that increase individual and system-level capacity to respond to traumatic conditions. This increased capacity enables educators to realize, recognize, and respond to resist re-traumatization.

“Realizes” Prevalence & impact of trauma

“Responds” To promote individual & collective healing

“Recognizes” Signs of trauma & needs for support

“Resists Retraumatization” By using trauma-informed principles in the classroom, school community & teacher supports
The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (2014) worked with trauma survivors to develop six key principles of trauma-informed care. We have adapted the key principles for use in our work with schools to illustrate a foundation in cultural humility and educational equity. Our goal is to create safe, trustworthy, and transparent school environments through the utilization of peer support, mutuality and collaboration, and empowerment, voice, and choice.

Although the principles were developed in collaboration with trauma survivors, most frameworks for trauma-informed schools, including ours, have failed to partner meaningfully with the students they serve to develop, adopt, and implement trauma-informed approaches. To truly embody the key principles of trauma-informed care, we must empower students to be a part of all aspects of planning for, adopting, and evaluating trauma-informed approaches. This includes incorporating their perspectives of trauma, healing, and resilience. As an organization doing trauma-informed work in schools, our work must also be grounded in the direct experiences of young people. As we move forward, we will engage young people directly and indirectly to shape our work.

In 2013 as part of the NOLA FOR LIFE initiative, the New Orleans Health Department assembled several community agencies to provide crisis response and clinical services to schools following student-involved violence and other public-facing traumatic events. The Health Department led these efforts because New Orleans is a portfolio school district comprised of autonomous charter schools without a centralized system to coordinate school crisis response.

In 2014, we coalesced as the New Orleans Trauma-Informed Schools Learning Collaborative (TIS-LC) under the leadership of Chris Gunther, Manager of Strategic Initiatives at the New Orleans Health Department. The objectives of the TIS-LC were to provide support to schools as they transitioned to trauma-informed frameworks and to build schools’ organizational capacities to implement, sustain, and continue to improve the delivery of trauma-informed approaches.

In 2016, we received funding from the National Institute of Justice to rigorously test whether the strategies we were using were effective in helping schools move forward with trauma-informed practices. That project, Safe Schools NOLA (SSNOLA), allowed us to expand the work of the collaborative to six additional schools.

In 2021, we began a strategic planning process to align our partners, our name, and our efforts with our current and future directions; thus we became the Coalition for Compassionate Schools. Our new name positively reflects our mission to build the capacity of schools, students, and parents to create transformative change in education through the adoption, implementation, and sustainment of trauma-informed, healing-centered practices. The new logo was designed to emphasize the collaborative and compassionate nature of the work.
Flourishing school systems that are rooted in community, healing, and human-centered approaches.

Build the capacity of schools, students, and parents to create transformative change in education through the adoption, implementation, and sustainment of trauma-informed, healing-centered practices.

The following core values inspire and guide our work, its operation and how we engage our community.

**VALUES**

- EQUITY
- CONTINUOUS LEARNING
- COLLABORATION & MUTUALITY
- COMPASSION & HOLISTIC WELL-BEING
- ADVOCACY

**VISION**

**MISSION**

**VALUES**
Evolution of the
COALITION FOR COMPASSIONATE SCHOOLS

2012 - 2014
- New Orleans Behavioral Health Council forms Youth Mental Health (YMH) Workgroup

2014 - 2016
- YMH Workgroup offers crisis prevention and response training to 104 attendees from 48 public schools and 8 community agencies
- TIS-LC provides local and national trainings on supporting trauma-informed schools
- YMH Workgroup offers trainings in evidence-based treatments for youth exposed to trauma
- Six schools are selected as part of the pilot: five schools complete the program with support from United Way

2016 - 2020
- National Institute of Justice funds Safe Schools NOLA study with six schools
- Department of Justice funds Trauma-Informed Schools Training of Trainers Project to support five schools (Cohorts 1 and 2)
- TIS-LC conducts COVID-19 educator surveys and webinar

2020 - PRESENT
- Baptist Community Ministries and LoveTruth funds ToT expansion to three Cohort 3 schools
- TIS-LC engages in strategic planning, changes name to Coalition for Compassionate Schools
- Baptist Community Ministries funds mapping project to identify trauma-informed school-based initiatives in NOLA public schools

YMH Workgroup offers crisis prevention and response training to 104 attendees from 48 public schools and 8 community agencies

TIS-LC provides local and national trainings on supporting trauma-informed schools

YMH Workgroup offers training in evidence-based treatments for youth exposed to trauma

Six schools are selected as part of the pilot: five schools complete the program with support from United Way

13 NOLA public schools apply to partner with TIS-LC to complete year-long pilot program to install trauma-informed approaches

Pilot schools receive ongoing support for implementation of trauma-informed approaches with funding from United Way
Safe Schools NOLA (SSNOLA) was funded by the National Institute of Justice (2015-CK-BX-0020; Co-PIs: Stacy Overstreet and Courtney Baker) to determine the best strategies to support schools in the adoption and implementation of trauma-informed approaches.

Schools participated in a year-long intervention designed to build educator and organizational capacity to integrate trauma-informed approaches within the universal level of their existing multitiered systems of student support. The intervention was delivered by a full-time Teacher Support Specialist embedded in the school and through monthly consultation with the project team.

**Shared Learning About Trauma**

**Summer Training**
- Foundational trauma-informed schools professional development for all school staff based on Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration guidance for trauma-informed care

**Teacher Consultation and Support**
- Classroom observation and debrief after each skill-building training
- Additional, differentiated consultation and support to teachers

**Teacher Skill Building, Consultation & Support**
- Safe & supportive classrooms
- Co-regulation to foster student emotional regulation
- Strengthening teacher-student relationships

**School-Wide Planning & Support**
- Development of a Leadership Team
  - Typically consisted of the school principal(s) and assistant principals, the dean of students, special education and response to intervention coordinators, the school mental health service provider, and a small group of teachers

- Leadership Team Consultation and Support
  - Completion of needs assessment
  - Creation of school specific, data driven trauma-informed action plan

- Peer Support Team Consultation and Support
  - Shared learning about trauma and trauma-informed practices
  - Individualized coaching for personal practice goals and the piloting of trauma-informed practices
  - Individual consultation to support effective leadership in needs assessment and action planning

**School Mental Health Team Consultation and Support**
- Clinical support for evidence-based trauma-focused interventions

**Trauma-Informed Schools Champions**
- Development of a Peer Support Team
  - Typically consisted of four educators and/or support staff that spanned all grade levels of the school
A multiple baseline design was used to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention. Following a baseline year (2016-17), six schools were randomly assigned to receive the intervention in 2017-18, 2018-19, or 2019-20. One school was dropped from analyses and did not receive the intervention because it lost its charter during the course of the study.

Analyses examined the extent to which the intervention resulted in changes in teacher and school capacity to adopt and implement trauma-informed approaches relative to the baseline year. Year 1 effects represent the average effect across all schools at the end of the intervention year relative to the end of the baseline year. Years 2/3 effects represent the average effect across all schools at the end of school years following the intervention relative to the end of the baseline year.

Educator responses on the Trauma-Sensitive Schools Checklist indicated significant improvements from baseline in schoolwide policies and practices that support trauma-informed approaches. For example, school staff reported shifts from baseline in:

- Discipline policies that balanced accountability with an understanding of trauma;
- Opportunities for professional development determined by their needs;
- The availability of consultation with a trauma expert, classroom observations, and opportunities for team work.

5/6 schools completed the intervention year and developed a trauma-informed action plan to guide implementation in the year following the project.

- Agreed or strongly agreed that the foundational training increased their knowledge.
- Agreed or strongly agreed that they would be able to apply the knowledge and skills taught in the foundational training.
- Of school staff agreed or strongly agreed that trauma-informed approaches were acceptable.

- 85% Agreed or strongly agreed that the foundational training increased their knowledge.
- 86% Agreed or strongly agreed that they would be able to apply the knowledge and skills taught in the foundational training.
- 88% Of school staff agreed or strongly agreed that trauma-informed approaches were acceptable.
The use of explicit trauma-informed strategies for student engagement and classroom management was evaluated using the Assessing School Settings: Interactions of Students and Teachers Observation System, an observational coding system that tracks both teacher and student behavior. Findings from classroom observations indicated that the intervention had large positive effects on educator and student behavior. The positive changes were even greater in the years following the intervention.

Large effect sizes are considered exceptional for interventions that target populations (like a school community) versus individuals*. Educators demonstrated meaningful positive changes in their ability to engage their students and manage their classrooms during the intervention year and in subsequent years. As educators provided more proactive and responsive supports and engaged their students, students demonstrated higher levels of engagement and lower levels of disruptive behaviors in the classroom. These positive shifts in the classroom climate are particularly important for students exposed to trauma. Supportive and engaging classroom environments can diminish the alarm response of students exposed to trauma and allow them to focus on learning.

Findings are encouraging because an improved school climate is critical for school satisfaction, student well-being, student engagement, academic motivation, and achievement. It also decreases disruptive behaviors, peer victimization, absenteeism, and suspensions. However, we can't rely solely on teacher reports or classroom observations to evaluate the impact of trauma-informed approaches on school climate. To truly embody the key principles of trauma-informed care, we must empower students to be a part of all aspects of planning for and adopting trauma-informed approaches, including: incorporating their perspectives of trauma, healing, and resilience in trainings provided to educators; involving them in the needs-assessment process and action planning that guides initial implementation of trauma-informed approaches; and drawing on their voices to define indicators of success.

“It allowed me to empower students to advocate for themselves. It gave them strategies that made them feel comfortable being who they are in my classroom. She also helped me enhance my self-care.”

PARTICIPATING TEACHER SAFESCHOOLSNOLA

TRAINING-OF-TRAINERS

The SSNOLA model relied on an external project team to lead the school through a series of capacity-building activities to integrate trauma-informed approaches within the universal level of their existing multitiered systems of student support.

Given that the successful adoption, implementation, and sustainment of trauma-informed approaches is a multi-year process, reliance on an external team to support the work is not practical. However, due to a lack of centralized services within New Orleans’ portfolio school district of charter schools, there was no mechanism for the district to provide training and support to schools. Furthermore, there was limited professional capacity to meet the demand to support trauma-informed schools; community agencies supporting this work were being pushed beyond capacity.

To address these needs, the Training-of-Trainers (ToT) project was developed to increase the capacity of the New Orleans public school system to overcome the structural challenges of creating and sustaining trauma-informed schools. The project was designed to build professional capacity in our community and provide training and implementation support to schools through our TIS Implementation Model. In addition, the project strategically established a network of support to grow and sustain trauma-informed schools by recruiting trainee dyads from the administrative staff of the Orleans Parish School Board and from charter network organizations. This approach created capacity at the administrative level to ensure organizational capacity to sustain the TIS Implementation Model beyond the year-long ToT project.
We certified educators/administrators to deliver foundational training in trauma-informed schools. 21 individuals in 5 charter management organizations and at the district level in Orleans Parish. 17 individuals in 2 schools and at the district level in Jefferson Parish.

We certified educators/administrators to carry out the implementation of the trauma-informed schools model. 17 in 5 charter management organizations and at the district level in Orleans Parish & 2 in Jefferson Parish.

In Turn

of those trained agreed or strongly agreed that the training increased their knowledge of those trained agreed or strongly agreed that they would be able to apply the knowledge/strategies in their classrooms.

THOSE CERTIFIED TRAINED

of those trained agreed or strongly agreed that trauma-informed approaches are acceptable.

THOSE CERTIFIED SUPPORTED

6 OF THE 8 partner schools in the development of trauma-informed action plan to carry trauma-informed practices into the next school year, focusing on the implementation of restorative discipline approaches to reduce suspensions and expulsions, and the adoption of social and emotional learning curricula to support the well-being of students.

THOSE CERTIFIED LED EXPANSION

3 NEW SCHOOLS of trauma-informed approaches into 3 new schools within their respective charter networks.

CONCLUSIONS

We have been able to generate system and adult-level capacity in our schools and CMOs to do trauma-informed schools work. Since 2019, our ToT program has partnered with 20% of CMOs in New Orleans (including past & current partners) to expand access to trauma-informed schools. We hope to reach all CMOs in the next 5 years as we expand our model to include student engagement and adaptations for high schools. In our first year, 4 certified trainers certified 26 additional educators and administrators in our model. Our next step is to investigate how young people experience and are affected by this increased system capacity.
Coalition for Compassionate Schools Awarded $1.17 Million

Coalition for Compassionate Schools awarded $1.17 million from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration to become a National Child Traumatic Stress Treatment and Service Adaptation (TSA) Center. The funding will support the Coalition as it works to provide local, regional, and national expertise for the installation and implementation of trauma-informed practices in schools.

Advancing the National Conversation

Since 2015, we’ve been invited to share our approach to the work at eight national conferences of professional organizations spanning five different disciplines.

We’ve published five peer-reviewed journal articles related to trauma-informed schools and two related to the impact of COVID-19 on teachers.

We’ve created a toolkit designed to serve as an information resource for schools to implement, sustain, and continue to improve the delivery of trauma-focused services.

Convenings were held by federal funding agencies:

*The Coalition for Compassionate Schools toolkit is available on our website: www.cforcs.org
Strategic Direction

WHAT’S NEXT FOR THE COALITION

BUILDING ON OUR SUCCESSES

The Coalition has enjoyed several successful years bringing trauma-informed practices into schools in Orleans and Jefferson Parishes. This is largely due to strong relationships that were formed and maintained over a lengthy period. With that success comes a shift in strategy.

Supporting this Strategic Direction requires us to go beyond our charter members, and expand our programming to afterschool programs. We are also intent on increasing youth voice in the Coalition. We plan to do this in three ways:

New Orleans is at the leading edge of trauma-informed schools work, and while our work is the best ambassador, we have learned how helpful it is to have experts in communication shaping the messages we share.

In addition to supporting the production of print and electronic materials like this one, funding partners can directly support bringing people together in meaningful ways locally, regionally, and nationally. In addition to convenings, cross-sector trainings have the potential to expedite our dissemination efforts and vastly increase the accessibility of the work.

We will continue to publish scholarly articles and create reports that respond to important events, like our report on how COVID-19 has impacted teacher mental health and wellbeing. What we need is to build communication and dissemination channels and relationships to get the information and practices in the hands of those who need it most.

COMMUNICATION: TELLING OUR STORIES

INCREASED YOUTH AND PARENT VOICE

In addition to expanding and communicating our work within the provider community, we are also intent on increasing youth voice in the Coalition. We plan to do this in three ways:

Expanding into high schools for our ToT programming

Involving the voices of young people and families directly in our decision-making as a Coalition

Engaging/supporting youth participatory action research projects focused on youth safety, trust and transparency.

SUPPORTING EDUCATORS

As summarized in this report, teacher mental health risk soared during the pandemic. We recognize the time is now for a dramatic shift in how we respect and support teachers. Schools play a unique role in the community; as seen during the pandemic, they were essential to the social, economic, and public health of our communities. Teachers have experienced extraordinary stress during the last two years as they dealt with exposure to COVID-19, shifts in schedules, teaching remotely, and loss of colleagues, family members and students. So impactful were these experiences that they had similar or higher rates of PTSD, anxiety, and depression than healthcare workers. At the same time, we have observed that teachers report lower levels of stress and burnout in schools where SAMHSA’s Six Principles are in place.

Supporting this next phase of evolution directly supports youth and family engagement in shaping school policy and practice.
Acknowledgements

The Coalition couldn’t have created this level of impact without the generous support of partners who continue to believe in our work and who know that we are making a difference in the lives of students, families, teachers, schools, and communities.

We are deeply indebted to our school partners who opened their doors – and minds – to us for this work. You have been a constant source of motivation.

SCHOOL PARTNERS

Pilot Project – Trauma-Informed Schools Learning Collaborative School Partners: 2015-2018

- KIPP Believe Primary
- New Orleans Charter Science & Mathematics High School
- Lawrence D. Crocker College Prep
- Success Preparatory Academy
- G.W. Carver High School

Safe Schools NOLA School Partners: 2016-2020

- Samuel J. Green Charter School
- ReNEW SciTech Academy
- Phillips Wheatley Community School
- Arthur Ashe Charter School
- ReNEW Schaumburg Elementary

Training of Trainers Cohort 1: 2019-2020

- Langston Hughes Academy
- Homer A. Plessy Community School

Training of Trainers Cohort 2: 2020-2021

- Encore Academy
- Martin Behrman Charter School
- Mildred Osborne Charter School
- Geraldine Boudreaux Elementary School (Jefferson Parish)
- Greenlawn Terrace Elementary School (Jefferson Parish)

Training of Trainers Cohort 3: 2022-2023

- KIPP Leadership Academy
- Lafayette Academy Middle School
- Sherwood Forest Elementary School

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- United Way
- LoveTruth
- Robert E. Floweree Fund
- Department of Psychology
- Tulane University
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- Office of Justice Programs
- National Institute of Justice
- Comprehensive School Safety Initiative
- U.S. Department of Justice
- Office of Justice Programs
- Bureau of Justice Assistance
- STOP School Violence Prevention and Mental Health Training Program
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