



TRAUMA-INFORMED TEAMS

Guide & Resource

July 2020



KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



Vision

Ensure each and every student is empowered and equipped to pursue a successful future.

Mission

To partner with districts, schools, families, students, business and industry, and communities to provide leadership and support to ensure success for each and every student.

About

The Kentucky Department of Education is a service agency of the Commonwealth of Kentucky, and part of the Education and Workforce Development Cabinet. The department provides resources and guidance to Kentucky's public schools and districts as they implement the state's P-12 education requirements. The department also serves as the state liaison for federal education requirements and funding opportunities.

OBJECTIVE AND KEY CONCEPTS

Objective: Create effective team(s) to support and sustain implementation of trauma-informed approaches in school settings in accordance with the School Safety and Resiliency Act.

KEY CONCEPT

- Schools must designate a Trauma-Informed Team by July 1, 2021.
- Effective Trauma-Informed Teams are enhanced by:
 - Commitment and support from leadership
 - Clear, relevant purpose
 - Defined structure, communication
 - Trust
 - Commitment to change, clear processes and plans
 - Measurable goals and outcomes, ongoing monitoring

WHAT IS A SCHOOL-BASED TRAUMA-INFORMED TEAM?

School-based teams addressing issues related to trauma can serve many purposes and functions. This tool will discuss the development and implementation of teams focused on integrating trauma-informed practices across all areas of school functioning, including but not limited to school climate and culture, academics and learning, disciplinary responses, drop-out prevention and reengagement, social and emotional learning, Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS), multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS), staff resilience and retention and school-family connectedness.

Such teams must develop a shared focus and understanding of trauma, the impact of trauma on the school community, and the role of schools in responding to community and individual-level trauma exposure. These teams also must establish a commitment to implementing and sustaining trauma-sensitive,

trauma-responsive and trauma-informed practices and policies in both the content and delivery of educational, disciplinary and support services.

Trauma-informed teams in schools must not only consider the impact of trauma on students and families, but must always recognize the primary and secondary trauma exposure school staff may experience and the potential impact on all staff. To be trauma-informed, schools also must be secondary trauma-informed. A continuum of practices and response strategies should be developed to holistically address needs of the school community and individual needs at universal, targeted and intensive levels of intervention.

Schools may task existing teams with the additional responsibility to address trauma-related concerns. Sometimes

this seems like an efficient solution as the people who will serve on the Trauma-Informed Team also are members of another team. Schools should always ensure that the team members responsible for addressing trauma-informed practices allocate

the time, energy and resources to adequately address trauma-related issues. Failure to prioritize trauma-informed approaches can lead to their being overlooked or deferred.

WHAT ARE THE KENTUCKY REQUIREMENTS FOR TRAUMA-INFORMED TEAMS?

The School Safety and Resiliency Act requires several teams that may address issues related to trauma and its impact on students and staff:

1. **Trauma-Informed Teams** shall be facilitated by a school counselor or mental health services provider at each school “to identify and assist students whose learning, behavior, and relationships have been impacted by trauma” ([KRS 158.4416\(3\)\(b\)](#)). This team shall also “provide training, guidance and assistance” to other school personnel on recognizing signs of trauma exposure, intervention strategies to support students who have experienced trauma, and develop a plan by July 1, 2021, for “implementing a trauma-informed approach” ([KRS 158.4416\(3\)\(c\) and \(5\)](#)). Recommended team members include “school administrators, school counselors, school-based mental health services providers, family resource and youth services coordinators, school nurses and any other school or district personnel” ([KRS 158.4416\(3\)\(b\)](#)).

2. **School Safety and Threat Assessment Teams** shall be established at each school “to identify and respond to students exhibiting behavior that indicates a potential threat to school safety or security” ([KRS 158.4412](#)). The District School Safety Coordinator shall appoint this team of two or more staff beginning in school year 2019-2020, and may include school administrators, school counselors, school resource officers, school-based mental health providers, teachers or other school

personnel. (Please see the Threat Assessment tool for information on this team.)

These two teams likely will have overlap of membership. Recommended practice is to leverage existing multidisciplinary teams to serve on these teams as those working relationships already have been established. Some schools are creating a single team to be responsible for both concerns; others prefer to have two distinct teams. If a school determines that efficiency is best served by a single team, it is imperative that all trauma-focused elements receive adequate consideration.



WHAT CHARACTERISTICS PROMOTE EFFECTIVE TRAUMA-INFORMED TEAMS?

Best practices for trauma-informed teams in school settings are drawn from research and recommendations for successful workplace teams in other domains, as data specific to school-based trauma teams is just emerging.

Guidance and recommendations from centers promoting trauma-informed practices in schools point to the need for trauma-informed teams to ensure a shared understanding of trauma and its impact on students, families and staff. This shared understanding corresponds to a shared responsibility across all areas of school service delivery to support students, families and staff impacted by trauma.

Trauma-informed teams are champions of trauma-sensitive practices in education through innovation and creativity;

collaboration within and beyond the school; cross-fertilization of ideas and practices across various domains of service; effective, iterative, flexible problem-solving; high fidelity to the essential elements of trauma-informed approaches; and strong, sustainable implementation strategies.

Characteristics that will promote effective trauma-informed teams in schools include:

1. Commitment to and support of team by school and district leadership
2. Clear, relevant, meaningful purpose
3. Clear structure and communication process
4. Trust among members and between team and others
5. Clear commitment to change process
6. Demonstrable outcomes and accountability

TIPS FOR CREATING AND MAINTAINING TRAUMA-INFORMED TEAMS

Commitment:

- Trauma-Informed Team members have buy-in and support the purpose of the team.
- District and school leadership demonstrate support through frequent showcasing of Trauma-Informed Team activities, regular reports from and about the team's activities to staff and the community, and routine referencing of the Trauma-Informed Team and the goal of becoming a trauma-informed school.
- Leadership allocates appropriate resources of time, personnel and funds to allow the Trauma-Informed Team to function.
- The Trauma-Informed Team includes a member of leadership with decision-making authority and access to resources to ensure the team remains aware of what is

possible, as well as what is impractical or impossible.

Clear, Relevant, Meaningful Purpose:

- Identify a specific, measurable goal with objectives, timeline and mechanism for continuous monitoring.
- Adopt a mission and/or vision statement.
- Develop a set of core values that reflect a shared understanding of trauma, including race-based, historical and structural trauma, and its impact on students, families and staff.
- Participate in the same trauma training to ensure alignment and common understanding of concepts, purpose and goals.
- Agree on a change process framework to adopt.
- Agree to address a continuum of responses from universal,

to targeted, to intensive.

Clear Structure and Communication Process:

- Clearly define team make-up, representation, size, length of service and expectations for membership.
- Ensure representation from across all areas of the school community, including classified staff, students, family members and community partners. Teams must be comprised of diverse membership regarding race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, ability and economics to ensure all voices and perspectives are heard. Particular attention should be paid to giving voice to students from populations disproportionately impacted by trauma, including structural or historical trauma. Consider inclusion of a special educator, school counselor or mental health counselor, Family Resource and Youth Services Center Coordinator and/or School Resource Officer.
- Determine frequency and length of meetings.
- Develop team norms for communication during and between meetings. Include clear expectations for listening, respect, confidentiality, handling disagreement, managing emotions, etc.
- Outline team processes and/or a standard agenda for meetings.
- Identify team roles including leader(s), facilitators, recorders/secretaries, timekeeper, etc.

Trust:

- Group norms must address trust, confidentiality and respect between team members. Encourage members to lean in and step back as appropriate.
- Develop multiple modes for input and contribution from team members (verbal during meetings, written between or during meetings, etc.).
- Address issues of race, ethnicity, privilege, cultural humility and implicit bias early in their process. Technical assistance and consultation from subject matter experts in equity, diversity and disparities in educational settings may be appropriate.
- Teams should create and maintain a climate and culture

of psychological safety that promotes shared learning and allows all voices to be heard, respected and valued.

- Members must feel safe to disagree, take risks, innovate, learn, ask questions, and share thoughts and feelings.
- Make time and space for reflection of content and process outcomes.
- Collaborate internally with school and district colleagues, and externally with community partners.
- Model transparency to demonstrate trust in the school and larger community and to engender trust and respect from others for the team.
- Seek technical assistance, consultation and coaching from content matter experts at the local, regional, state and national level.

Commitment to Change Process:

- Intentionally adopt a framework to guide change process.
- Identify and adopt a process to use small tests of change or rapid cycle change. This may be a Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) or other process or framework that promotes rapid identification of barriers, and generates and tests potential solutions on a small scale before adopting.
- Use data-driven decision-making.
- Rely on evidence-informed practices as much as possible. Stay current about best practices and novel approaches.
- Prioritize fidelity and identify ways to monitor and assess fidelity to trauma-informed practices.

Accountability and Outcomes:

- Develop goals with clear, measurable outcomes.
- Consider using a framework for implementation and measurement of trauma-informed practices in school settings (see the Additional Resources section for links).
- Use data-driven decision-making.
- Collect baseline data.
- Maintain ongoing data collection and monitoring processes to constantly monitor implementation activity and outcome.
- Report on outcomes and process regularly to school and district leadership, school and district stakeholders and

- community stakeholders.
- Use small tests of change or rapid change cycles to monitor effectiveness and outcomes.
- Honor and learn from setbacks as much as successes - “fail forward.”



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- Kentucky Department of Education School Safety and Resiliency Act webpage: [https://education.ky.gov/school/sdfs/Pages/School-Safety-and-Resiliency-Act-\(Senate-Bill,-2019\).aspx](https://education.ky.gov/school/sdfs/Pages/School-Safety-and-Resiliency-Act-(Senate-Bill,-2019).aspx)
- Edutopia: [5 Characteristics of an Effective School Team](#)
- Leaning Forward: [Strong Teams, Strong Schools](#)
- William & Mary Training & Technical Assistance Center: [Strategies for Creating Effective School Leadership Teams](#)



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