Being a Trauma-Informed Middle School and Exclusionary Discipline Rates: A Quantitative Study

by:

Chérie N. Hayes

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Approved:

Chair: J. Michael Pragman

Dr. J. Michael Pragman, William Woods Adjunct Professor

Committee Member/Reader: Sheila R. Hodge-Logan

Dr. Sheila R. Hodge-Logan, William Woods Associate Professor

Committee Member/Reader: Kyle S. Anderson

Dr. Kyle S. Anderson, William Woods Assistant Professor

CONCURRENCE:

I agree with the recommendation of the Dissertation committee. The student named above has completed all requirements for the award of the degree, of Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership at William Woods University.

School Dean or Designated Representative Signature

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Abstract

To address the influx of trauma within school-age children and to help address existing exclusionary discipline practices, the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education adopted the Trauma-informed Model (DESE, 2019). So, with Missouri schools moving towards becoming trauma-informed and reforms to zero-tolerance policies, this begs the question: are schools considering a students' trauma and thus changing their exclusionary discipline practices to best meet the needs of these students who have trauma history? The purpose of this quantitative study was to determine if there is a relationship between a school's level of being trauma-informed and their exclusionary discipline rates at the middle school level. The results for the Spearman correlation for in-school-suspension and out-of-school suspensions is considered very weak. There is a negative correlation, however, between in-school suspension and the average trauma-informed rate. As such, as the average trauma-informed rate increases, the in-school suspension decreases. The p-value shows that the results are not statistically significant. This study concludes with recommendations for continued research.

Dedication

I am a child of trauma. I was one of those kids whose safe place was school. I disappeared in the crowd as a perfectionist who followed all the rules. All the while, I was hurting inside and traumatized. I remember the looks in my teachers' eyes when they would find out my story from my mom. Their eyes always held a look of pity. I remember playing the "victim" role and embracing the looks of pity. Until one day, I got tired. I got tired of being a victim and living in the victim mentality and decided to be, not just a survivor, but an overcomer. This dissertation is a testament to my goals of overcoming! I dedicate this dissertation to those who have experienced childhood trauma and are looking for a different way to not just live but thrive.

To my daughters: my Alexa and my Lily. We have been through so much! You watched me hit rock bottom and then were my biggest cheerleaders as I found myself again. Thank you for encouraging me on this journey. My love for you is immeasurable! To my baby, Demitra: you brought love to our home that we did not even know we needed! I love you more than I can ever explain!

To Mom and Dad: Thank you for showing me what a house full of love really looks like! Thank you for always supporting my dreams and goals.

To Lucky: You inspired this journey! I did it!

To my best friend and husband, Tyler: You have loved me with all my hurts, my scars and my imperfections. Thank you for encouraging me always, believing in me and calling yourself "doctor". I would not want to do life with anyone else! I see you. Let's go on an adventure!

Psalm 23:4 “Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for you are with me, your rod and your staff, they comfort me.” Thank you, Jesus for walking with me through every valley!

Acknowledgments

When you spend twenty years in the education field, you meet lots of people. I tried to learn something from each and every person I met along my career journey. I have definitely learned some things along this dissertation journey. Dr. Pragman, Dissertation Chair, thank you for your constant upbeat emails and "you can do this" attitude! Your kind emails helped more than you realize! Your guidance was top notch. Dr. Hodge-Logan and Dr. Anderson, committee members, thank you for your encouragement and believing in my dissertation. Josh Varner, thank you for allowing me to use some of your words in this dissertation. Thank you for being a champion of trauma-informed care. Finally, I want to thank those teachers that I have worked with through the years that got it right with kids who had trauma but also to the ones who got it wrong. We learned.

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Chapter One

Introduction

According to an October 2022 poll by CNN.com, 90% of adult Americans believe the United States is facing a mental health crisis (McPhillips, 2022). Mental Health America reports that approximately fifty million Americans suffer from any mental illness (AMI) (Reinert, et al., 2022). Mental Health America also ranks Missouri as 44th on the list of the states with the highest mental illness rank of 22.71% (Reinert, et al., 2022). Considering these alarming figures pertaining to adults, what challenges are the younger members of our community facing? The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) states "currently, data on how many children and adolescents experience adverse childhood experiences are limited" (CDC, 2022). The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) reports that a study from 2007 found two thirds of children reported at least one traumatic event by the age of 16 (2024). SAMHSA reports that one in seven children have experienced child abuse or neglect within the past year (2024). And those are only the numbers of children that are reported. In 2019, 1,840 children died in the United States from child abuse or neglect (SAMSHA, 2024). More research is needed about adverse childhood experiences, trauma, and the effects it has on children as they grow into adulthood. The public education system must adjust to help these children who are coming to school with trauma.

As this Researcher was a novice building-level administrator, she would strictly follow school policy and suspend students, whether that was in-school or out-of-school suspension. After the first year of the principalship, the Researcher began to wonder

about the impact of isolating and/or sending students home on suspension. This Researcher was beginning to think there had to be another more positive alternative to just exclusionary discipline. The Researcher began to study and research trauma and the effects on children. The conclusion drawn was that students need to stay at school. As this project loomed, the Researcher wanted to add some true data behind her belief. This study is the result of those thoughts and questions.

Statement of Problem

"The goal of any effective disciplinary system must be to ensure a safe school climate while avoiding policies and practices that may reduce students' opportunity to learn" (APA, 2008). The Zero-tolerance Policies came into public schools in 1994 (Moreno & Scaletta, 2018). In 2008, the American Psychological Association (APA) Zero-tolerance Task Force found there was a need to reform zero-tolerance policies and put alternative practices in place as more appropriate discipline approaches were needed (APA, 2008). Controversy had arisen due to zero-tolerance policies and practices in the news and the task force was created (APA, 2008). Various stories were being published in the news such as, a 10-year old girl was expelled because her mom sent a small knife in her lunch box to cut up her apple and another story explained how a boy was expelled for talking on his cell phone to his mom, who happened to be stationed in Iraq and the first conversation they had in 30 days (APA, 2008). As these stories were happening more and more, the APA wanted to evaluate the existing evidence of zero-tolerance policies and how they were impacting students and schools and make recommendations

about the existing policies and practices (APA, 2008). Simply put, exclusionary discipline practices were not working.

To address the influx of trauma within school-age children and to help address existing exclusionary discipline practices, the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education adopted the Trauma-informed Model (DESE, 2019). This was due to the legislators passing Missouri Senate passed Bill 638, Section 161.1050 in 2017 which established the "Trauma-Informed Schools Initiative" (DESE, 2019). The model was co-written by various Missouri organizations who have the common goal of addressing the impact of trauma in society (DESE, 2019). So, with Missouri schools moving towards becoming trauma-informed and reforms to zero-tolerance policies, this begs the question: are schools actually considering a students' trauma and thus changing their exclusionary discipline practices to best meet the needs of these students who have trauma history?

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to determine if there is a relationship between a school's level of being trauma-informed and their in-school and/or out of-school suspension (exclusionary) rates at the middle school level.

The middle school level was the focus of this study due to two main reasons. First, data has identified middle school students as needing support due to the rates of behavior problems and future behavior outcomes whether positive or negative (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2010, as cited in Predy et al., 2014). Secondly, Delgado's research resulted in a statistically significant finding when comparing how exclusionary discipline affects academic achievement in 8th graders (2014).

Middle school students are shaping and reshaping their identities during the adolescent years (Galvan, 2021). Social development and social bonds are a large challenge for middle school students in their adolescence (Frydman & Mayor, 2017). Students are exploring and actively engaging with their world (Galvan, 2021). At this time in their lives, middle school students are moving away from their family relationships as their focal point to focus more on their friend relationships (Frydman & Mayor, 2017). Also, middle school adolescents tend to take risks (Galvan, 2021). This shaping and reshaping of their identities can contribute to behaviors and acting out at school.

"A traumatic event may foster a radical shift in the way adolescents think about their world" (NCTSN, 2024). If a middle school student has a history of trauma in their life, they may avoid connections with others (Frydman & Mayor, 2017). NCTSN posits that adolescents withdraw because they do not want their emotions to cause others to see them as abnormal (NCTSN, 2024). This lack of healthy connections could mean that students develop poor boundaries, often isolate themselves and may develop aggressive behaviors (Frydman & Mayor, 2017). Frydman & Mayor posited that middle school students struggle with emotional regulation in general (2017). If students do not learn proper coping strategies to handle their emotions, this can lead to increased behavioral problems (Frydman & Mayor 2017). These behavioral issues can lead to increased behaviors at school which can ultimately lead to exclusionary discipline. Speaker Josh Varner told of his time as a middle school counselor in Missouri. He stated, "I saw middle school students begin to address their social, emotional, and cognitive impairments in middle school by adopting risky behaviors whether it be behaviors like

sexual behaviors, vaping, marijuana and others" (Varner, 2024). Thus, this Researcher focused this study on middle schools.

Significance of Study

Many students come to school daily with the baggage of trauma; behaving and performing as required by our public school system can be difficult at best. This study will give insight into how a school self-identifies as being trauma-informed and how the school actually handles exclusionary discipline. The research aimed to provide an understanding of the disciplinary actions taken against students who have experienced trauma. These results could challenge the way middle school administrators are disciplining students or it might emphasize the work that the middle schools are doing to embrace being trauma-informed. Either way, the results come in; it will be an insight into how middle schools' staff are disciplining students.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are essential for understanding and expanding upon this research.

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

Originally, this term was coined when a study was conducted by the Kaiser Permanente Clinic in San Diego, CA, which linked 10 categories of adverse experiences (such as abuse, neglect, and exposure to household violence) during childhood (ages 0-18) to various physical and mental health outcomes in adulthood (Melville, 2017).

Contemporary Trauma Theory (CTT)

This theory established that survivors of trauma are psychologically and physically injured and in need of healing and help (Goodman, 2017).

Exclusionary discipline

This term refers to school discipline policies that result in temporary or permanent removal from a classroom; often referred to as out-of-school suspension, expulsion, or in-school suspension (Hwang et.al, 2022; Curran, 2016).

Trauma

Trauma is an emotional response to a terrible event such as violence, abuse, neglect, loss, accident, disaster, war, and other emotionally harmful experiences (SAMHSA, 2014; APA, 2023).

Trauma-aware

School staff becomes aware of how prevalent trauma is and have begun to consider trauma's impact on students and staff (DESE, 2019).

Trauma-responsive

The school's culture begins to highlight the role of trauma in students and the staff begins to rethink routines and infrastructure of the school system (DESE, 2019).

Trauma-sensitive

School staff begin to move past their awareness of trauma and begin to build consensus around the principles of trauma and how it effects students and staff; staff begins to prepare for change (DESE, 2019).

Trauma-informed School

A trauma-informed school is a safe and supportive school that understands the importance of having clear expectations and systems to repair relationships and culture

when behavior challenges it; the strategies and practices are embedded into daily practice by all (DESE, 2019 & 2023).

Zero-tolerance policies

"This term became widely adopted in schools in the early 1990s as a philosophy or policy that mandates the application of predetermined consequences, most often severe and punitive in nature, which are intended to be applied regardless of the gravity of behavior, mitigating circumstances, or situational context (APA, 2008).

Theoretical Framework

For this research project, the Researcher chose the positivist theoretical framework. This framework allows for the scientific method to be completed by asking questions, obtaining data, and analyzing the data. The positivist theoretical framework is considered a hypothetico-deductive model which means that the "scientific model is based on forming a testable hypothesis and developing an empirical study to confirm or reject the hypothesis" (Park et., al, 2020). The positivist framework allowed the Researcher to examine the explanatory or causal relationships between variables in the study (Park, et., al, 2020).

The positivist theory of this research as the theoretical framework allowed for the explanation of a phenomenon with quantitative methods. The Researcher used two conceptual frameworks as well. The conceptual frameworks of Contemporary Trauma Theory and Maslow's Theory further support the Researcher's motivation of understanding exclusionary discipline and trauma.

Positivism has existed since 1822 when Auguste Conte, a French philosopher, first used the word (Fletcher & Barnes, 2023). This theory explains that reality is independent of human intervention and can be predicted and understood through a collection of data and supporting evidence (Fletcher & Barnes, 2023). Positivism is typically a quantitative method of scientific research that studies society and discovers the laws that govern society. Positivists believe that data allows for more representation and allows them to understand society as a whole, not just an individual person.

The conceptual framework that aligns with this research is the Contemporary Trauma Theory (CTT). This theory ascertained that survivors of trauma are psychologically and physically injured and in need of healing and help (Goodman, 2017). Therefore, CTT avoids labeling trauma survivors as sick, weak, or having poor moral compasses. CTT examined a person's functioning by the following properties: dissociation, attachment, reenactment, long-term effect on later adulthood, and impairment in emotional capacities (Goodman, 2017).

These properties are important in understanding a victim of trauma. Research identified that dissociation is the defense mechanism in which a person uses to "negotiate and tolerate the horrific traumatic experience" (Goodman, 2017, p. 187). A trauma victim will struggle with healthy relationships, i.e. attachment. Research asserted that reenactment is where the victim tries to gain and/or maintain control by seeking relationships that reenact the traumatic event (Goodman, 2017). Trauma can lead to long-term effects such as mental health and physical health issues. Finally, an adult who has experienced trauma may have impairment in their emotional capacities; this means that

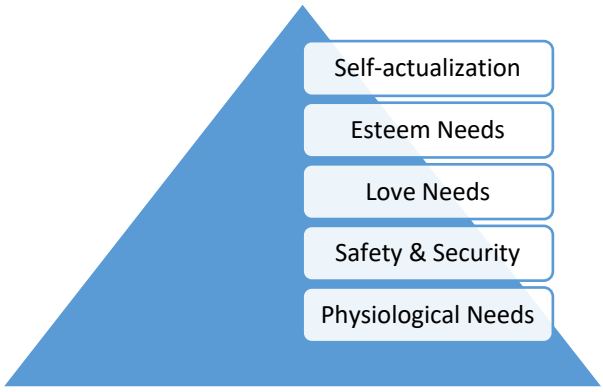
they do not have the ability to regulate their emotions, understand their emotions or even identify emotions in others (Goodman, 2017).

The groundwork for CTT began when Sandor Ferenczi, a Hungarian psychoanalysis, studied trauma. Ferenczi asserted that the presence of a trusted person or lack thereof is significant after a trauma has occurred (Mészáros, 2010). Ferenczi's research also paved the way for trauma therapy, declaring that a trust must be built between the therapist and the trauma victim (Fletcher & Barnes, 2023). Ferenczi, thus, was laying this groundwork for CTT back in the early 1900's.

Another conceptual framework that applies to this research is Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory which was written in 1943 (Cherry, 2022). This is a common theory in education and one that educators often refer to when discussing children. Maslow's Hierarchy explained that people want to become all they can be or self-actualized (Cherry, 2022). But before a person reaches self-actualization (the top level), several other needs must be met first (see Figure 1). The two most basic levels of the hierarchy are physiological needs and safety and security (Cherry, 2022). In thinking about trauma, a child may be missing some of these two bottom tiers which may contribute to their trauma.

Figure 1

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, 1943



Note: adapted from Cherry, 2022

By analyzing the data, the Researcher will determine if the independent variable (the trauma-informed rate of a school) effects the dependent variable (exclusionary data).

Hypotheses and/or Research Questions

Research Question One (RQ1) What is the relationship between a school's level of being trauma-informed and the in-school, out of-school suspension and/or expulsion (exclusionary) discipline rates at the middle school level?

Null Hypothesis One (Ho1) The school's level of being trauma-informed has no effect on in-school suspension rates at the middle school level.

Alternative Hypothesis (H1) The school's level of being trauma-informed has an effect on in-school suspension rates at the middle school level.

Null Hypothesis Two (Ho2) The school's level of being trauma-informed has no effect on out-of-school suspension rates at the middle school level.

Alternative Hypothesis Two (H2) The school's level of being trauma-informed has an effect on out-of-school suspension rates at the middle school level.

Null Hypothesis Three (Ho3) The school's level of being trauma-informed has no effect on expulsion rates at the middle school level.

Alternative Hypothesis Three (H3) The school's level of being trauma-informed has an effect on expulsion rates at the middle school level.

Limitations

This study has limitations. For one, the Researcher was limited to the data that was returned in the self-assessing survey sent out to middle school principals. This data had a limited number of urban and/or rural districts. Secondly, the COVID-19 pandemic played a significant role in public education; as such, educators and students may have more trauma affecting them as they missed a year of being in seated school. Therefore, a school may not be as far a long in their trauma-informed journey due to missing a year of regular school. Transversely, a school may not have found the need to become trauma-informed and may not have made steps to start the trauma-informed journey. The Researcher was limited in exclusionary discipline data that is available and reported to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). Also, the Researcher was limited in obtaining all necessary data as DESE protects small student populations of less than five students by not releasing the exclusionary data (DESE, 2024).

Delimitations

Delimitations set for this research project included public middle school principals across the state of Missouri. For this study, middle schools are defined as schools that have grades five through eight or a combination of those grades. Another

delimitation was collecting exclusionary (in-school and out-of-school suspension data and expulsion data) for the last two years of school (school year 2021-2022 and 2022-2023).

Assumptions

One assumption is that not every middle school principal participated in the survey. The second assumption is that participants understood the questions on the survey and responded as accurately as possible. A third assumption was that the data obtained from DESE regarding a school's exclusionary rates is accurate. Finally, the assumption was made that every principal has a true understanding of being trauma-informed and paints an accurate picture of where their school building is on the trauma-informed model.

Organization of the Study

In Chapter One, background information regarding trauma and schools was discussed. The purpose of the study was addressed as well as the research questions and hypotheses. The Researcher defined key terms for the reader. The Researcher named and discussed the theoretical framework and conceptual frameworks for the study. Next, the limitations, delimitations and assumptions were stated.

Chapter Two will include a literature review. These topics include the history of trauma, trauma in children, the effects of trauma in the school system, school discipline policies and practices, and becoming a trauma-informed school. Finally, the Researcher will expand on the transformation of discipline practices and policies and explain positive

childhood experiences (PCEs) as well as discuss trauma-informed professional development for teachers.

In Chapter Three, the Researcher will discuss the design of the project. This includes describing the participants and the role of the Researcher. The instrumentation that will be used will be described. Chapter Three concludes with a description of the data collection and methods for data analysis.

Chapter Four will present the study's findings including non-identifiable school results, data analysis and results of the research question.

Finally, Chapter Five will provide a summary of the entire study, as well as share the findings and extensive recommendations for future research.

Chapter Two

Review of the Literature

Trauma is ever present in the 21st century. Two-thirds of children have reported at least one traumatic event by the age of 16 (SAMHSA, 2024). The CDC findings indicate sixty-four percent of adults experience at least one ACE before the age of 18 (2024). Students are coming to school with their trauma experiences and the school faculties are left with trying to figure out how to educate, best support and best discipline these students (SAMHSA, 2014).

Defining trauma and traumatic events can be difficult because it is such a complex and unique individual experience. The working definition this Researcher will use is: trauma is an emotional response to a terrible event such as violence, abuse, neglect, loss, accident, disaster, war, and other emotionally harmful experiences (SAMHSA, 2014; APA, 2023). Trauma is often discussed as an adverse childhood experience. Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are experiences that occur before the age of eighteen that cause extreme distress and can result in long-term medical, mental health, and behavioral issues (Zyromski et al., 2020). Schools are responding to this phenomenon of students with ACEs by becoming “trauma-informed” (SAMHSA, 2014). In 2019, the Missouri Department of Elementary & Secondary Education published a model for Trauma-Informed Schools. Researchers and educators are continuously learning and discovering more about trauma and how it effects children in schools. This includes exclusionary discipline policies and practices and how educators are using discipline in schools.

In this literature review, the Researcher will first discuss how trauma became an important topic in schools in 2024. Next, the Researcher will explore how trauma effects children and their school life. Thirdly, past and present school discipline policies and procedures and the effects of those policies and procedures on trauma students will be explored. Finally, the literature review will show how schools are adapting to traumatized students by being trauma-informed and how this understanding of the trauma in students is changing school discipline practices as well as the professional development needed to support the school staff.

The History of Trauma Discussions

In 1995 through 1997, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Kaiser-Permanente completed a two-year study which is still being referenced in 2024 (CDC, 2022). Out of this study of over 17,000 people, the ACEs or Adverse Childhood Experiences of the study participants were recorded. The findings of the study were significant. Almost two-thirds of people studied had at least one ACE while more than one in five people studied reported three or more ACES (CDC, 2022). ACEs are traumatic events that happen from 0-17 years of age (CDC, 2022). Obtaining an ACE score on someone begins with a questionnaire. The ACE questionnaire asks questions relating to abuse and neglect, a family member's suicide or attempted suicide, substance abuse, mental health problems in the family members, if there was divorce in the home and if anyone in the household was in prison and/or jail (CDC, 2022). As found in the Kaiser-Permanente study, the impact of these traumatic events can result in mental, physical, and emotional issues (CDC, 2022). The CDC reports that at least five of the top

ten leading causes of death are associated with ACES (2022). Due to the Kaiser-Permanente and CDC study, ACEs have been found as a contributor to depression, asthma, kidney disease, stroke, cancer, obesity, drug and alcohol use, and even unemployment and as such, preventing ACEs would result in a reduction of these societal issues (CDC, 2022). ACEs can lead to a disruption in the neurodevelopment of a person which leads to social, emotional, cognitive development which leads to the adoption of health-risk behaviors which leads to diseases, disabilities, or social problems which ultimately leads to early death (Varner, 2024).

However, the ACEs study has its limitations as it does not cover the full range of traumatic events that a person may go through (Taylor & Barrett, 2018). Speaker Josh Varner noted that in the ACE study, both parents of the people studied held college degrees and the participants were primarily white (2024).

There are more child-friendly surveys that measure the impact of trauma on current functioning being used today, such as, Childhood Rating of Post-Traumatic Symptoms, Parent Rating of Post-Traumatic Symptoms and the Lifetime Incidence of Trauma Events (Taylor & Barrett, 2018). The Childhood Rating of Post-Traumatic Symptoms (or CROPS) is “a self-report measure for children and adolescents that assesses a broad range of post-traumatic symptoms, with or without an identified trauma, and can be used to measure changes in symptomatology over time” (NCTSN, 2024). The Lifetime Incidence of Trauma Events (LITE) is another screening tool used for parents and children where each individual self-identifies traumatic events (Strand, et al., 2024).

Trauma in Children

To further expound on educators' and researchers' understanding of trauma, a large study was conducted that examined over 14,000 children (Greeson et al., 2014). This study expanded the definition of an ACE to include major adversities not examined in the original 1995-1997 Kaiser-Permanente and CDC study (Greeson et al., 2014). These major adversities included things like natural disasters, school violence, and community violence (Greeson et al., 2014). The study found that most youths experienced more than one trauma type (for example, domestic violence, traumatic loss, child abuse or neglect) and that the total number of trauma types was significantly related to childhood behavioral problems (Greeson et al., 2014). Researchers estimate that almost half of all children have an ACE score of 1 (Spence, 2021). Furthermore, ACEs have been shown to influence the social, emotional, and cognitive abilities of those children who experienced them (Garduno, 2021). Walkley and Cox (2013) concur as they found trauma can alter the brain structure of a child. Researchers agree that the trauma a child endured can negatively affect their capacity for self-regulation including putting feelings into words, organization, comprehension, and memorization (Wolpow, 2009; Walkley & Cox, 2013). Further, other researchers concur that trauma effects student behaviors at school, their abilities to regulate their emotions and their ability to recognize their own resilience (Baez, et al., 2019). "A key research finding is that the more adversity in a child's life, the greater the odds of long-term developmental consequences" (Walkley & Cox, 2013, p. 123). The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) posits that exposure to trauma can cause a plethora of issues for children including emotional distress, behavior issues, academic failure, sleep issues, and sometimes even post-

traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety or depression (2024). The American Psychological Association (APA) defines PTSD as a traumatic even in which someone feels a threat to their life and/or their safety and has feelings of fear and helplessness (APA, 2024). Further, the APA describes PTSD in this way: "people with PTSD may relive the trauma in painful recollections, flashbacks, or recurrent dreams or nightmares; avoid activities or places that recall the traumatic event; or experience physiological arousal, leading to symptoms such as an exaggerated startle response, disturbed sleep, difficulty in concentrating or remembering, and guilt about surviving the trauma when others did not" (APA, 2024). NCTSN describes how trauma experiences can interfere with a child's daily life (2024). Speaker Josh Varner stated, "trauma disconnects us from ourselves, others and God" (2024). Considering all these things together, students can be affected academically and socially throughout their school experiences.

When a child's body is exposed to prolonged stress, it affects their brain development. A child's brain becomes primarily focused on survival and preservation (Plumb et al., 2016). This is important for educators to understand because if a child is hyper-focused on survival, their learning, academic achievement, and proper behavior is not a priority. Abraham Maslow understood this when he created the hierarchy of needs in his published paper in 1943 (Cherry, 2022). The first tier explains that humans need their physiological needs met (food, shelter, clothing) first (Cherry, 2022). The second layer of the hierarchy or the second need of a human is safety and security (Cherry, 2022, Bowen, 2021). Bowen states that learning and growth can only happen if a person feels safe (2021). Students must feel safe enough to form a connection and must have a connection before learning can take place (Varner, 2024). Trauma interrupts being able to

obtain safety and security because ultimately, trauma effects how the body regularly functions (Bowen, 2021). If a person does not feel safe enough to learn and risk possible failure, then any effort to learn will be futile (2021). This is important for educators because the question becomes: how do we help children feel safe and secure?

Compound these traumatic experiences with a global pandemic of 2020 with the introduction of Covid-19 into our society and there are more traumatic experiences. Students went home for the rest of the 2020 school year, if not longer. During this time there was a surge in trauma due to ACEs and Covid-19 because students felt detached from their teachers (Subramaniam, 2022). Students were living in socially distanced homes which lead to more domestic abuse and more grief due to loss of loved ones because of death and/or hospitalization (Spence et al., 2021). Researchers posit that even the readjustment back into the school buildings may affect students' mental health (Spence et al., 2021).

The Effects of Trauma in the School System

Pierce et al. (2022) emphasized that focusing on ACEs and trauma-informed policies would have benefits for the students that are at-risk for exclusionary discipline. The researchers discovered that excluding children of trauma from the school environment may prolong their healing and their sense of belonging (Pierce et al., 2022). Research posits that exclusionary discipline leads to a decrease in student achievement and increases a student's risk of dropping out (Sedillo-Hamann, 2022; Crosby et al., 2018). Since children of trauma have a difficult time discriminating between safe and unsafe environments, sending them home and out of school further confuses their brains

(Thomas et al., 2019). However, teachers may have a difficult time in their classrooms as a child of trauma can have major behaviors since their bodies are concerned with self-preservation and survival (Plumb et al., 2016). Learning, academic performance, and appropriate behaviors are not first priority, and many times suffer (Thomas et al., 2019, Plumb et al., 2016). Kaplow explains that students who were maltreated from the ages of 0-2 are at a greater risk with inhibitory control (controlling automatic urges) (Kaplow et al., 2007).

By the mid-20th century, public health professionals began to help teachers understand the link between public health and student behavior (Hicks, 2021). Educators began to learn that trauma is an extreme form of stress that affects the brain development of children (Plumb et al., 2016). Teachers were learning that there is a need to balance accountability and to have an understanding of behaviors that result of past and/or current trauma (Plumb et al., 2016). That behavior can often happen when a person is triggered. When a person of trauma becomes triggered, they usually respond with what is known as a trauma response. Speaker Josh Varner described these trauma responses; fight, flight, freeze or fawn (Varner, 2024). Fight is where a person wants to defend themselves from some type of a perceived attack (Varner, 2024). Flight is where a person runs away from the perceived threat; most notably in those students who run out of the classroom or building (Varner, 2024). Freeze is where a person is unable to react or just shuts down; mostly seen in "middle school students who put their hoods up and heads down" (Varner, 2024). Fawn is the people-pleaser and is typically a great student with great behavior (Varner, 2024).

A qualitative study conducted by Hansen et al., (2020) found that most middle-aged adults that had trauma as children, had difficulty dealing with their trauma as they aged through school. Pierce et al. (2022) completed a study with two interesting finds. First, high school students with zero ACEs were suspended at a 7% rate while students with four or more ACEs were suspended at a 33% rate (Pierce et al., 2022). Also, students with two or more ACEs by the age of 5 were significantly more likely to be suspended in high school than students with zero ACEs (Pierce et al., 2022).

Students can display a wide range of behaviors and emotions; the challenge is to identify the patterns in these behaviors and emotions so interventions can be utilized (Cummings et al., 2017). School systems began using a wide range of consequences from exclusionary discipline to other behavior interventions (Hicks, 2021) as teachers believed that discipline issues interfere with instruction (Crosby et al., 2018; Samerson, 2010).

School Discipline Policies and Practices

Exclusionary discipline or suspension is prevalent as a discipline measure in the 21st Century. This may include in-school or out-of-school suspension. In-school suspension is where the student stays within the school building but is removed from their regular classroom to complete their work (Curran, 2016). Out-of-school suspension means a student is not allowed to come to school for a set number of days (Curran, 2016). This suspension typically includes extracurricular activities.

Behavior management begins in the classroom. Better known as classroom management, this is where teachers use a management system to keep order within their classroom. A referral system is usually in place within a school system. If a student

misbehaves, a teacher will address it. If the behavior continues, the teacher will document what happened including their actions with the student and send the referral to the office (Moreno & Scaletta, 2018, Hicks, 2021). A teacher's interpretation of a student's behavior is at play here as the discipline referral may ultimately come down to a cultural difference or a misunderstanding (Ura et al., 2021; Dutil, 2020). Once the administrator meets with the student, the administrator alone would decide the proper consequence (Hicks, 2021, Higley, 2020). The final discipline for a student is entered into the school database for tracking purposes (Hicks, 2021).

Zero-tolerance policies exist in our school systems in 2024. These are policies in which there are automatic severe consequences for certain offenses (Hicks, 2021, Higley, 2020). Some educators argue that these policies do not address the external factors acting on a student (Higley, 2020). These external factors such as home environment are outside of the school's control. Research held that some educators believe that because the external factors are not being addressed, zero-tolerance policies enable a cycle of continuous bad behavior (Hicks, 2021, Higley, 2020). "There is no evidence that exclusionary discipline is an effective way to change behaviors or is a deterrent for future recidivism" (Higley, 2020, p. 43). What's more, research held that students that are subjected to frequent exclusionary discipline are more likely to drop out of school (Higley, 2020). This is also known as the school-to-prison pipeline (Higley, 2020). This pipeline is created because students experience exclusionary discipline and the juvenile justice system which means they have a decrease in their time in the school seat learning and an increase in their time with the criminal justice system (Dutil, 2020; Mowen & Bohman, 2020). Dutil emphasizes the need to dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline by

first recognizing the connection between school discipline and the pipeline (2020). In 2009 advocacy groups in Florida worked together to amend the state zero-tolerance laws after seeing the number of students being not only suspended but also arrested (Thompson, 2016). The law was changed to ensure that zero-tolerance was not being used in petty situations and to give school districts the authority to use their own discipline programs. (Thompson, 2016). By the end of the 2013-2014 school year, out-of school suspensions were reduced by 41% and in-school suspensions were reduced by 48%, however, the data still showed that students were being disproportionally suspended (Thompson, 2016). Mowen and Bohman hypothesized in their study that youth who are suspended will have a greater increase in re-offending compared to those youth who were never suspended (2020). This research had two interesting findings. The first was that school exclusionary discipline can serve as a negative and harmful turning point in the life of a youth and actually can increase that youth's offending over time (Mowen & Bohman, 2020). Secondly, the "intensification of discipline strategies may counterproductively increase offending behaviors" (Mowen & Bohman, 2020). In summary, increasing discipline may actually have the opposite effect school officials desire.

Originally, zero-tolerance policies mandated exclusionary discipline for students who possessed contraband such as firearms or illegal drugs at school (Moreno & Scaletta, 2018). The Gun Free Schools Act (GFSA) of 1994 stated that schools who wanted to receive federal money had to adopt the zero-tolerance policy (Moreno & Scaletta, 2018). Because of GFSA, schools were allowed to remove students from school (Moreno & Scaletta, 2018). Slowly, these zero-tolerance policies began to encompass other student

behaviors. These student behaviors included defiance, disrespect, profanity, repeated insubordination, habitual truancy and tardiness, inappropriate attire and more (Moreno & Scaletta, 2018, Higley, 2020, Delgado, 2014). Exclusionary discipline is more commonly used for what one might consider "non-violent behaviors" (Dutil, 2020). Since the inception of zero-tolerance policies, there has been an overall drastic increase in the use of exclusionary discipline (Dutil, 2020). The American Psychological Association stated that "zero-tolerance has not been shown to improve school climate or school safety" (2008, p. 860). The APA further claim that zero-tolerance policies run in direct contrast to our knowledge of child development (APA, 2008).

Yet, the numbers tell a strong story. The U.S. Department of Education released data from the Civil Rights Data Collection for the 2017-2018 school year. This is the most recent data available. In the 2017-2018 school year, 50,922,024 students attended public schools in the United States, including Washington D.C. and Puerto Rico (USDE, 2022). A total of 11,205,797 school days were missed due to students receiving out-of-school suspension (USDE, 2022). Additionally, 101,652 students were expelled from the public schools across the country (USDE, 2022). When looking at the data on a state level, Missouri administrators suspended 5.62% of the public-school population which is over the national suspension rate of 4.96% (USDE, 2022).

Going a step further, this Researcher looked at the disaggregated data to see if there was any disproportionality. White and African American boys had the same number of out-of-school suspensions, however, white boys had more than three times the enrollment numbers that African American boys had (USDE, 2022). Next, the girls had

nearly the same number of in-school-suspensions, but again, the Aftrican American girls had about three times less enrollees (USDE, 2022).

There is conflicting data on the attitudes of exclusionary discipline in educators. A study conducted in a middle school in Alaska found that over 75% of the school faculty said exclusionary discipline is sometimes necessary but the same faculty also realized that it has negative effects on academic outcomes for students (Hodge, 2020). Five New York City middle school staffs were surveyed, and the results showed that 94% believe very strongly that traditional discipline measures address student misbehaviors (Samerson, 2010). Sixty-two percent of the Alaskan faculty and ninety-two percent of the New York City faculty stated that students who were suspended or expelled did not change their behaviors when they came back to school (Hodge, 2020; Samerson, 2010). However, a study of a Tennessee county of middle school administrators found that a majority of the administrators find zero-tolerance policies and exclusionary discipline to be effective (Nelson, 2016). Seventy-five percent of the over fifty principals surveyed stated that zero-tolerance policies are a contributing factor in maintaining order in their buildings (Nelson, 2016). The survey further exposed that 66% of the administrators admitted that exclusionary discipline has a negative effect on students (Nelson, 2016). Interestingly, eighty-one percent of the administrators disagreed or remained neutral with the statement “suspension and expulsion do not really solve discipline problems” (Nelson, 2016). Another research study concluded that sending students out of school does not change the student’s behavior (Donelson, 2020).

Administrators are ultimately the ones who decide what discipline to disperse to students. However, the issue is not always cut and dry. Research conducted by the School

Superintendent Association (AASA) in 2014 found that half of the superintendents surveyed in forty-eight states reported that reducing exclusionary discipline is very important. Interviews of twenty-seven Florida administrators found that they assigned out-of-school suspension even though the administrators feel it is ineffective (Kennedy et al., 2017). In contrast, eighty-five percent of the surveyed superintendents reported positive outcomes when using exclusionary discipline (AASA, 2014). Thirty-three percent of the superintendents stated that exclusionary discipline maintains and/or improves school climate (AASA, 2014). Middle school principals in Louisiana reported that knowing the why behind student behavior is critical to discipline (Walker, 2021). Just the issue of handling discipline according to school policies caused the majority of the administrators to negotiate compromises between their beliefs and practices (Kennedy et al., 2017). Walker found that principals have changed their view of discipline and have been moving away from zero-tolerance policies over the years (2021). Going further, the administrators acknowledged that not all students even understand school expectations and schools need to first teach the expectations (Kennedy et al., 2017). Administrators described factors such as feeling safe, loved and respected contribute to a student's ability or desire to meet the school behavior expectations (Kennedy et al., 2017). Walker's research study found that administrators believe "parental involvement and home-school collaboration are critical factors in improving student behaviors and preventing future suspensions" (2021, p. 208).

Students with emotional/behavioral disorders (EBD) held low social skills and aggressive or violent behavior among their traits (Moreno & Scaletta, 2018). This Researcher asserts that this would involve some traumatic history as well. Moreno &

Scaletta stated “students with EBD are the most affected groups from zero-tolerance policies” (2018, p. 97.). In 2016, Illinois began to take notice that the zero-tolerance policy was detrimental to students (Reed, 2020, Moreno & Scaletta, 2018). The Illinois Senate passed a bill (SB 100) that put several provisions on schools regarding discipline (Reed 2020, Moreno & Scaletta, 2018). The bill stated that school districts had to provide ongoing professional development in the area of classroom management because exclusionary discipline usually began with a classroom referral (Moreno & Scaletta, 2018). Secondly, SB100 required school administrators to use “all means of interventions prior to expelling or suspending a student for 3 or more days” (Moreno & Scaletta, 2018. p. 94). The law further states that school administrators must only use exclusionary discipline if there is a safety threat or a disruption to the school and the discipline determined would need to be on a case-by-case basis (Reed, 2020). Further, school districts must limit their use of alternative schools as well as exclusionary discipline (Reed, 2020).

One researcher sought to explore what parents think about exclusionary discipline. Powell completed narrative research with parents and their thoughts toward exclusionary discipline and how it leaves a traumatic effect (2020). Five major themes arose from the research. First, parents similarly expressed concerns for the loss of communality with the school community (Powell, 2020). This is supported by Sedillo-Hamann that cautioned that exclusionary discipline decreases school connectedness and pushes the child away (2022). Second and thirdly, parents noticed that their students had a loss of self and self-esteem along with feelings of powerlessness (Powell, 2020). Next, these parents noticed more overall resistance in their students’ behaviors (Powell, 2020).

Finally, parents indicated they were just concerned with the lost instruction time for their student (Delgado, 2014).

Parents questioned out-of-school suspensions as far back as 1975. In that year, the U.S. Supreme Court heard Goss v. Lopez (Delgado, 2014). The case centered around a school issuing an out-of-school suspension without due process (Delgado, 2014). Ultimately, the Court agreed and ruled that school officials must give notice and hold a hearing for students facing suspension (Delgado, 2014). This stands today.

When discussing student discipline, it is impossible not to discuss the disproportionate statistics. From 1973 to 2006, suspension rates more than doubled for Latino students while suspension rates nearly tripled for African American students (Losen & Sibka, 2010). Dorado et al. (2016) and Moreno and Scaletta (2018) found that students with disabilities are also being disproportionately suspended.

"Punitive models perpetuate a cycle of externalized behavior, negative consequences and retraumatization" (Dutil, 2020, p.174). Sedillo-Hamann posits that schools who continue to use exclusionary discipline may actually be perpetuating more anti-social behaviors in students as well as retraumatizing them (2022). Further, researchers Gregory & Evans reported exclusionary discipline increases feelings of harm in students as well as escalates conflict (2020). A case study completed by Donelson in 2020, in which the researcher interviewed midwestern school officials, found that exclusionary discipline is not the most effective discipline for students (Donelson, 2020). The study also found that school officials unanimously reported that it is necessary to eliminate exclusionary discipline except when there is a danger to other students (Donelson, 2020). The APA urged "it is time to make the shifts in policy and practice to

keep schools safe and to preserve learning for students" (2008, p. 860). Zero-tolerance policies are moving to the wayside as more schools are responding to the trauma needs of students.

Becoming Trauma-Informed

Schools are responding to students' trauma by becoming "trauma-informed". Research posited that a district that uses a "trauma-informed framework provides a baseline level of support for all students whether or not they have been identified as needing support" (Anyon et al., 2018, p. 107). McGruder explained that to have a supportive trauma-informed environment, a school needs to address "safety, trust, transparency, peer support, collaboration, empowerment (voice and choice) as well as cultural, historical and gender issues" (2019, p. 122). Crosby et al. describe a trauma-informed framework as one that addresses the school culture, teacher-student rapport and school discipline (2018). McGruder also explained that a trauma-informed approach can empower students to develop the skills necessary for self-regulation, including managing emotions and exercising self-control (2019). Overall, a trauma-informed school provides a safe and supportive environment where students learn, and teachers work (DESE, 2019). This approach reduces the retraumatization of students as well as reduces the use of punitive consequences (Ura & d'Abreu, 2021).

Educators cannot prevent trauma that happens to the students, but educators can seek to ease the impact by implementing different strategies and interventions (Taylor & Barrett, 2018). It is important to note that educators do not need to know a student's trauma story to be able to help them (Varner, 2024). Various interventions help identify

the students that are at-risk, can provide support to students, and help teachers monitor the at-risk students and/or students of trauma (Taylor & Barrett, 2018). Teachers can change their mindsets and begin using a trauma lens; moving from the question: "what's wrong with you?" to "what happened to you?" which supports students of trauma (Thomas et al., 2019, Dorado et al., 2016). Taking it one step further, educators can ask: "what helps you?" (Taylor & Barrett, 2018). This question allows educators to reduce emotionally charged words between the student and the adult such as "trauma or attachment issues" (Taylor & Barrett, 2018). When teachers respond to behavior through this lens, they are more likely to respond sympathetically and not in a quick punitive way (Ura & d'Abreu, 2021). By focusing on a student's mental health needs, educators move away from exclusionary discipline and focus more on interventions and strategies (Dutil, 2020).

At the core of a trauma-informed school are student-staff relationships. A quantitative study completed by Nese et al. found that students are aware of and emphasized the importance and power of a student-teacher relationship (2022). Subramaniam & Wuest stated that the cornerstone of the trauma-informed approach is a "strong, trusting and predictable relationship between teachers and students (2022, p. 31). The teacher-student relationship is an important factor of student engagement, academic achievement and social-emotional development (Subramiam & Wuest, 2022; Epperly, 2021; Felps, 2020). Trust is pivotal for students and critical for positive relationships within the classroom (Sumbramiam & Wuest, 2022). Teachers must develop trust with students by getting to truly know their students (Sumbramiam & Wuest, 2022). This takes time as students of trauma have often been let down by the adults in their lives

(Sumbramiam & Wuest, 2022). Students of trauma are very observant, meaning they are constantly scanning for threats and authenticity; thus, it is crucial that the actions of the adults in the building match their words (Subramaniam & Wuest, 2022). Teachers can build positive relationships with students by learning about their students' strengths and incorporating those strengths as well as the student's interests, hopes and cultures into not only their teaching but conversations with that student (Subramaniam & Wuest, 2022). Teachers may receive some pushback from students because a connection can feel unsafe because students have previously been hurt by the adults in their lives (Varner, 2024).

Even as far back as 1978, educators were trying to figure out the relationship between student behavior and the classroom. Multhauf and Licata completed a study surrounding a humanistic vs custodial classroom style (1978). They discovered that students were less likely to misbehave in a classroom that was "full of action, interesting, exciting and powerful" (Multhauf & Licata, 1978, p. 42). The custodial classroom was full of routine and structure (Multhauf & Licata, 1978). Although their original hypotheses were answered, their study created more questions that we ask today. Was a lack of student behaviors due to the trust of the leeway within a humanistic classroom or was it due to the routine, structure, and major rules of the custodial classroom? In other words, how does a trauma-informed environment effect student behavior?

The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) published a model for Trauma-Informed Schools in 2019. There currently is no requirement in the state of Missouri for schools to be trauma-informed (DESE, 2019). Missouri Senate Bill 638 dictated that DESE must supply information to schools on how

to become trauma-informed but there is no requirement for Missouri schools to become trauma-informed (DESE, 2019).

Within the published model, DESE (2019) emphasized that a trauma-informed approach is not a new program for schools to implement. Becoming trauma-informed requires a paradigm shift in knowledge, perspective, attitudes and skills (DESE, 2019). As such, schools become focused on the fundamentals of a program in regard to trauma; this includes programs that schools already implemented. Trauma-informed schools refocus from rewards and punishment to a system of accountability (DESE, 2019). To accomplish this, DESE suggested behavioral supports and restorative practices (2019).

When a school becomes trauma-informed, students are able to develop positive relationships with at least one adult and school becomes a safe environment for them (Báez et al., 2019). Higley's research found that eighty percent of his interview participants believed that building relationships is vital to lower exclusionary discipline usage (Higley, 2020). Walton-Fisette reported that having one person in the school who demonstrates they care makes a difference in a student's ability to engage and learn (2020). The end goal of a trauma-informed school is: "to promote healthy, resilient teachers and learners capable of disrupting the cycle of trauma in their lives" (DESE, 2019, p. 3). DESE noted that becoming trauma-informed should be viewed as a continuum and not a checklist to be completed (2019). Forkey et al. emphasize that trauma-informed care is about relationships, hope, and building self-regulation (2021).

First, the Missouri Model of Trauma-Informed Care begins with five basic principles. These principles are safety, trustworthiness, choice, collaboration, and empowerment (DESE, 2019). The model states "these principles should be used to guide

every aspect of a school's trauma-informed journey and when fully realized, lead to more equitable outcomes" (DESE, 2019, p.7). The trauma-informed model has twelve indicators and five stages of becoming trauma-informed. Being trauma-informed is the highest stage a school can achieve in the state of Missouri. The other stages are: 0-pre-trauma aware; 1-trauma aware; 2-trauma sensitive; 3-trauma responsive and finally; 4-trauma informed (DESE, 2019). Being trauma aware means that educators have learned about trauma and its impacts and are beginning to implement appropriate changes within the school (DESE, 2019). Trauma sensitive translates to schools that are examining the five principles, have leadership buy-in, and have informed their community about the journey they are on (DESE, 2019). Trauma responsive is the level where schools begin to make policy and practice changes and are implementing new policies and practices (DESE, 2019). The schools at this level have a higher level of involvement from the community as well as teachers who are beginning to recognize the need to change their own actions and behaviors (DESE, 2019). Finally, the trauma-informed level is achieved. At this final level, schools are able to see and analyze data and results from the changes they have instituted and are continuing to seek ways to improve (DESE, 2019). DESE emphasizes that this stage is never "completed" because students and structures are always growing and changing and the school environment must adapt. (DESE, 2019, p. 6).

DESE recommends three major steps for a district to become trauma-informed. The first step is for the school to engage in universal training which creates trauma awareness (DESE, 2019). This step includes introductory training to all staff that helps create a common vocabulary for educators as well as explaining the effects of trauma on

the brain and the human body (DESE, 2019). The second step DESE suggests is to create a trauma team which means the school is at the trauma sensitive level (2019). This team that includes teachers, counselors and administrators should receive additional training on trauma and hold regular meetings (DESE, 2019). The team's primary goal is to create an action plan which may include changing practices and policies within the school (DESE, 2019). Finally, step three is ongoing program practice and policy change which is the levels trauma responsive and trauma-informed (DESE, 2019). DESE emphasizes that this is a process and not a destination (2019). The following paragraphs describe the twelve indicators in which schools can use to gauge their progress. It is important to note that more than one indicator can and should be addressed at the same time (DESE, 2019).

As a school uses the list of indicators, educators will notice that there is a description of each level (0 to 4) under each indicator listed. It is using these descriptors that a trauma-informed team can identify where they are in addressing that indicator. The first indicator states: school leadership and staff demonstrate an understanding of the impact and prevalence of trauma in daily practice (DESE, 2019; Cummings et al., 2017). The second indicator explains an equity lens is applied to all programs and policies to address bias and the impact of historical trauma and systemic oppression (DESE, 2019). Thirdly, students are given age-appropriate information about stress, trauma, and emotional/behavioral regulation and opportunities to develop new coping tools (DESE, 2019). Next, staff have access to needed supports, including coaching, consultation, and meaningful professional development; benefits that support their health and well-being; necessary materials and resources; and administrative support in prioritizing self-care (DESE, 2019). This is important as one researcher completed a quantitative study of high

school teachers that teachers may experience negative effects from exposure to student trauma, which is also known as secondary trauma (Denham, 2019). Fifthly, schools actively, appropriately, and meaningfully engage parents and caregivers in relevant educational opportunities and decision making at all levels (DESE, 2019). Indicator six addresses the topic of this research. Discipline practices and policies support restoring and repairing community, addressing the unmet, underlying needs driving behavior, exercising compassion, and supporting a culture of accountability. (DESE, 2019). Next, students are given meaningful and developmentally appropriate leadership and decision-making opportunities, particularly around issues that directly impact their experiences and education (DESE, 2019). Staff have access to meaningful leadership opportunities and are supported in trying new and innovative techniques to support students (DESE, 2019; Cummings et al., 2017). Schools actively, appropriately, and meaningfully partner with community organizations to meet the needs of students and staff (DESE, 2019). Next, curriculum design across grade levels and subject areas supports the trauma-informed process (DESE, 2019). Then, human resources and supervision practices, including hiring, performance management, and employment transitions reflect the principles of trauma-informed care (DESE, 2019). Finally, the last indicator states that schools have a system in place to continually evaluate and improve practices and policies (DESE, 2019).

Indicator number six stated: Discipline practices and policies support restoring and repairing community, addressing the unmet, underlying needs driving behavior, exercising compassion, and supporting a culture of accountability (DESE, 2019). This indicator directly addresses school discipline practices and policies. This indicator lends

itself to ideas on how to transform discipline policies and practices by using such terms as “restoring”, “community”, “compassion”, and “accountability”. Transforming policies and practices will be further discussed in the following section.

The Missouri Trauma-Informed Model included a survey that is a self-assessment (DESE, 2019). As step two shows, each building should have a trauma-informed team to identify where a building is on the trauma-informed model (DESE, 2019). There is no checklist for this journey. DESE recommends that a school has a strong team of stakeholders to create a vision and to define what being trauma-informed means for that particular school (DESE, 2019). DESE also emphasizes that measuring progress is essential so that the trauma-informed work is continuous (2019).

Similarly, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration emphasized six principles of a trauma-informed approach (2014). The first two principles include safety and trust (SAMHSA, 2014). Principle three is about trustworthiness and transparency (SAMHSA, 2014). Principle four is collaboration, and Principle five is about empowerment, voice and choice (SAMHSA, 2014). Finally, the last Principle is about cultural, historical and gender issues (SAMHSA, 2014). These principles can be seen in the Missouri model.

A school administrator is the leader of the building who carries the torch for the mission and vision of the school or any program. This includes a trauma-informed building. Walker posited that it is the administrator’s responsibility to shift their own mindset from one of punitive discipline to one of positive discipline and using alternative approaches to managing behavior (Walker, 2021). Administrators must also ensure teachers obtain the training necessary to ensure their success in the classroom

(SAMHSA, 2014). Teachers who are not properly trauma-informed trained, may misread behaviors as requiring discipline when in fact the child is showing signs of stress or a trauma response (Ura & d'Abreu, 2021). Without proper training and by not managing behaviors correctly, the behavior may escalate causing more severe discipline which leads to more trauma (Dutil, 2020). To be a successful trauma-informed school, teachers must demonstrate flexibility in classroom instruction and management and ultimately, requires administrator support (Dutil, 2020).

When discussing a trauma-informed approach, social-emotional learning and social-emotional competence are typically discussed. When an administrator focuses on increasing the teachers' social-emotional competence, this allows for teachers to interpret and respond to student behaviors more accurately (Ura & d'Abreu, 2021). Ura & d'Abreu surveyed 164 teachers and discovered that sixty-five percent of those teachers had low to medium social-emotional competence (2021). Teachers with social-emotional competence are more likely to self-regulate and can better empathize with students (Ura & d'Abreu, 2021). So, within a trauma-informed approach, it is vital that teachers work on themselves as well. "Studies and researchers continue to point to the importance of social-emotional learning for student success as well as educator mindset" (Higley, 2020, p. 105). A study conducted by Balfanz and Byrnes concluded that students with strong social-emotional skills had higher academic achievement (2020). Important to note is that these findings were from several different districts which included elementary, middle school and high school students (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2020). The authors concluded that working on social-emotional skills such as relationship building while working on

academic skills was more effective than working on SEL skills in isolation (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2020).

Transformation of Policies and Practices

Many schools are using exclusionary discipline which disconnects students from the learning environment (Hodge, 2020). In 2011, the U.S. Department of Justice required schools to record data on exclusionary rates of students (Hwang et al., 2022). Since then, educators across the United States have begun revising discipline policies.

Early intervention and prevention are vital for schools (Walkley, 2013). Researchers have emphasized the need for preventative measures and for educators to be proactive with student behaviors (Subramiam & Wuest, 2022; Donelson, 2020). Samerson found that there are middle schools that choose to focus on early intervention for several reasons (2010). Samerson sited districts who were identifying students who needed more behavioral attention to support them and supporting students with positive behaviors (2010). Samerson studied middle schools in New York City that implemented non-traditional and alternative interventions for student discipline (2010). The schools' goal was to promote positive student behaviors (Samerson, 2010). Early intervention strategies implemented as early as possible for children of trauma and/or adversity is essential for changing the trajectory of their lives (Risehl, 2019). Higley's qualitative research held ninety percent of administrators he interviewed believed proactive and preventative approaches to discipline need to be increased within schools (Higley, 2020).

The federal government took note of the issues of discipline and the school-to-prison-pipeline and decided to see what they could do to help. In 2011, the Attorney

General, Eric Holder, and the Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, held a press conference together in which they announced the "Supportive School Discipline Initiative" (OPA, 2011). In this press conference, it was explained that the initiative's goal was to "support good discipline practices to foster safe and productive learning environments in every classroom" (OPA, 2011, p.1). Secretary Duncan expressed his concern for the increasing and disparate discipline rates within our country (OPA, 2011).

Research held that to address the student discipline issue, many schools are implementing restorative practices (RPs) and other practices which focus on relationships and conflict resolution (Breedlove et al., 2021). Denver public school system began discipline transformation within their district ten years ago due to stakeholder concerns regarding racial disparity and the growing school-to-prison pipeline. (Anyon et al., 2018). The district set a goal to lower the suspension rates to three percent or lower for all students (Anyon et al., 2018). The result was an emphasis on student-adult relationship building. Another study in one southern middle school found that over a five-year span, suspension rates declined after the implementation of restorative practices (Felps, 2020).

Anyon et al., interviewed teachers at the end of the ten years and found that teachers across the district in various buildings were sighting the importance of relationship-building (2018). Teachers stated that a positive student-teacher relationship allows for relevant consequences and interventions in that discipline is no longer a just an administrative practice but an opportunity for personal growth (Anyon et al., 2018). Ura et al. noted that when a noncompliant student was referred to the school social worker or counselor before the office, interventions were utilized instead of exclusionary discipline showing that teachers understood that trauma may cause behaviors (Ura, et al., 2021).

"Relationship building plays a role in students social, emotional, behavioral and academic outcomes" (Anyon et al., 2018, p. 227). This relationship building also enhances the school climate as the school becomes a safe and supportive environment (Cummings, 2017; Walton-Fisette, 2020). Huang et al. found that "a positive school climate, marked by a fair and just disciplinary environment, is associated with a lower likelihood of student suspension" (2020, p. 120). When educators are focused on relationship-building, "every positive interaction with a student is a therapeutic moment" (Varner, 2024).

Social-emotional learning or SEL can be used as a program to address social and academic issues (Plumb et al., 2016). SEL builds emotional literacy and problem-solving which are two important characteristics of resiliency (Plumb et al., 2016, Huang et al., 2020). SEL also helps to create a climate that is more conducive to teaching and learning (Dorado et al., 2016). "Our results suggest that a positive school climate, marked by a fair and just disciplinary environment, is associated with a lower likelihood of student suspension" (Huang & Cornell, 2018). A strong SEL program allows students to become more successful overall; students can better regulate their emotions, are more skilled at making friends and are able to reflect on their own behavior and emotions (Baez, et al., 2019). Some authors articulate that SEL alone is not enough for students of trauma, that a trauma-informed approach is needed as well (Baez, et al., 2019).

One intervention strategy that some schools are using is the Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) (Thompson et al., 2022). MTSS is an intervention in which a school can address a student's academic and behavioral issues. The first tier addresses all students and is usually a system-wide program such as Positive Behavior Interventions

and Supports (PBIS) (Thompson et al., 2022). The second tier is more direct to a smaller group of students. This tier may involve small group instruction using social stories (Thompson et al., 2022). The last tier is the most intensive intervention where a student may receive an individualized behavior plan (Thompson et al., 2022). MTSS includes a student's caregiver in the process. By including the caregiver in the process, the school and home relationship strengthens which can create a mutually beneficial relationship for the student (Thompson et al., 2022). This is another strategy in positively effecting a child of trauma.

Researchers have studied the impact of PBIS. A quantitative study of a middle school in Ohio found that after one year of implementation of PBIS, office referrals, out-of-school suspensions and in-school suspensions were significantly reduced (Reynolds, 2020). Another quantitative study found that there was a considerable reduction in exclusionary discipline over a two-year period that PBIS was implemented (Poor, 2021). In contrast, another quantitative study of different middle schools found that there was no significant decline of suspensions after PBIS was implemented (Wooten, 2015). However, these middle schools had principals that had varying practices and philosophies which could have ultimately affected the suspension rates (Wooten, 2015). The researcher found that the school that had more extra-curricular activities available to students had more supportive relationships for students (Wooten, 2015).

Restorative practice or restorative justice is a discipline alternative that is used across the nation and has been used somewhat regularly since the 1970s (Sedillo-Hamann, 2022). Restorative practice is a trauma-informed approach as it considers the victim as well as the offender (Sedillo-Hamann, 2022). In his qualitative study, Epperly

found that educators who have experienced ACES themselves lean more toward using restorative practices (Epperly, 2021). Restorative practice helps students recognize their own behaviors and helps students address their misbehavior (Donelson, 2020). Further, restorative practice causes the offender to identify the harm that was caused, recognize the needs of the victim and causes the offender to problem-solve to repair the situation (Sedillo-Hamann, 2022). Restorative practice has traditionally had three tiers. Tier 1 is prevention; Tier 2 is where the intervention is introduced and Tier 3 is the more intensive intervention (Kervick et al., 2020). Peer mediation is usually at the Tier 2 level (Kervick, et al., 2020). "Restorative practices that formalize student and peer roles in reducing school discipline can provide this opportunity to students, support their developmental growth, and enhance implementation of restorative practices" (Samimi et al., 2023). Tier 3 requires a reentry plan for reentry into the school community (Kervick et al., 2020). Restorative practice creates a more positive and relational school culture (Kervick et al., 2020). "Restorative practice is still in varying stages of adoption by schools as a means to reduce exclusionary discipline practice and build positive school communities" (Kervick et al., 2020, p. 174).

The research on restorative practices is conflicting at best. Hodge completed a case study of middle schools that implemented restorative practice (2020). The researcher determined that the middle schools studied had a reduction in exclusionary discipline over a two-year period when the schools implemented restorative practice (Hodge, 2020). Within these schools, restorative practice improved attendance by fifty percent (Hodge, 2020). Teacher and student relationships as well as student to student relationships improved by forty-one percent (Hodge, 2020). Finally, suspensions were reduced by

fifty-eight percent (Hodge, 2020). Gregory & Evans studied the suspension rates in Denver, Colorado from 2006-2013 (2020). Their analysis showed suspension rates fell from eleven percent to six percent after restorative practices were implemented (Gregory & Evans, 2020). Another qualitative study of ten administrators found that the implementation of restorative practices decreased office referrals and out-of-school suspensions (Salemi, 2021). Salemi's study also found all ten administrators said restorative practices had increased student-teacher relationships as well (2021). Felps completed a quantitative study on restorative practices at a middle school and found that there was a reduction in exclusionary discipline (2020). In Bryant's quantitative study of a middle school who implemented restorative practices, he discovered that there was no impact on the reduction of exclusionary discipline (2019). Bryant also noted in this study that the teachers were vocal in their concern of eliminating exclusionary discipline (2019). Yet, Darling-Hammond found in his qualitative research study that staff tend to resort back to punitive measures and abandon restorative practices when dealing with classroom conflicts (2023). Thirty-four studies about restorative practices were analyzed; nineteen of the studies reported a decrease in suspension rates leaving fifteen with no change or an increase in suspension rates (Lodi et al., 2022). Further, an integrative review of restorative practices and exclusionary discipline found that restorative practices are "an effective intervention to reduce exclusionary discipline, including the racial disparities that are an essential element in the school-to-prison pipeline" (Samimi et al., 2023, p. 42).

At the University of California, a program of discipline called Healthy Environments and Response to Trauma in Schools or HEARTS has been developed

(Dorado et al., 2016). This program addresses the trauma in students as well as the adults within a building (Dorado et al., 2016). The heartbeat behind HEARTS is about safety, predictability, compassion, dependability, relationships, and resilience (Dorado et al., 2016). Social-emotional learning (SEL) is a large part of this program's success as SEL helps to create a climate that is more conducive to teaching and learning (Dorado et al., 2016). Along with SEL, HEARTS also addresses three different domains of trauma: attachment, self-regulation, and competency (Dorado et al., 2016). Four schools were studied that implemented HEARTS from school years 2009-2010 to school years 2013-2014 in the San Francisco school district; data was taken in 2008-2009 before implementation occurred (Dorado et al., 2016). Suspensions went from a total of fifty-six to a total of three with there being 674 incidents initially reported down to eighty-seven (Dorado et al., 2016).

Crosby and fellow researchers completed a study on an intervention dubbed the Monarch room (2018). This study of a public midwestern high school emphasized the need of educators to recognize the impact of trauma and triggers on student behaviors (Crosby et al., 2018). The Monarch room was a safe place students could go to if their emotions were interfering with their learning (Crosby et al., 2018). Students could either self-refer or a teacher could refer them (Crosby et al., 2018). Once the researchers analyzed the data, they discovered that of the nine exclusionary discipline reports, only two of those were students who attempted to use the Monarch room (Crosby et al., 2018). In other words, students with the option to self-regulate their emotions were more successful in the school environment.

Another intervention program that has made waves across Southwest Missouri is BIST (Behavior Intervention Support Team). The BIST model recognizes that student behaviors are often a result of their past traumas (BIST, 2024). BIST believes that students are not able to be successful academically until they feel safe and are able to work on healing (BIST, 2024). The BIST model has four major components. These include: early intervention, caring confrontation, protective plan and outlasting the acting out (BIST, 2024). The model allows the teacher and the student to partner together to learn replacement skills like taking a break instead of acting out (BIST, 2024). This model allows for teachers to help students learn new skills instead of the harmful ones they may be used to (like throwing chairs) (BIST, 2024). Students are not sent directly home for their behaviors but students help teachers create plans, so they are able to stay at school (BIST, 2024).

Each of the four components of BIST is important. The first is early intervention. This stage is where teachers set expectations and intervene after one warning (BIST, 2024). This allows teachers to maintain the same expectations for all students. Secondly, is caring confrontation. In this stage, the teacher works to partner with the student to call attention to their behavior and bring it back to the expectation (BIST, 2024). Third is protective plan. This is where teachers and students create a plan together to correct the misbehavior (BIST, 2024). At this stage, teachers are usually teaching a replacement skill (BIST, 2024). For instance, instead of throwing a pencil when frustrated, a teacher and student may agree that the student picks up the hall pass and gets a drink of water when frustrated (BIST, 2024). Finally, is outlasting the acting out. This can be the hardest stage as teachers must stay the course and continue to confront the behavior and teach the

replacement skill (BIST, 2024). BIST is not just about compliance at school but learning new coping skills for life.

Once new discipline policies and procedures are written, the execution of those policies and procedures is important. Research posited that ongoing professional development and support is essential for these schools as they implement the new policies and procedures (Reed et al., 2020). However, schools need to assess whether their efforts of new practices, policies and procedures are addressing the needs of the students (Higley, 2020). DESE proclaims that becoming trauma-informed is a reflective journey and not necessarily a destination (2019). Two questions are to be asked to help guide a school's constant reflection and improvement: "if this journey works, what will look different? and how will we know?" (DESE, 2019, p.10).

Positive Childhood Experiences (PCEs)

Researchers have identified several factors that can buffer against the negative effects of childhood trauma and contribute to beneficial outcomes for students. Research identified these factors and they are known as Positive Childhood Experiences (PCEs) and Protective Factors (PFs) (Breedlove et al., 2021). A 2021 study found there are seven positive childhood experiences: (1) felt able to talk to their family about feelings; (2) felt their family stood by them during difficult times; (3) enjoyed participating in community traditions; (4) felt a sense of belonging in high school; (5) felt supported by friends; (6) had at least two nonparent adults who took a genuine interest in them; and (7) felt safe and protected by an adult in their home (Breedlove et al., 2021). Although several of these positive factors are related to the home environment, several of them can be

supported by the school community. The American Society for the Positive Care for Children (American SPCC) encourages predictable, nurturing environments, recognition, praise and acceptance and emphasizes the importance of the teacher-student relationship (2024).

As some researchers found in student interviews, students say the supports they had at school really helped them improve not only academically, but behaviorally (Báez et al., 2019). The teacher-student relationship is essential for students' social-emotional development and academic achievement (Subramiam & Wuest, 2022). Students went on in this interview to say that the adults need to realize that these changes take time because they are still facing life challenges every day (Báez et al., 2019).

Research is showing that Positive Childhood Experiences make an overall difference in someone's life. One study conducted by Dr. Christina Bethell found that the more PCEs a child has, the better their mental health as an adult (Pinetree Institute, 2024). The American Society for the Positive Care for Children (American SPCC) reports that the more PCEs a person has, the less likely the odds of depression (2024). The society reports that people with 0-2 PCEs have a 48% chance of depression, 3-5 PCEs have a 25% chance of depression while people with 6-7 PCEs have only a 12% chance of depression (American SPCC, 2024).

Resilience is an important word when discussing trauma and rising above that trauma. Resilience can be defined as "the capacity of an individual or family to adapt successfully to challenges that threaten its function, survival, or future development (Forkey, et al., 2021). Resilience in a person can change and grow over time and is often influenced by positive relationships (Forkey, et al., 2021). There are many factors that

contribute to a person's resilience, such as environment, self, family and community; but the authors have created an acronym to identify a person's individual resilience factors (Forkey, et al., 2021). Those factors are found in the acronym: THREAD; Thinking and learning brain, Hope, Regulation (self-control), Efficacy, Attachment, Developmental skill mastery and social connectedness (Forkey, et al., 2021).

A study completed in 2017 interviewed fourteen various service providers to children including teachers, social workers, and counselors. (Cummings, et al., 2017). All of the providers unanimously agreed that students of trauma can be resilient (Cummings, et al., 2017). One service provider stated "children are resilient, and even though children go through really traumatizing things, they can grow up and be strong successful adults (Cummings, et al., 2017, p. 2735). DESE acknowledges the importance of resilience as the Trauma-informed Model encourages teachers and students to learn about the importance of self-care and resilience (DESE, 2019).

Trauma-Informed Professional Development

Once new discipline policies and procedures are written, the execution of those policies and procedures is important. Research posited that ongoing professional development and support is essential for these schools as they implement new policies and procedures (Reed et al., 2020, Walton-Fisette, 2020, Higley, 2020). Just having new policies and procedures is not the end of the issue. Thomas et al., (2019) emphasized that administrative buy-in is crucial to the success of the new policies and procedures. Researchers state that there is a "need for training and professional development to successfully implement student-centered discipline practices" (Burrell et al., 2021, p. 62). This professional development is critical because research found that teachers feel

supported by their administration but not fully prepared to deal or properly handle children and families of trauma (Navarro, 2022). Productive professional development will emphasize how educators not only view the internal factors of a student but also the external factors effecting students (Hicks, 2021 and Reed et al., 2020). Professional development for teachers allows teachers to reflect on their own social-emotional skills so that they are able to think about student perspectives (Ura, et al., 2021). A teachers' high level of self-awareness and self-regulation allows for this (Ura, et al., 2021). When a teacher is considering a student's perspective, this allows for a stronger relationship instead of the teacher making assumptions about the student's behavior (Ura, et al., 2021).

A national superintendent survey found that twenty-seven percent of superintendents believe that improving classroom management through professional development would decrease exclusionary discipline rates (AASA, 2014). The same survey found that thirty-eight percent of superintendents believe teachers and staff not only need support but further training in how to build positive relationships with students (AASA, 2014).

But before teachers can adjust within their classrooms, teachers must begin with self-examination to find the space between the head and the heart when it comes to discipline (Epperly, 2021). A study completed in 2017 found several things that teachers should do when interacting with students in their classrooms, such as react properly, ensure positive social-emotional responses, show overall positive regard as well as minimize possible triggers for students, if triggers are known (Cummings, et al., 2017). In West Virginia, there is a teacher training program that helps teachers to first learn how to

manage their own emotions and reactions and then learn how to create a sense of safety within their classroom (Rishel et al., 2019).

One does not always consider professional development for students, but some research points in that direction. In a review of eleven studies, Samimi et al., found that many of the studies emphasized the need to provide training to students (2023).

Lastly, preservice teachers must be remembered in this discussion. Authors Subramaniam and Wuest emphasized the need to teach preservice teachers about trauma and the importance of building positive relationships with students (2022). The authors posited that current educators should be helping and mentoring pre-service teachers and emphasized the need for teacher prep programs to include trauma, relationship building and trauma-informed care (Subramaniam & Wuest, 2022). College faculty should model positive relationship building for pre-service teachers through discussions and role-playing (Subramaniam & Wuest, 2022). Curriculum about classroom management strategies should include honest discussions from current educators about real-world relationship-building examples in the classroom (Subramaniam & Wuest, 2022). Finally, the authors discussed how pre-service teachers in their teacher prep programs should have the opportunity to discuss their discipline beliefs as well as explore positive school-wide systems such as PBIS and other interventions (Subramaniam & Wuest, 2022).

Summary

In 1997, a two-year study was completed in which researchers discovered common traumatic events (called ACEs) in people ages 0-17. These ACEs can lead to other personal issues such as health issues or social issues. Since then, research has

continued on this idea of traumatic events. Some research has found that trauma can alter the brain structure of a child. This can lead to issues emotionally, behaviorally and/or academically. Educators look to Maslow's hierarchy to understand the needs of all children but especially a child of trauma. Their basic needs and safety and security must be met.

Public health officials began to help teachers understand the link between public health and student behavior (Hicks, 2021). Teachers began to understand there is a need to understand a child's behaviors to help them at school. The conversation around traumatized students began to change. Researchers helped teachers change their language from "what's wrong with you?" to "what happened to you?" (Thomas et al., 2019, Dorado et al., 2016). Finally, the latest question that has been added is "how can I support you?"

Zero-tolerance policies paved the way for exclusionary discipline. Zero-tolerance policies were originally mandated for students who brought firearms or illegal drugs to school. However, these policies metamorphosed into ones that contained other behaviors such as truancy, disrespect, defiance, tardiness and others. This new adaptation of the policies for zero-tolerance saw a drastic increase in the use of exclusionary discipline whether it be out-of-school suspension, in-school-suspension, or expulsion.

The data on attitudes of educators regarding exclusionary discipline encompasses a wide range of beliefs. There are some educators who believe it is harmful to students but feel there are no other options. Further, some educators who participated in research believe that exclusionary discipline is not effective for changing student behaviors. There are some educators who have reported they have to squelch their own belief systems in

order to carry-out exclusionary discipline. On the contrary, there are some educators who believe that zero-tolerance policies and exclusionary discipline are effective. When compared to parents' attitudes on exclusionary discipline, research demonstrates parents are not in favor of exclusionary discipline.

Schools across America are responding to the effects of students' trauma by becoming trauma-informed. In doing so, a school is focusing primarily on student-adult relationships, safety and support for students. The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education has published a Trauma-informed Model that schools can use to transition their buildings to being trauma-informed. The end goal of a trauma-informed school is: "to promote healthy, resilient teachers and learners capable of disrupting the cycle of trauma in their lives" (DESE, 2019, p. 3). DESE notes that being trauma-informed is more about a paradigm shift and not a new program to implement.

DESE's model has five stages with twelve total indicators. A school can range from 0 to 4 on each indicator which labels them from pre-trauma aware to being trauma-informed. Some of the indicators happen at the administrative level while others happen within the classroom. The model includes a survey that is a self-assessment. This survey allows a school to measure their progress so that the trauma-informed work is continuous.

Student-staff positive relationships is a key piece to being trauma-informed. Positive connections allows a student to form a relationship so they can feel safe and ultimately learn. Speaker Josh Varner said, "your history of connection is a better predictor than your history of trauma" (Varner, 2024).

The work of transforming policies and practices is where the rubber hits the road. If schools are going to reduce their use of exclusionary discipline, they will need a

program that helps them do so. In this chapter, several intervention and prevention programs were explored, for example, restorative practices, PBIS, social-emotional learning, MTSS, HEARTS, BIST, and the Monarch Room. Social-emotional learning is not just for students but is also important for teachers to learn about themselves so they can better help the students in their care.

Next, this Researcher discussed PCEs and protective factors. These are important because these are factors that can buffer against the traumatic events that students have already experienced. Resilience was also discussed along with a person's individual factors that lead to growing resilience. Resilience can grow and is often influenced by positive relationships in a student's life.

Finally, this Researcher chose to end the discussion of the research with professional development. In order to move a school away from old policies and follow new policies, there must be buy-in from the administrator as well as the classroom teachers. Being a trauma-informed building takes work and all educators must be supported in this journey. This Researcher also noted the importance of professional development not just for the current educators but for the pre-service teachers as well. Current classroom teachers should be involved with the teacher prep programs to help give real-world examples to pre-service teachers.

With the conclusion of this chapter, this Researcher would emphasize the need for more research on the attitudes and beliefs of educators about exclusionary discipline and more research on the attitudes and beliefs of educators about trauma and how it effects students in the classroom. The question remains: if the research supports that exclusionary discipline has a negative effect on students, why are some schools still using

it? More research needs to be completed on the schools that have extremely low exclusionary discipline rates. The questions for those schools would be: what are you doing and how are you doing it?

Chapter Three

Research Methodology

"The goal of any effective disciplinary system must be to ensure a safe school climate while avoiding policies and practices that may reduce students' opportunity to learn" (APA, 2008). Researchers discovered that excluding children of trauma from the school environment may prolong their healing and their sense of belonging (Pierce et al., 2022). Research posits that exclusionary discipline leads to a decrease in student achievement and increases a student's risk of dropping out (Sedillo-Hamann, 2022; Crosby et al., 2018). Since children of trauma have a difficult time discriminating between safe and unsafe environments, sending them home and out of school further confuses their brains (Thomas et al., 2019). This research reinforces the need of schools to examine their exclusionary discipline rates in schools, especially when working towards becoming trauma-informed. Trauma-informed schools refocus from rewards and punishment to a system of accountability (DESE, 2019).

The aim of this research was to investigate if there is a connection between a school's self-identified trauma-informed level and the number of students subjected to exclusionary discipline at the same school. This study examined how a school rates itself overall on the Missouri Model for Trauma-Informed Schools indicators as compared to the school's exclusionary discipline data.

In this chapter, the methodology for this study is described in detail. The chapter is organized into five sections: research design, research participants, role of the Researcher, instrumentation, data collection and data analysis. This chapter concludes with a summary of methodology.

The research question for this study was: what is the relationship between a school's self-identified level of being trauma-informed and the in-school, out of-school suspension, and/or expulsion (exclusionary) discipline rates at the middle school level? The hypotheses are as follows:

Null Hypothesis One (Ho1) The school's level of being trauma-informed has no effect on in-school suspension rates at the middle school level.

Alternative Hypothesis (H1) The school's level of being trauma-informed has an effect on in-school suspension rates at the middle school level.

Null Hypothesis Two (Ho2) The school's level of being trauma-informed has no effect on out-of-school suspension rates at the middle school level.

Alternative Hypothesis Two(H2) The school's level of being trauma-informed has an effect on out-of-school suspension rates at the middle school level.

Null Hypothesis Three (Ho3) The school's level of being trauma-informed has no effect on expulsion rates at the middle school level.

Alternative Hypothesis Three (H3) The school's level of being trauma-informed has an effect on expulsion rates at the middle school level.

Research Design

The Researcher purposefully chose to complete a quantitative study for this research project. There were several reasons for this. First, quantitative research relies on numerical data and minimizes any possibility of researcher bias. Since this Researcher has a history of working with children of trauma and exclusionary discipline, she felt like it would be best if data was obtained and analyzed without the influence of the

Researcher. Second, as the saying goes, the data speaks for itself; the analysis of the data tells a story. The results of a quantitative study can be quickly obtained as surveys are typically used to obtain data. Also, a quantitative study is easy to use in future studies as other researchers use previous data to support or oppose their positions.

This research project was a quantitative study. Two sets of data were used. The first set of data used was exclusionary discipline rates for participating schools which were collected from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education school data website. The second set of data used was a survey from the Missouri Model of Trauma-informed Schools sent out to all Missouri middle school principals. The survey was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The letter can be found in Appendix A.

A quantitative survey was used to obtain the trauma-informed level of participating Missouri middle schools. This survey is from the Missouri Model for Trauma-Informed Schools which is found on the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's website. There is a description of each level from 0 (pre-trauma aware) to 4 (trauma-informed) under each indicator listed with a total of twelve indicators. Each indicator is thoroughly explained. The complete survey can be found in Appendix B.

The data from the trauma-informed survey and the exclusionary discipline rates were used to accept or reject the three hypotheses.

Research Participants

Middle school principals from across the state of Missouri participated in this study by completing the self-assessing survey from the Missouri Model for Trauma-Informed Schools. For the purpose of this study, middle schools were defined as buildings that contain 5th through 8th grade or a combination thereof.

When using a survey or rubric in a research study, it is important to draw from a large population. When doing a correlational study, a target of 100-200 participants is set to obtain data analysis accuracy. Therefore, this Researcher would need at least 100 middle school principals to respond to the survey. All middle school principals in the state of Missouri were asked to participate via email. If a middle school building had a principal and assistant or vice-principal, only the head principal was asked to complete the survey. Over 600 emails were sent to enlist the participation of all Missouri public middle school principals. It is noted that various school districts across Missouri have various configurations of middle schools. In some places the middle school is included within the high school while other middle schools are free-standing. Still, other buildings have middle school grade levels within an elementary building. This Researcher used random sampling for this study; therefore, all participants had an equal chance of being selected.

Role of the Researcher

This Researcher is not an active employee for a Missouri public school district. However, the Researcher was previously a building principal in Missouri and there may be some middle school principals that respond to the survey that have had a prior

working relationship with the Researcher. This will in no way impede the data received from the surveys.

The Researcher will not have any influence over the research participants involved in this study. The Researcher's primary role is to distribute the survey, collect survey data and analyze all data.

Although the Researcher collected district information in order to analyze the survey data compared to exclusionary discipline data, there is no identifiable information in publication. For reporting purposes, all responding schools were assigned random numbers.

Instrumentation

The instrumentation used for this research is The Missouri Model for Trauma-Informed Schools. This document was created at the request of the State of Missouri's Trauma Roundtable (DESE, 2019). The Alive and Well Communities Educational Leader's Workgroup put the document together (DESE, 2019). The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education then allowed educators across the state to submit feedback on the document (DESE, 2019). With all the feedback and input, the final document was released in 2019.

Within the model, the workgroup has included several sections to help an organization on their trauma-informed journey. First, the document explains the facts and some myths as they relate to being trauma-informed in the section "Understanding the Model" (DESE, 2019). The second section is entitled "The Missouri Model Principles of Trauma-Informed Care" (DESE, 2019). This section explains the five major principles

the model is built on: safety, trustworthiness, choice, collaboration and empowerment (DESE, 2019). Next, the three major steps of becoming a trauma-informed organization are described. These steps include: universal trauma training, creating a trauma team and ongoing practice and policy change (DESE, 2019). Finally, the twelve indicators are discussed in depth (DESE, 2019). The twelve indicators range from one about school discipline policies to helping students obtain age-appropriate information about trauma and learning coping skills to engaging parents to professional development for teachers to hiring practices to giving students and teachers' leadership opportunities to getting the community actively involved within the school. Indicator six directly addresses discipline policies (DESE, 2019).

There are a total of twelve indicators for an organization to use to self-evaluate their trauma-informed journey. Within each indicator there are descriptors of the five levels (DESE, 2019). The consistent levels for each indicator are: 0-pre-trauma aware; 1-trauma aware; 2-trauma sensitive; 3-trauma responsive and finally; 4-trauma informed (DESE, 2019). The Researcher created an electronic survey from the model.

For this research, principals self-evaluated their middle school building using The Model for Trauma-Informed Schools to determine the school's level of being trauma-informed. A principal identified a level (0-4) for each of the twelve indicators with descriptors on an electronic survey. This Researcher included a copy of The Missouri Model for Trauma-Informed Schools to assist principals with any questions they may have. (See Appendix B).

Once these surveys were completed, the Researcher calculated the mean of all twelve indicators for each individual school to obtain a final trauma-informed score for each middle school building.

In quantitative research, reliability and validity describe the accuracy and consistency of the data. In this study, when considering reliability and validity, it is noted that these are self-ranking items. The answers to the survey are subjective and based on the principal's answers. Also, this Researcher only asked for the principal's ranks on the indicators and not a team of teachers or individual teachers. To increase reliability and validity, the leadership team or trauma-informed team could have been asked to submit surveys as well. Before being sent to all Missouri middle school principals, the survey was sent out to two local middle schools to help obtain reliability and validity.

Data Collection

A master distribution list of Missouri middle school principals was obtained from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's website. Once the IRB (see Appendix A) approved the survey, it was emailed to all Missouri middle school principals. Over 600 emails were sent to enlist the participation of all Missouri middle school principals. There was an introduction to the project as well as a consent form included in the email as well as a timeline for the principals. Email addresses were not recorded as surveys were submitted to assure the anonymity of the participants. However, one question asked the name of the school and the grade levels in the school so exclusionary discipline data could be obtained. Participants had the opportunity to include an email address if said person was interested in the final results of this research

project. In order to be included in the post-research publication, they were instructed to separately email the Researcher to be added to the list.

Data was stored on the Researcher's personal password protected computer to insure privacy and confidentiality.

In-school and out-of-school suspension and expulsion discipline rates were obtained from the corresponding schools that participated in the survey. The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's website, more specifically, the Missouri Comprehensive Data System (MCDS), was used to obtain all necessary data.

The Researcher was not able to illicit the required exclusionary discipline data from the MCDS website, so the Researcher contacted DESE to obtain help. The issue was with the Researcher's web browser and the contact at DESE sent the link needed to obtain the appropriate data.

Data Analysis

The Researcher used Excel and SPSS (a statistical software by IBM) to organize and analyze all data. First, the Researcher scrubbed the data by assigning random numbers to all of the reporting schools. Next, the Researcher used the mean of all answers to the twelve indicators to obtain each building's overall trauma-informed level. This was done using Excel. Next, the Spearman correlation was calculated. This was completed by inputting the data into SPSS. The Researcher considered the correlation coefficient as well as the p-value and the sample size.

The Spearman correlation tests for the strength of the association between a continuous and ordinal variable. Further, this means that the Spearman correlation shows

the strength and direction between two data sets. For this research study, the exclusionary discipline rates (in-school and out-of-school suspension and expulsion rates) are the continuous variable and the level of trauma-informed is the ordinal variable.

When using the Spearman correlation test, the strengths of the correlations range from very high to very weak. A 0 to 0.19 is considered a very weak correlation. Low correlation is 0.2 to 0.3. A medium correlation is 0.3 to 0.5. A high correlation is 0.5 to 0.7. Finally, a very high correlation is 0.7 to 1 (Muijs, 2011).

The p-value will identify the significance level. The p-value is the probability the data occurred by chance. 0.05 is the standard p-value used.

Once the Researcher analyzed the data, the following was considered. If the correlation coefficient is 0 then there is no relationship between the two sets of data. If there is a high X and a low Y, then we have a -1 or perfect negative correlation. To have a perfect positive correlation, we will have a positive 1 which means we will have a high X and a high Y. When this Researcher considers the p-value of the F-test, the closer the p-value is to 1, the stronger the correlation.

The data will show whether there is a relationship between the exclusionary discipline rates and the trauma-informed level, and whether there is a positive or negative correlation. The p-value will describe how strong that correlation is. Further study will need to be done; however, because correlation does not mean causation.

Summary

In this chapter, the Researcher described the purpose of the research, presented a research question and provided three null hypotheses. The Researcher then went into

detail about several aspects of the research study. The first section was the design of the research. A quantitative study was the overall method chosen. Next, random sampling was used to obtain the goal of 100 participants across the state of Missouri. The Researcher's role in the process was explained. Then, the instrumentation was described. This quantitative study included a survey of Missouri middle school principals' ratings of being trauma-informed by using DESE's Model for Trauma-Informed Schools. Data collection included obtaining data from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to complete the corresponding exclusionary discipline rates from the participating schools including in-school suspension rates, out-of-school suspension rates, and expulsion rates. The last phase of the research study included data analysis. Data analysis included using Excel and SPSS to determine if there is a correlation between a school being trauma aware, trauma sensitive, trauma responsive, trauma-informed, and the school's exclusionary discipline rates. The research results will be presented in Chapter Four.

Chapter Four

Results

The purpose of this study was to identify any correlations between exclusionary discipline and a school's level of being trauma-informed. This chapter will explain the results obtained from the principal's surveys as well as the data collected from DESE in easy-to-read charts. In this chapter the following is discussed: research participants, results, and the research question.

Research Participants

The research participants for this project were middle school principals within the state of Missouri. All principals with grades five through eight or a combination of those grades had the opportunity to be included in this study. A total of three emails were sent out to the same group of middle school principals to encourage participating in the survey; email addresses were obtained from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. Over 600 emails were sent to enlist the participation of all Missouri middle school principals. A total of 46 surveys were completed. The surveys were collected via three emails. The first email was sent during the summer month of July and only collected nine surveys. The second email was sent at the beginning of August and collected seven surveys. The last survey was sent after school had started in August and collected 30 surveys. Two surveys were disqualified by this Researcher as one participant was a superintendent, and one participant was a principal of a high school building only.

This Researcher noted that the schools taking part in the study were from all areas of the state. The areas of the state that participated are as follows: the Southwest region of the state had 12 participants; the Northwest region had 14 participants; the Southeast region had 6 participants; the Northeast region had 6 participants, while the Central region of the state had 8 participants. The west side of the state held the majority of participants with over half of the participants.

Results

This Researcher conducted a quantitative study which used random sampling of middle school principals in the state of Missouri. The research question that guided this study was: what is the relationship between a school's level of being trauma-informed and the in-school, out of-school suspension and/or expulsion (exclusionary) discipline rates at the middle school level?

The first table (below) shows the average trauma-informed rate of each of the 44 reporting principals. Each principal rated their building on the twelve indicators within the emailed survey. Random numbers were assigned to the participating buildings to protect the identity of each building. The overall mean for the average trauma-informed rate for the 44 participating schools is 2.13.

Table 1

Average Trauma-Informed Rates

School number	Average Rate	School number	Average Rate	School number	Average Rate
1	2	16	1.58	31	2.67

2	2.12	17	1.58	32	1.67
3	3.33	18	2.58	33	2.58
4	2.58	19	3.08	34	2.33
5	2.17	20	1.33	35	2.08
6	2.5	21	1.58	36	2.42
7	1.67	22	0.58	37	2.25
8	1.33	23	3.33	38	3.17
9	1.92	24	1.83	39	1.75
10	2.83	25	1.92	40	1.75
11	1.92	26	2.5	41	1.25
12	1.92	27	1.67	42	2
13	1.17	28	2.17	43	2.33
14	2.17	29	3.67	44	1.42
15	2.5	30	2.92		

Next, the Researcher went to the DESE Missouri Comprehensive Data System (MCDS) website to obtain in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension and expulsion data. When recording data, there were several districts that had an asterisk (*) instead of a number. The DESE website states “suppression has been applied to protect small student populations of less than 5” (2024). With this information, where an asterisk was used, this Researcher used the value of 0. It is important to note that no school had any expulsion rates that could be reported. The following table displays the information for in-school suspension and out-of-school suspensions for the 21-22 school year and the 22-23 school year.

Table 2

ISS and OSS Rates for School year 21-22 and 22-23

School number	ISS SY22	ISS SY23	OSS SY22	OSS SY23
1	0	0	22	15

2	0	0	0	0
3	0	0	10	7
4	0	0	0	0
5	0	0	20	23
6	0	0	0	0
7	0	0	14	0
8	0	0	0	0
9	19	16	29	18
10	0	0	8	0
11	0	0	11	19
12	0	11	0	8
13	0	0	17	29
14	0	0	0	0
15	0	0	17	21
16	0	6	0	0
17	18	0	0	32
18	0	0	0	5
19	0	0	18	16
20	0	0	0	0
21	0	0	0	0
22	0	0	0	0
23	0	0	0	0
24	0	0	13	14
25	0	0	0	0
26	0	0	26	19
27	0	0	7	10
28	0	0	6	7
29	0	0	0	0
30	0	0	0	0
31	0	0	0	5
32	0	0	5	7
33	0	0	0	0
34	0	0	8	9
35	0	0	6	30
36	0	0	15	13
37	0	0	0	8
38	0	0	31	25
39	0	0	0	0
40	0	0	0	0

41	0	0	0	0
42	0	0	0	0
43	0	0	0	0
44	0	0	0	0

Next, this Researcher entered the data found on the DESE MCDS website to obtain the Spearman's correlation coefficient. This Researcher was able to use SPSS to determine the strength as well as the direction of the associations. 0 to 0.19 is considered a very weak correlation (Muijs, 2011). The p-values were also calculated and reported. The results are in Table 3.

Table 3

Spearman's Correlation and p-values

	Spearman correlation	*p-value*
ISS SY 22	-0.166	0.282
ISS SY 23	-0.171	0.267
OSS SY 22	0.158	0.307
OSS SY 23	0.073	0.640

The Spearman correlation for in-school-suspension and out-of-school suspensions is considered very weak. There is a negative correlation, however, between ISS and the average trauma-informed rate. As such, as the average trauma-informed rate increases, the in-school suspension decreases. More discussion of this data will take place in Chapter Five.

In looking at the p-values, in order to be considered statistically significant, there would need to be a p-value of less than 0.05. There are none in this quantitative study, so we cannot say the results are statistically significant.

Research Question One

Research Question One asked what is the relationship between a school's level of being trauma-informed and the in-school, out of-school suspension and/or expulsion (exclusionary) discipline rates at the middle school level?

Null Hypothesis One (Ho1) The school's level of being trauma-informed has no effect on in-school suspension rates at the middle school level.

Due to the Spearman calculation having a very weak correlation and the p-value showing no significance, the Researcher fails to reject null hypothesis one. This means that there is not enough sufficient data evidence to support the null hypothesis. Failing to reject the null hypothesis, however, does not mean that the null hypothesis is false.

Alternative Hypothesis (H1) The school's level of being trauma-informed has an effect on in-school suspension rates at the middle school level.

Because the Researcher fails to reject the null hypotheses, this means there is not enough evidence to support the alternative hypothesis.

Null Hypothesis Two (Ho2) The school's level of being trauma-informed has no effect on out-of-school suspension rates at the middle school level.

Due to the Spearman calculation having a very weak correlation and the p-value showing no significance, the Researcher fails to reject null hypothesis two. This means

that there is not enough sufficient data evidence to support the null hypothesis. Failing to reject the null hypothesis, however, does not mean that the null hypothesis is false.

Alternative Hypothesis Two(H2) The school's level of being trauma-informed has an effect on out-of-school suspension rates at the middle school level.

Because the Researcher fails to reject the null hypotheses, this means there is not enough evidence to support the alternative hypothesis.

Null Hypothesis Three (Ho3) The school's level of being trauma-informed has no effect on expulsion rates at the middle school level.

Due to the Spearman calculation having a very weak correlation and the p-value showing no significance, the Researcher fails to reject null hypothesis three. This means that there is not enough sufficient data evidence to support the null hypothesis. Failing to reject the null hypothesis, however, does not mean that the null hypothesis is false.

Alternative Hypothesis Three (H3) The school's level of being trauma-informed has an effect on expulsion rates at the middle school level.

Because the Researcher fails to reject the null hypotheses, this means there is not enough evidence to support the alternative hypothesis.

Summary

Based on the data obtained, the Researcher failed to reject all three null hypotheses; therefore, none of the alternative hypotheses are accepted either. The p-value showed no statistically significant correlation. Chapter Five will further discuss the findings as well as address the conclusions and further studies that might be conducted.

Chapter Five

Summary, Discussion, and Conclusions

Students are coming to school with their trauma experiences and the school faculties are left with trying to figure out how to not only educate students but also support and best discipline them (SAMHSA, 2014). This study has sought to examine middle schools in the state of Missouri and their level of being trauma-informed and their exclusionary discipline rates.

This chapter is divided into five sections. First, a summary of the study will be discussed. Next, the findings will be discussed followed by the implications for practice. At the end of the chapter, extensive recommendations for further studies will be discussed before the final conclusion.

Summary of the Study

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) reports that a study from 2007 found two thirds of children reported at least one traumatic event by the age of 16 (2024). This number is before COVID-19 in 2020, which means this number is sure to be higher today. With students coming to school with more trauma, a school system must address the issue. This means that school faculties must figure out how to educate, best support and best discipline students of trauma (SAMHSA, 2014). To help combat the problem, the state of Missouri created the model for Trauma-Informed Schools in 2019. The model's end goal is "to promote healthy, resilient teachers and learners capable of disrupting the cycle of trauma in their lives" (DESE, 2019, p. 3). The

process of a school becoming trauma-informed should be viewed as a continuum and not a checklist to be completed; in other words, it is a journey (DESE, 2019).

Zero-tolerance policies became prevalent in school after the Gun Free Schools Act (GFSA) of 1994. This act allowed schools to remove students from school (Moreno & Scaletta, 2018). Zero-tolerance policies began to include more than the original intended behaviors of guns and drugs in school, such as defiance, disrespect, profanity, repeated insubordination to name a few (Moreno & Scaletta, 2018, Higley, 2020, Delgado, 2014). Since the inception of zero-tolerance policies, exclusionary discipline has been on the rise (Dutil, 2020).

In 2008, the American Psychological Association (APA) formed the Zero-Tolerance Task Force (APA, 2008). The task force found there was a need to reform zero-tolerance policies and put alternative practices into place (APA, 2008). With the call for zero-tolerance policy changes and the introduction of trauma-informed models into schools, the question becomes: are schools actually considering a student's trauma and thus changing the exclusionary discipline practices to meet the needs of students?

The purpose of the study was to determine if there is a relationship between a school's level of being trauma-informed and their in-school and/or out-of-school suspension rates at the middle school level.

The theoretical framework encompassed within this research was the positivist theory. This framework allows for the scientific method to be used by asking questions, obtaining data and analyzing the data. The positivist theory also allows for quantitative methods to be used.

Two conceptual frameworks were used as well. The conceptual frameworks of Contemporary Trauma Theory and Maslow's Theory support the Researcher's purpose of this study. The Contemporary Trauma Theory explains that survivors of trauma are psychologically and physically injured and in need of healing and help (Goodman, 2017). Secondly, Maslow's Theory addresses the need for humans to have their physiological needs and safety and security needs met (Cherry, 2022).

The driving research question for this quantitative study was: what is the relationship between a school's level of being trauma-informed and the in-school, out-of-school and/or expulsion (exclusionary) discipline rates at the middle school level?

The methodology for this research study was a quantitative study. This study included a survey of Missouri middle school principals' ratings of being trauma-informed and analysis of exclusionary discipline rates. The Researcher used a random sampling to obtain 44 participants from middle schools across the state of Missouri. Data was obtained from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to complete the corresponding exclusionary discipline rate research. Data analysis was completed using SPSS to discover the correlation between a school being trauma aware, trauma sensitive, trauma responsive, trauma-informed, and the school's exclusionary discipline rates.

Due to the Spearman calculation having a very weak correlation and the p-value showing no significance, the Researcher failed to reject null hypothesis one, null hypothesis two and null hypothesis three. This means that there was not enough sufficient data evidence to support any of the three null hypotheses. Failing to reject the null hypotheses, however, does not mean that the three null hypotheses are false. Because the

Researcher failed to reject the null hypotheses, this means there was not enough evidence to support any of the three alternative hypotheses.

Discussion of the Findings

There was one driving research question for this quantitative study with three hypotheses:

Research Question One (RQ1) What is the relationship between a school's level of being trauma-informed and the in-school, out of-school suspension and/or expulsion (exclusionary) discipline rates at the middle school level?

Null Hypothesis One (Ho1) The school's level of being trauma-informed has no effect on in-school suspension rates at the middle school level.

Alternative Hypothesis (H1) The school's level of being trauma-informed has an effect on in-school suspension rates at the middle school level.

Null Hypothesis Two (Ho2) The school's level of being trauma-informed has no effect on out-of-school suspension rates at the middle school level.

Alternative Hypothesis Two (H2) The school's level of being trauma-informed has an effect on out-of-school suspension rates at the middle school level.

Null Hypothesis Three (Ho3) The school's level of being trauma-informed has no effect on expulsion rates at the middle school level.

Alternative Hypothesis Three (H3) The school's level of being trauma-informed has an effect on expulsion rates at the middle school level.

Based on the data obtained, the Researcher failed to reject null hypothesis one about in-school suspensions, null hypothesis two about out-of-school suspensions and

null hypothesis three about expulsion rates. This means that there was not enough sufficient data evidence to support any of the three null hypotheses. Failing to reject the null hypotheses, however, does not mean that the three null hypotheses are false. Because the Researcher failed to reject the null hypotheses, this means there was not enough evidence to support any of the three alternative hypotheses.

Even though the three hypotheses failed to be rejected, the data is promising. There was a negative correlation between ISS and the average trauma-informed rate. As such, as the average trauma-informed rate increases, the in-school suspension decreases. This finding supports the idea that being trauma-informed refocuses schools from rewards and punishment to a system of accountability (DESE, 2019).

The overall average trauma-informed rate for all 44 participating schools was 2.13. This means that the 44 schools average at level 2 which is trauma sensitive. DESE explains that at level 2 schools have done several different things. For one, the school has started to explore the principles of trauma-informed care, such as safety, choice, collaboration and empowerment and how these principles apply to existing practices (DESE, 2019). Secondly, schools have leadership buy-in and have designated core leaders to guide the change process (DESE, 2019). Lastly, at level 2, schools have begun to share their vision with the community and stakeholders and have begun teaching them about trauma-informed care (DESE, 2019).

Indicator Six of the Missouri Trauma-Informed Model addresses the topic of this research. Indicator Six states: discipline practices and policies support restoring and repairing community, addressing the unmet, underlying needs driving behavior, exercising compassion, and supporting a culture of accountability (DESE, 2019). Since

Indicator Six is directly related to discipline, the Researcher gathered the data for the 44 schools in regard to Indicator Six. The table follows.

Table 4

Number of Schools at each level of Indicator Six

0: Pre-trauma aware	2 schools
1: Trauma aware	7 schools
2: Trauma sensitive	19 schools
3: Trauma responsive	14 schools
4: Trauma-informed	2 schools

The mean for Indicator Six is 2.16. The overall mean for all 44 schools' trauma-informed rate is 2.13. The average is holding to schools being trauma-sensitive. According to the DESE Trauma-Informed Model, at the trauma-sensitive level, a school has created a team that is learning about trauma and meeting at least twice a month to create an action plan to implement new policies, procedures and trainings for all staff (DESE, 2019).

The data collected shows that 79.5% of the schools surveyed identify as at least trauma-sensitive. This is good news. This leans towards the idea that schools in Missouri are doing some work in becoming trauma-informed. On the flipside, this means that approximately 20% of schools reported they are in the bottom two levels of the trauma-informed model. The bottom two levels are being pre-trauma aware and trauma-aware.

This means that staff is aware of trauma and beginning to have conversations about what trauma means in a school and classroom. However, 36% of the schools surveyed identified as either trauma-responsive or trauma-informed. This is encouraging. More schools are completing work to be trauma-informed than not.

The Researcher noticed several limitations during this study. First, the study was only able to obtain 44 surveys of middle school principals which is less than the ideal 100-200 to have a strong correlational study. The second limitation to this study was protection of student data in a school with a category that had a student population of less than 5. As this Researcher used 0 for those schools, the actual data could have been anywhere from 1-4. Using 0 may have skewed the data and the actual results. Because of the need to protect small student populations, there was no data to use for students that were expelled from school. Further, this study was limited to the data provided by the building principal. If the trauma-informed team or the leadership team or the teachers in general were surveyed, the results on the surveys may have been different. Next, this study was limited to the data collected by DESE. There could be schools without in-school-suspension capabilities and, therefore, the data on DESE would not convey the lack of in-school-suspensions capabilities. Finally, the survey did not inquire about other programs or interventions that schools may use as a step before in-school-suspensions as discussed previously in Chapter Two. Some schools may have already implemented such things as social-emotional learning, the Monarch Room, BIST, HEARTS, Restorative Practices, or other prevention/intervention programs. These limitations could make a large impact on the results.

Implications for Practice

In this quantitative study, the Spearman correlation for in-school-suspension and out-of-school suspensions is considered very weak. However, important to note is that there is a negative correlation between ISS and the average trauma-informed rate. As such, as the average trauma-informed rate increases, the in-school suspension decreases. This is a positive finding for a middle school! This shows that becoming trauma-informed is making a difference on the in-school suspension rates. The schools that have a higher trauma-informed rate can share with their stakeholders that becoming trauma-informed is working. The administration of that school can also show the teachers that changing their policies and practices within their building is making a positive impact on students.

Administrators can also share with their teachers that they are not the only educators in Missouri doing this work. They can share that almost 80% of schools surveyed are doing some type of trauma-informed work. This is important because it would help teachers to not feel alone but supported and understand that this is a systemic change and not just another program.

The negative correlation between ISS and the average trauma-informed rate can also be used by a newly formed trauma-informed team to support the need in their building. The data can be used to address the teachers that may not have bought-in to the trauma-informed journey yet. This negative correlation can show the need to take this trauma-informed journey seriously and not just see it as another thing to do.

The data from this study also supports the need to research and implement interventions other than just relying on in-school suspension. The schools in Missouri

must be doing something else besides just putting students in in-school suspension or sending them home. These interventions may include programs such as social-emotional learning, the Monarch Room, BIST, HEARTS, Restorative Practices or other prevention/intervention programs.

Finally, the data from this study would encourage a middle school to analyze their own discipline data as compared to their trauma-informed level. Since DESE suppresses some data to protect small populations of students, the data for this study could not truly be completed. A school could, however, take their actual data and compare it to their trauma-informed levels over several school years to determine if there is a relationship. This would help the school determine if the correct work was being done in the area of discipline and trauma-informed care.

Recommendations for Further Research

The topic of childhood trauma and a school being trauma-informed is one that will be discussed and in our school systems for the foreseeable future. Two-thirds of children are reporting at least one traumatic event has occurred in their life by the age of 16 (SAMHSA, 2024). This research project examined the relationship between a school's level of being trauma-informed and their exclusionary discipline rates. More research needs to be done to continue the work of becoming trauma-informed.

The first recommendation for research is to examine why a school is at the trauma-informed level that they identify as. The overall average trauma-informed level for the schools in this study was 2.13. This number indicates that middle schools across the state of Missouri are doing the work. But the average level also raises some questions.

How long has the school been at this stage? What are the individual teacher perceptions in those buildings in regard to childhood trauma and trauma-informed care? Would the teachers rank their own buildings as higher or lower on the trauma-informed levels? Do the teachers feel like their school is making progress? What needs to be done to continue moving along the trauma-informed care continuum? These questions could best be answered by a qualitative study. This qualitative study could give insight to other schools on how to move to becoming trauma-informed.

The second recommendation for research is to examine the barriers a school has in becoming trauma-informed. Is it a lack of professional development? Is trauma-informed care a priority? Do the parents understand and support trauma-informed care? The barriers might be administration perceptions or support, teacher perceptions or support, parent support, or professional development time among other barriers. This research might help schools in the beginning of their trauma-informed journey by demonstrating how a school can develop a solid plan to becoming trauma-informed while addressing the barriers and involving all stakeholders.

A third recommendation for research would be a longitudinal study on exclusionary discipline and childhood trauma. For the students that experience exclusionary discipline in middle school, what happens to them past middle school? Does the student who experienced exclusionary discipline have less infractions in high school? Do the behaviors increase, decrease, or stay the same? More research needs to be done in the area of long-term exclusionary discipline usage.

Along the same lines, what about students who experience interventions at the middle school level in a school on the trauma-informed journey? How is their behavior

different in high school? Does a trauma-informed approach have success at the high school level? Little evidence was found about trauma-informed approaches at the high school level.

A fourth recommendation for future research would be another longitudinal study. This one would focus on students of trauma and drop-out rates. Research posits that exclusionary discipline leads to a decrease in student achievement and increases a student's risk of dropping out (Sedillo-Hamann, 2022; Crosby et al., 2018). A researcher could focus on was the drop-out's school trauma-informed when they dropped out of school or was the high school focused on exclusionary disciplines measures?

Another recommendation for future research is to examine the schools in Missouri that are on the trauma-informed journey and determine what interventions they are using in their buildings instead of exclusionary discipline. Sixteen schools in this study reported that they were either trauma-responsive or trauma-informed on Indicator Six. More research needs to be conducted on these schools that are not just using exclusionary discipline to see what interventions are working and how they are implementing their interventions so that other schools may follow their examples.

Another research project could focus on the interventions used in schools. For instance, Behavior Intervention Support Team (BIST) has held several trainings over the last several years in Southwest Missouri (this Researcher has attended several), so how is that intervention working in the schools that have been trained? What does their discipline data show? A study completed on a school that has implemented a full intervention program such as BIST would help other schools. Analyzing data on things like continuous professional development, classroom support, number of professional

development hours, classroom observations and student problem-solving could be helpful to other schools.

In this study, the Researcher has discussed interventions at length. But trauma-informed practices are more than just an intervention program. Trauma-informed practices may have a large impact on students in a school building but might be small changes to a school culture. More research could be done on these practices that help a school be successful in helping students of trauma.

In Chapter Two, research was provided on parents' attitudes about exclusionary discipline. The research posits that parents are overall not in support of exclusionary discipline. Parents sighted concerns with loss of school community, loss of student self-esteem, loss of instruction time as well as overall resistance in a child's behavior (Powell, 2020). As more schools are moving towards being trauma-informed, it would behoove educators to know what parents think of this trauma-informed movement and the interventions happening within the schools, especially as teachers and administrators work to partner with parents.

Along with research on parents' attitudes, research could be done on parenting classes for parents with students of trauma. Sometimes it is difficult for parents to know how to support their student while supporting the school as well. Parents do not always know how to best handle various situations with their students of trauma and a parenting class could help. A survey of parent interest would be very interesting in itself.

The Researcher recommends considering the size of a school and grade level when looking at exclusionary discipline. Does a more populous school deal with more discipline issues than a smaller school? Do they have equal rates of discipline? Is there a

disparity between the two? This could lead into the research topic of urban vs rural schools. Are the rates of exclusionary discipline similar between urban and rural students?

Further research could be completed on students of trauma themselves. As a principal, this Researcher always encouraged teachers to just talk to the student themselves who was struggling with discipline. Students will give you a lot of insight into how they think; we just have to ask. It would be interesting to complete a study on the student's own perceptions of trauma, their academic performance and behaviors. They could also be asked about exclusionary discipline and how it makes them feel. The interviewer could also ask what would help them to be successful. This study could help administrators and teachers find pathways to help students without using exclusionary discipline.

Along the same lines, more research could be completed on the perceptions of classroom teachers. As schools complete more of the work to become trauma-informed, they need to understand what the classroom teachers are thinking. A qualitative study would be advantageous. Administrators need to know what an educator's level of understanding is when it comes to being trauma-informed.

When researching classroom teachers, a researcher could examine the effects professional development when compared to student discipline data. Are teachers feeling prepared and supported to handle student trauma in the classroom? Are teachers learning new ways to handle students? Are teachers building relationships? Have teachers learned how to emotionally regulate themselves? If new interventions have been implemented, how are teachers being supported to implement those interventions? Is it reoccurring

professional development? These are important questions which can be addressed when studying professional development.

Next, more research could be done in connection to preservice teachers. How prepared are new teachers to handle students and trauma? What does the curriculum look like in colleges? Are they taught interventions? Are they able to observe enough schools that are trauma-informed? Are they able to experience various interventions?

Finally, although Chapter Two described some surveys with administration's perceptions of exclusionary discipline, more could be done here. What professional development opportunities exist for principals? How are they supported? Do principals feel supported by their superintendents when they are implementing new intervention programs and striving for their school to be trauma-informed?

This Researcher has spent several pages exploring questions to develop more thought and research questions and ideas for the reader. The fact is that the topics of discipline, trauma-informed care and childhood trauma are extensive. Then, if someone begins to think about how these topics all relate to schools, even more questions arise. There are many aspects of these topics that can still be researched.

Conclusions

As a former administrator, this Researcher had spent her tenure wondering how educators could help students who had experienced trauma and were acting out at school. Sending acting-out students home just did not seem to be the answer to this Researcher. This study was born out of those years in the principal's office. This study was focused on the relationship between a school's self-identified level of being trauma-informed and

the in-school, out-of-school suspension and/or expulsion (exclusionary) discipline rates at the middle school level.

Although there were no significant findings in this study, there are some important take-aways. For one, there was a negative correlation between the level of trauma-informed care and in-school suspensions. This is a positive sign to this Researcher; as trauma-informed care increases, in-school suspension rates decrease. This supports the efforts of middle schools who are diligently seeking alternatives to just sending students home when behaviors occur. Secondly, although the target participant set was not reached, it was positive to see the overall data in which middle schools across Missouri are working on their trauma-informed journey. It is encouraging to see that 80% of the middle schools surveyed are in the top three levels of the trauma-informed journey.

The data is staggering. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) reports that one in seven children have experienced child abuse or neglect within the past year (2024). In 2019, 1,840 children died in the United States from child abuse or neglect (SAMSHA, 2024). Childhood trauma is not an issue that is going away. Educators must learn how to help students of trauma, so students are not being isolated or just sent out of the school and end up further traumatized.

There are many avenues of childhood trauma and schools that can be further researched. This research is vital as students continue to come to school traumatized. These students then grow up to become adults who have trauma backgrounds. We must figure out how to help a child of trauma so they can become productive members of society.

In Chapter One, this Researcher asked the question: are schools actually considering a students' trauma and thus changing their exclusionary discipline practices to best meet the needs of these students who have trauma history? The answer: overall, this study shows that educators in Missouri are aware of the need for change to exclusionary discipline policies and are not sitting idly by but doing something about those old zero-tolerance policies. Missouri educators understand the need for trauma-informed care.

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APPENDIX A: Institutional Review Board (IRB) Letter

WILLIAM WOODS
UNIVERSITY

To: Dr. J. Michael Pragman

Cc: Chérie N. Hayes

From: Tom Frankman, Ed.D.
Chair, Institutional Review Board

Protocol Number: 544

Title: Being a Trauma-Informed Middle School and Exclusionary Discipline Rates: A Quantitative Stud

Date: July 15, 2024

On July 15, 2024, the William Woods University Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and approved an extension to the above-cited protocol following expedited review procedures.

Please note the following:

1. Please keep copies of the signed consent formed used for this research for three years after the completion of the research.
2. **Any modification to your research (including protocol, consent, advertising, instruments, funding, etc.) must be submitted to the Institutional Review Board for review and approval prior to implementation.**
3. Any adverse events or unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects including problems involving confidentiality of the data identifying the participants must be reported to the Institutional Review Board office.

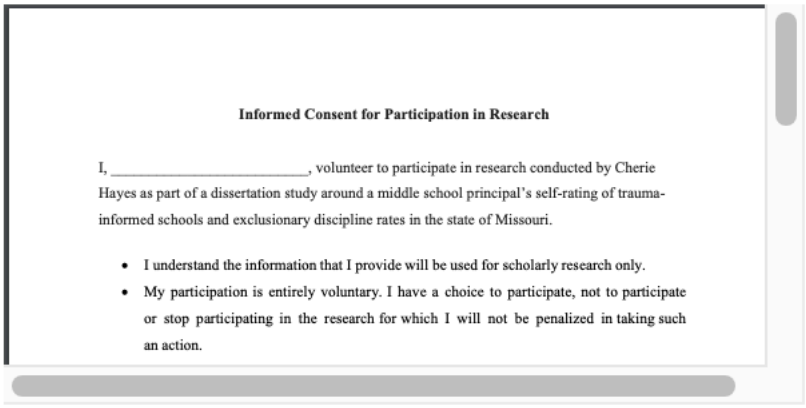
The anniversary date of this study is July 15, 2025. **You may not collect data beyond that date without WWU IRB approval.** A continuing review form must be completed and submitted to the Institutional Review Board 30 days prior to the anniversary date or upon the completion of the project. You will be sent a reminder prior to the anniversary date.

If you have any questions, please contact me at tom.frankman@williamwoods.edu

APPENDIX B: Principal Self-Rating of Trauma-Informed Level Survey

Principal Self-Rating of Trauma-Informed Level Using the Missouri Model for Trauma-Informed Schools

This rubric has been retyped and made electronic from the model published in 2019. Below, you will mark one level for each of the twelve indicators. Mark the one that best describes your school.



Informed Consent for Participation in Research

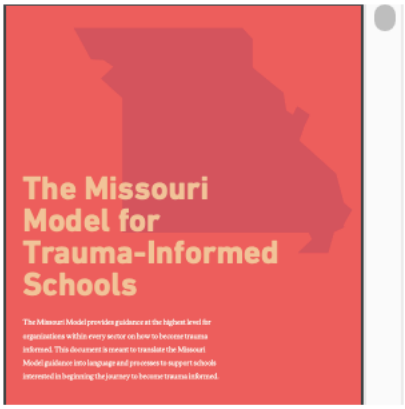
I, _____, volunteer to participate in research conducted by Cherie Hayes as part of a dissertation study around a middle school principal's self-rating of trauma-informed schools and exclusionary discipline rates in the state of Missouri.

- I understand the information that I provide will be used for scholarly research only.
- My participation is entirely voluntary. I have a choice to participate, not to participate or stop participating in the research for which I will not be penalized in taking such an action.

Sign to give consent *

Next

Click here to read the entire Missouri Model for Trauma-Informed Schools.



The below information is obtained for data comparison only. Within the final report, schoools will be identified as 'School A', 'School B', etc.

To ensure confidentiality, please feel free to email: cxaustin8524@owl.williamwoods.edu for a final copy of the completed dissertation.

Please indicate the name of the school in which you are principal. *

What district is your school located? *

What grade levels are in this school? *

Indicator 1: School leadership and staff demonstrate an understanding of the impact and prevalence of trauma in daily practice. Please indicate where your school is for Indicator 1 *

	Choose one Stage
Stage 0 Pre-trauma Aware: Leadership and staff are unable to identify the impact and prevalence of trauma.	○
Stage 1 Trauma Aware: Staff members are able to articulate basic information about the impact and prevalence of trauma. All staff have received a standardized training on trauma and trauma-informed schools.	○
Stage 2 Trauma Sensitive: Staff show signs of understanding information about trauma, referencing it informally. Staff begin to understand the importance of addressing their own stress and trauma.	○
Stage 3 Trauma Responsive: Staff begin to change their approach to instruction and discipline to better reflect the impact of trauma. Staff begin to strengthen their own regulation and the regulation of their students.	○
Stage 4 Trauma Informed: All staff respond to students and one another in a way that reflects the science of trauma. Staff members routinely share new information and innovative ideas to meet the changing needs of students. Trauma-informed responses are embedded within the organization.	○

Indicator 2: An equity lens is applied to all programs and policies to address bias and the impact of historical trauma and systemic oppression. Please indicate where your school is for Indicator 2 *

	Choose One Stage
Stage 0 Pre-trauma Aware: Bias and inequity are not addressed. Conversations about racism and systemic oppression are actively avoided. Opportunities to learn and talk about racism and systemic oppression are ignored or missed.	○
Stage 1 Trauma Aware: Staff demonstrate an understanding of historical trauma and the relationship of systemic oppression to trauma.	○
Stage 2 Trauma Sensitive: Anti-bias or anti-racism training is required for all staff. Staff begin to understand their role in advancing or perpetuating inequities.	○
Stage 3 Trauma Responsive: Data measuring performance is disaggregated by race and other demographic factors. Staff and leadership actively address the role of the school or district in creating trauma and perpetuating inequity. Concrete steps are taken to ensure staff and leadership representation reflect the community they serve.	○
Stage 4 Trauma Informed: All decisions are made using a racial equity lens, with the goal of creating outcomes that are no longer predictable by race or identity factor. Language, both informally and formally, reflect an embedded equity and liberation framework.	○

Indicator 3: Students are given age-appropriate information about stress, trauma, and emotional/behavioral regulation and opportunities to develop new coping tools. Please indicate where your school is for Indicator 3 *

	Choose One Stage
Stage 0 Pre-trauma Aware: No instruction is provided to students about stress, trauma, or regulation. No pro-active strategies are in place to support regulation.	○
Stage 1 Trauma Aware: Some staff use practices that aim to increase the capacity of students to cope and remain regulated. Informal or one-on-one education may be done on the impact of stress and trauma for individual students.	○
Stage 2 Trauma Sensitive: Some students are given some intentional instruction about stress, trauma, and regulation.	○
Stage 3 Trauma Responsive: Standardized instruction is provided to all students about stress and trauma and a robust, culturally responsive set of coping tools are routinely referenced. As appropriate, students are engaged as peer educators and help to lead supportive practices.	○
Stage 4 Trauma Informed: Information about stress, trauma, and regulation is embedded within the curriculum. Both formal and informal practices routinely demonstrate an understanding of the need to and process of increasing regulation. Schools act as leaders to their community stakeholders in education about trauma and the promotion of regulation strategies.	○

Indicator 4: Staff have access to needed supports, including coaching, consultation, and meaningful professional development; benefits that support their health and well-being; necessary materials and resources; and administrative support in prioritizing self care. Please indicate where your school is for Indicator 4 *

	Choose One Stage
Stage 0 Pre-trauma Aware: Practices and policies create a culture of burnout. Educators are routinely under-resourced in both materials and support.	○
Stage 1 Trauma Aware: Leadership demonstrates an understanding of the importance of staff well-being. Staff are given information about benefits routinely. Informal practices exist for all staff to meet their own needs for healing and well-being.	○
Stage 2 Trauma Sensitive: Opportunities for peer mentoring or coaching are made available and culture of support is cultivated amongst staff. Gaps with employee benefits are identified and articulated to key stakeholders. Staff drive agenda setting for professional development opportunities that directly align with their needs.	○
Stage 3 Trauma Responsive: Policies are developed that actively support staff in accessing needed help and a process for support is clearly identified and communicated. Resources are allocated to enhance benefits as needed. Staff drive policy development that helps to support a healthy work/life balance.	○
Stage 4 Trauma Informed: Quality, on site and real time coaching and supervision is available to staff. Comprehensive benefits for employees and their families are provided. Benefits have full parity for behavioral health services. Policies and practices that support well-being are formally adopted and institutionalized.	○

Indicator 5: Schools actively, appropriately, and meaningfully engage parents and caregivers in relevant educational opportunities and decision making at all levels. Please indicate where your school is for Indicator 5 *

	Choose One Stage
Stage 0 Pre-trauma Aware: Little interaction with parents and caregivers beyond discipline. Meeting times and communication strategies do not accommodate caregivers with nontraditional schedules and divergent communication resources.	○
Stage 1 Trauma Aware: Staff and leadership demonstrate an understanding of the impact of trauma on parents and caregivers and how that affects relationships.	○
Stage 2 Trauma Sensitive: Staff identify information opportunities to build relationships with parents. School identifies meaningful roles for parents and caregivers within the school setting.	○
Stage 3 Trauma Responsive: School programs offer information and tools to parents and caregivers about stress, trauma, and resilience. Parents are actively engaged on the trauma team and other leadership groups. Schools actively seek and respond to feedback from parents.	○
Stage 4 Trauma Informed: Parents and caregivers are actively engaged in decision-making. Routine, positive, informal and formal communication happens between staff and families.	○

Indicator 6: Discipline practices and policies support restoring and repairing community, addressing the unmet, underlying needs driving behavior, exercising compassion, and supporting a culture of accountability. Please indicate where your school is for Indicator 6 *

	Choose One Stage
Stage 0 Pre-trauma Aware: Punitive discipline practices focus on addressing the presenting behavior. Discipline practices routinely disconnect students from instruction. Disciplinary actions and policy view standardized rewards and punishments as the means to achieve compliance. Before taking action, both parties of an incident are not asked about their ideal disciplinary outcomes or what actions would restore community connection.	○
Stage 1 Trauma Aware: Consideration for the cause or purpose behind behavior is occasionally considered in discipline conversations. Informal or sporadic community building efforts take place in classrooms. School staff and leadership demonstrate an understanding that disciplinary practices should aim to increase a student's capacity of regulation and success.	○
Stage 2 Trauma Sensitive: Intentional community building practices are routinely used in classrooms and other school spaces. Schools identify the supports they need to reduce or eliminate suspensions and other punitive discipline practices. Disciplinary action, when necessary seeks to address the social, emotional, cognitive, and relational needs driving behavior.	○
Stage 3 Trauma Responsive: Strong sense of community amongst staff and students. Discipline policies are reviewed and adjusted as needed, and parent and student voice are considered in the revision. Resources are allocated to support the shift from an incentive-based disciplinary model to one of accountability and responsiveness to developmental needs. Students are able to connect to consequences with their accountability to their community.	○
Stage 4 Trauma Informed: Fully restorative model of discipline. Suspension is exceedingly rare. No discernable discrepancy in suspension or discipline rates by race or ability status. Disciplinary action and accountability practices actively support connection to instruction for all students.	○

Indicator 7: Students are given meaningful and developmentally appropriate leadership and decision-making opportunities, particularly around issues that directly impact their experiences and education. Please indicate where your school is for Indicator 7 *

	Choose One Stage
Stage 0 Pre-trauma Aware: Students voice is not included in decision making. Extremely limited choices are given to students regarding their education.	○
Stage 1 Trauma Aware: Some students, on an individual basis, are given choice in how to demonstrate proficiency. Student voice is informally acknowledged in decision making, including regarding discipline. Administrators seek student input on decisions that impact them.	○
Stage 2 Trauma Sensitive: Practices demonstrate a value placed on student voice and leadership in discipline, instruction, and student support activities.	○
Stage 3 Trauma Responsive: Formal student leadership opportunities are established and supported and are given a place in formal decision-making process. Policies are enacted that support student choice in their schooling.	○
Stage 4 Trauma Informed: Students across all ages and areas of student are able to individualize their learning and assessment to meet their needs. Policies and practices embed students in the decision-making process. As appropriate, students are included in the highest levels of decision-making, including around budgeting and school priorities.	○

Indicator 8: Staff have access to meaningful leadership opportunities and are supported in trying new and innovative techniques to support students. Please indicate where your school is for Indicator 8 *

	Choose One Stage
Stage 0 Pre-trauma Aware: Leadership is strictly "top-down". Little freedom is given to educators in customizing curriculum or classroom practices. Staff may be penalized for being "off schedule" while addressing emergent non-academic student needs.	○
Stage 1 Trauma Aware: Staff input is considered by leadership when requested and only on occasion. Staff innovation is allowed within specified parameters and with oversight from leadership.	○
Stage 2 Trauma Sensitive: Staff leadership groups are formed to amplify their voice in the decision-making process. Teachers are routinely asked to share promising practices with one another.	○
Stage 3 Trauma Responsive: Staff leadership groups are supported and given needed resources. Policies are written to allow for individualization in instruction. Appropriate development opportunities are available to teachers to help them innovate and improve.	○
Stage 4 Trauma Informed: Diverse representation of staff is included in all decision-making process. Practices and policies incentivize and reward innovation. Quality professional development is available that works to meet articulated needs from staff.	○

Indicator 9: Schools actively, appropriately, and meaningfully partner with community organizations to meet the needs of students and staff. Please indicate where your school is for Indicator 9 *

	Choose One Stage
Stage 0 Pre-trauma Aware: Uncoordinated community partners working in the school setting. No formalized process is used. Specific outcomes from partnerships are lacking.	○
Stage 1 Trauma Aware: Schools understand clearly the role of all community partners working in their school. Schools actively identify gaps in services and seek out appropriate partners.	○
Stage 2 Trauma Sensitive: Schools create specific and date-driven outcome expectations for all community partners. School staff, including teachers, regularly communicate and collaborate with external partners.	○
Stage 3 Trauma Responsive: Community partners are embedded into the school and have clear expectations for communication and success. Community partners regularly share disaggregated data on the impacts of their services.	○
Stage 4 Trauma Informed: Clearly articulated partnerships with community partnerships with community partners actively support the trauma-informed process. School has a long-term and sustainable plan for maintaining partnerships with and funding for external supports.	○

Indicator 10: Curriculum design across grade levels and subject areas supports the trauma-informed process. Please indicate where your school is for Indicator 10 *

	Choose One Stage
Stage 0 Pre-trauma Aware: No consideration to the trauma-informed process is given within the curriculum design process. Curricula actively avoids opportunities to discuss historical trauma and marginalization.	○
Stage 1 Trauma Aware: Individual teachers, on occasion, include information in the classroom setting. Some teachers and leaders reflect upon the current ability to critically teach about all forms of trauma throughout curricula.	○
Stage 2 Trauma Sensitive: Information about trauma is provided separately during designated instructional time. Specific subject areas begin to embed a trauma-informed approach to methods and content of instruction. Teachers routinely infuse social-emotional learning opportunities in all areas of curriculum.	○
Stage 3 Trauma Responsive: All subject areas have written and specific ways to include and support the trauma-informed process. Cohesive, shared language about trauma and resilience is used across all schools and districts. School staff routinely collectively reflect on the ability to teach critically about marginalization and historical trauma throughout curricula.	○
Stage 4 Trauma Informed: Information about trauma, resilience, well-being, and equity is fully embedded into curriculum, both formally and informally. Specific policies are in place for the integration of new curriculum to ensure continued connection to the trauma-informed process.	○

Indicator 11: Human resources and supervision practices, including hiring, performance management, and employment transitions reflect the principles of trauma-informed care. Please indicate where your school is for Indicator 11 *

	Choose One Stage
Stage 0 Pre-trauma Aware: No consideration for the principles of trauma-informed care are present.	○
Stage 1 Trauma Aware: Informal inclusion of questions about trauma-informed care are present in the hiring process.	○
Stage 2 Trauma Sensitive: Collaborative identification of improvement areas during performance review. Standardized interview questions reflect the principles of trauma-informed care. Performance review standards are improved to better reflect the trauma-informed principles and a focus on relationships and culture.	○
Stage 3 Trauma Responsive: Policies related to hiring, performance management, and transitions are revised to reflect the principles of trauma-informed care. Hiring process values a diverse set of decision-makers. Exit interviews include standardized questions related to trauma-informed care, with particular attention to the role of the school in supporting staff well-being.	○
Stage 4 Trauma Informed: Principles of trauma-informed care are embedded in the hiring practice, including in job postings and interview questions. Impact of trauma is routinely discussed and addressed in performance management. Employee transitions are handled with clear communication, and transition plans are in place. Opportunities are made available to staff and students to discuss and process transitions.	○

Indicator 12: Schools have a system in place to continually evaluate and improve practices and policies. Please indicate where your school is for Indicator 12 *

	Choose One Stage
Stage 0 Pre-trauma Aware: No policy is in place to support continuous quality improvement.	○
Stage 1 Trauma Aware: A team of initial stakeholders is identified to address the policy process. A cohesive definition of success is developed in partnership with the community. Key metrics are identified to measure progress and impact.	○
Stage 2 Trauma Sensitive: Policies begin to be revised. Additional voices are added to policy conversations, as needed.	○
Stage 3 Trauma Responsive: Nearly all existing policies have been evaluated through the principles of trauma-informed care. The policy revision process is formalized, with intentional focus on the inclusion of a diverse group of stakeholders.	○
Stage 4 Trauma Informed: Comprehensive process is formally adopted to address policies that includes specific standards for time of review and required participants. Open data sharing, including disaggregated data, happens routinely. Community is continually involved to identify standards of success.	○

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