



SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL NEEDS AND TRAUMA-INFORMED PRACTICES: An Advocacy Toolkit for Educators



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++++++ INTRODUCTION ++++++

As Teach Plus Illinois Teaching Policy Fellows who teach in public schools throughout the state, reflecting the diversity of Illinois' school districts, we understand the many needs our students bring to the classroom, including needs stemming from trauma. We know that serving and educating students with trauma can be overwhelming, and that often our schools don't provide the tools we need.

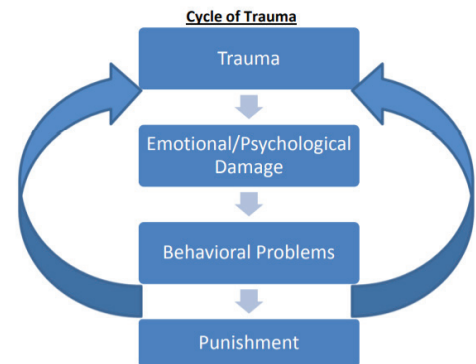
The goal of this toolkit is to equip all teachers, from early childhood through high school, with the necessary information and tools to advocate for training and resources to implement social-emotional learning (SEL) and trauma-informed practices in their school or district. Having increased access to these trainings and resources can help equip teachers to make the transition away from exclusionary discipline systems while still maintaining a safe and positive learning environment.

According to the Teach Plus policy brief, "[From Zero to SB100: Teachers' Views on Implementation of School Discipline Reform](#)," teachers in Illinois report that limiting exclusionary discipline has had a negative impact on the behavior at their school. In the brief, the Teach Plus Fellows recommended providing thorough, mandatory professional development on SB100 and corresponding school discipline protocols, as well as implementing disciplinary protocols informed by restorative justice and trauma-informed practices.

This toolkit builds on the earlier brief, providing a set of resources and tools that teachers can use to ensure that schools can provide meaningful professional development around SEL, trauma-informed practices, and discipline reform.



According to the National Child Traumatic Stress Network, "one out of every four children attending school has been exposed to a traumatic event that can affect learning and/or behavior."¹ These students bring their trauma to school with them, which not only affects their behaviors and interactions, but also their ability to learn. Changing how discipline is structured does not go far enough to prevent future incidents. Teachers, staff, and schools can work together to help support students and mitigate the effects of trauma. Trauma-informed practices alter behavior management approaches so that these do not retraumatize students (See graphic).²



HOW DOES TRAUMA AFFECT STUDENTS DAILY?

- + Trauma can impact student performance. (Lower GPA, higher absence rate, decreased reading ability, increased behavior problems).
- + Trauma can impair learning. (Chronic exposure can adversely affect attention, memory, and cognition, interfere with problem solving, result in overwhelming feelings of frustration and anxiety).

WHAT ARE THE OUTCOMES WHEN TRAUMA-INFORMED PRACTICES ARE EMPLOYED IN CLASS AND AT SCHOOL?

According to Barbara Oehlberg (2008)³, benefits of a trauma-informed school include:

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|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Improvements in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Academic achievement and standardized test scores + School climate + Teacher sense of satisfaction and safety + Retention of new teachers + Graduation rates | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Reductions in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Student behavioral outbursts and referrals to the office + Stress for staff and students + Absences, detentions, and suspensions + Student bullying and harassment + Need for special educational services/classes |
|--|--|

HOW TO BRING SEL AND TRAUMA-INFORMED PRACTICES INTO YOUR CLASSROOM AND SCHOOL

It is important that all adults in the school building understand the need for SEL and trauma-informed practices including how a trauma-informed school culture can result in improved student learning and well-being. As educators, we are all asked to implement new initiatives and curriculum regularly. It can be overwhelming and, at times, we wonder whether the new initiative will have any staying power. SEL and trauma-informed practices can *greatly* improve the lives of our students and the lives of the whole school community.

BRING SEL AND TRAUMA-INFORMED PRACTICES INTO YOUR CLASSROOM

Just like our students, small successes make teachers more likely to take big leaps as an entire school community. Teach Plus Fellows work with students of all ages and backgrounds and we have tried implementing small changes in our classrooms with success. Some easy ways to start making SEL and trauma-informed practices a priority in your classroom include:

+ Set clear expectations. Students who know what to expect feel safer than students who do not know what expectations they are being held to.

+ Set and follow a routine. Routines help students feel safe because they know what is coming next.

+ Use effective language. When talking to students, share how the actions or situation are making you feel in that moment. This models appropriate expression of feelings and helps students develop empathy (i.e. This is making me feel...I felt this way when you said...)

+ Model appropriate ways to react to certain feelings. Explain to students why you are doing what you are doing (i.e. I feel frustrated right now so I am going to pause and take three deep breaths before we continue.)

+ Allow students time and space to cool down. After students have experienced something that upsets them, it is ideal to have a space where the student can still hear and see instruction, but can de-escalate. At the same time, the teacher will be able to reduce the number of instructional minutes lost (i.e. a cool-down corner)

BRING SEL AND TRAUMA-INFORMED PRACTICES INTO YOUR SCHOOL

+ Build a culture where it is safe to learn. Just like students, when teachers try something new, we are bound to make mistakes. Build a school culture where teachers can be honest with each other about what is working and what is not. Emphasize making an effort to put the SEL curriculum into practice, not perfection in implementation.

+ Build support systems within your building. Find others who are trying similar strategies with their students and set a time to meet to discuss successes and ways to alter your practice. Kindly hold each other accountable for trying new strategies. Meet regularly to support each other in this work. Celebrate the successes and problem-solve the areas of weakness.





OTHER WAYS TO CONTINUE LEARNING INCLUDE:


- + Include teachers, schools, and systems that have strong SEL programs in your personal learning network.
- + Follow people and institutions on Twitter, see resource section below.
- + Join teacher Facebook groups.
- + Identify and attend professional development workshops and conferences on SEL and trauma-informed practices topics.



+++++++ HOW TO ADVOCATE FOR WHAT YOUR STUDENTS NEED: A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE ++++++

While you can learn some trauma-informed practices on your own, changing the school environment and providing a more robust training needs to be done in partnership with your school's administration. What follows is a step-by-step guide for advocating, within your school building, for more SEL and trauma-informed supports for students and staff.

-  **FIND LIKE-MINDED COLLEAGUES WHO ARE ALSO EAGER TO SEE AN INCREASE IN SEL AND TRAUMA-INFORMED PRACTICES IN YOUR SCHOOL OR DISTRICT.** These colleagues can be fellow teachers, school counselors, custodial staff, paraprofessionals, or office staff. Anyone who works with students in the school setting has a stake in improving the climate of the building and the student body's collective ability to appropriately work through their emotions and build healthy relationships. Reach out to teachers from a variety of departments as well as union representatives.
-  **AS A GROUP, WORK ON NARROWING OR DEFINING THE WAYS IN WHICH YOU WOULD LIKE TO SEE SEL AND TRAUMA-INFORMED PRACTICES BECOME A PART OF DAILY LIFE IN YOUR BUILDING.** A clear vision from a united front will have a greater likelihood of being implemented than vague wishes for change. This will take some time and likely involve some research. Resources to aid you in this effort can be found in the Resources section below.
-  **MAKE SURE THE VISION YOU AND YOUR COLLEAGUES CREATE IS STUDENT-CENTERED AND SOLUTION-ORIENTED, AND THAT ALL ELEMENTS OF THE PLAN HAVE BEEN TAKEN INTO CONSIDERATION, INCLUDING ANY FINANCIAL RESOURCES THAT MAY BE REQUIRED.** Though we know that discipline concerns affect teachers and students alike, as educators, our primary concern is our students' ability to learn and stay safe at school. When approaching an administrator about SEL and trauma-informed practices, keep students at the heart of every story and every change you request.
-  **APPROACH THE MEETING WITH SOLUTIONS, NOT COMPLAINTS.** The administrator in your building is all too familiar with the specific behavior concerns your school experiences. Do not attend a meeting with the intent to put new concerns on the table or relay a long list of specific concerns. Briefly summarize a concern so everyone is speaking on the same topic and then quickly move into the solutions that you and your team of colleagues have found or created.


 **WALK INTO THE MEETING ARMED WITH TALKING POINTS.** Many teachers recognize the importance of social emotional learning and trauma-informed practices (SEL/TIP) in meeting the needs of our diverse student bodies, but may struggle with introducing newer ideas to administration. We recognize the need to garner support from the administration in order to implement new practices with fidelity. Here are some talking points on creating support for these new ideas:

+ *SEL/TIP helps improve academic outcomes.* Studies show that when SEL/TIP are implemented with integrity, they can improve academic outcomes for students. See the section above, "How Trauma Informed Practices Support Our Students," and the resources below.

+ *Recognize current SEL/TIP initiatives.* Provide administrators with concrete examples of existing initiatives and specific data on the changes that have taken place.⁴ Some examples of what school districts are implementing can be found at The Partnership for Resilience (<https://partnership4resilience.org/>).

+ *Be informed about what your district already has in place.* Many districts have initiated SEL programs. If you are unable to find this information on your own, connect with colleagues who would know. Knowledgeable colleagues or district employees may be a school counselor, social worker, union representative, director of curriculum, case manager, or building administrator.

+ *ESSA Indicators and the 5Essentials provide useful data on a school's SEL/TIP work.* Future indicators of school ratings include school culture and climate as scored by the 5Essentials Survey. Improving the learning environment through SEL/TIP is likely to contribute to a higher rating in the survey, thereby improving the school's overall score.

 **BE PREPARED TO ANSWER FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS, SPECIFICALLY THOSE CONCERNING TIME AND FINANCIAL RESOURCES.** If you do not have an answer, offer to seek it out and get back to the administrator with what you have found.

 **REGARDLESS OF HOW THE MEETING SEEMS TO GO, THANK THE ADMINISTRATOR FOR THEIR TIME AND SEEK TO KEEP THE TOPIC OPEN FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION AND POTENTIAL WORK TOGETHER.** A single page summarizing the group's ideas or a brief follow-up email are excellent ways to allow your administrator to revisit your ideas after the meeting has ended.

The following is a list of resources for school organizations and providers to deliver services from a trauma-informed perspective and develop trauma-informed relationships that cultivate safety, trust and compassion. Use these resources to start building a library of your own to start advocating and implementing.

If you are reading a paper copy of this toolkit, you can scan the QR code to the right, which will link you to a page with all of the links you can explore.



RESEARCH ON TRAUMA

- + [NPR - ACEs](#)
- + [ACE Study \(CDC\)](#)
- + [Education Brief: ACEs for Educators and Stakeholders](#)
- + [Trauma-Informed Classrooms](#)

PUBLIC ACT 99-0456: A LAW TO ADDRESS THE “SCHOOL-TO-PRISON-PIPELINE”

- + [From Zero to SB 100](#) (A Teach Plus brief that outlines SB 100 and the views of teachers across Illinois)
- + [Key Elements of SB 100](#)

RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS TO USE WITH STUDENTS

- + [Trauma Toolkit from Maryland and First Book](#)
- + [Helping Teachers Manage the Weight of Trauma](#)
- + [Child Trauma Toolkit for Educators](#)
- + [Illinois Classrooms in Action: Social Emotional Learning](#)
- + [Australian Childhood Foundation Resources - Making SPACE for Learning](#)
- + [Edutopia Resources on Social Emotional Learning](#)
- + [Early Childhood and Trauma Triggers](#)
- + [Psychological and Behavioral Impact of Trauma: Preschool Children](#)
- + [How Preschoolers React to Trauma and How to Help](#)
- + [Trauma and Children-Two to Five years](#)

SELF ASSESSMENTS FOR SCHOOLS AND DISTRICTS

- + [Trauma Responsive Schools Implementation Assessment](#)
- + [What is a trauma-informed school?](#)
- + [Teaching With Strengths in Trauma-Affected Students: A New Approach to Healing and Growth in the Classroom](#)
- + [Helping Traumatized Children Learn \(Action plan for schools in Chapter 2\)](#)
- + [Research on Impacts of Suspension on Academic Performance](#)

INFORMAL STUDENT ASSESSMENT FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

- + [Screening and Assessment with Multiple Systems](#)

RESOURCES FOR TEACHER SELF-CARE

- + [Self-Care for Teachers of Traumatized Students](#)
- + [Self-Care as a Trauma Informed Practice](#)
- + [Self-Care for Educators](#)
- + [Secondary Traumatic Stress](#) (Coping with the effects of others)
- + [Secondary Trauma Video](#)

BOOKS

- + *The Deepest Well* by Nadine Burke Harris
- + *Fostering Resilient Learners: Strategies for Creating a Trauma-Sensitive Classroom* by Kristin Souers and Peter A. Hall
- + *Relationship, Responsibility, and Regulation: Trauma-Invested Practices for Fostering Resilient Learners* by Kristin Van Marter Souers and Peter A. Hall

VIDEOS

- + [Video: Impacts of Trauma on Learning - Academic Performance](#)
- + [Video: Compassion Fatigue- Teacher Self Care](#)
- + [Video: Recent Research Science Behind Social Emotional Learning](#)
- + [Video: How Childhood Trauma Affects Health Across a Lifetime](#)

ORGANIZATIONS

- + Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning ([CASEL](#))
- + [National Child Traumatic Stress Network](#)
- + [TREP Project](#)
- + [Illinois Classrooms in Action](#)
- + [SEL Chicago](#)
- + [Umoja Corporation](#)

TWITTER HANDLES AND HASHTAGS TO FOLLOW

- + Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) @caselorg
- + Pete Hall @educationhall
- + Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) @ISBEnews
- + National Child Traumatic Stress Network @nctsn
- + National Education Association (NEA) @NEAToday
- + Office of Social & Emotional Learning (OSEL) at CPS @oselcps
- + Kristin Souers @KristinKsouers
- + @SELearningEDU
- + TED-Ed @TED_ED
- + TREP Project @TREPProject
- + #SEL
- + #TraumaInvested
- + #TraumaInformed

CURRENT LEGISLATION AND SCHOOL COMPLIANCE

PA 99-0456

In 2015, the Illinois Legislature passed Public Act 99-0456, commonly known as Senate Bill 100 (SB 100), which made [comprehensive reforms](#)⁵ to school discipline policies at both charter schools and traditional public schools. The legislation limits the use of “zero-tolerance” policies and requires that schools “limit the number and duration of expulsions and suspensions to the greatest extent possible.” Prior to suspension, it is recommended that other forms of non-exclusionary discipline are used. SB 100 created [specific guidelines](#)⁶ for when students can receive suspensions less than three days, suspensions greater than three days, or expulsion. Exclusionary discipline should be used to preserve a safe and healthy learning environment, not simply as punishment for misbehavior.

In addition, schools are required to provide students who have been suspended the opportunity to make up work they missed for equal credit as well as have a policy to re-engage students who have been suspended. SB 100 also includes parents in a school's discipline process, making it a requirement that schools provide parents with more reasoning behind a student's specific exclusionary discipline decision. Also, school boards or local governing bodies must create a parent-teacher advisory committee to annually review discipline policy guidelines.

In regards to training for staff, schools are required to “make reasonable efforts to provide ongoing professional development” on five topics: “the adverse consequences of school exclusion and justice-system involvement, effective classroom management strategies, culturally responsive discipline, the appropriate and available supportive services for the promotion of student attendance and engagement, and developmentally appropriate disciplinary methods that promote positive and healthy school climates.”⁷

ILLINOIS SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING STANDARDS

The Illinois State Board of Education introduced the [Illinois Social and Emotional Learning Standards](#) in accordance with Illinois' [Children's Mental Health Act of 2003](#). The law also mandates that “every Illinois school district develop a policy for incorporating social and emotional development into the district's educational program.” The standards promote the development of social-awareness, self-management, interpersonal skills and metacognitive skills.

ILLINOIS EARLY LEARNING SOCIAL/EMOTIONAL LEARNING STANDARDS

One of the Illinois State Board of Education's Early Learning domains is Social/Emotional Development. It includes “preschool benchmarks in: Self-Management Skills, Social Awareness and Interpersonal Skills, and Decision-making Skills and responsible Behaviors.” [Illinois Early Learning Standards](#).

IMPORTANT TERMS

The advocacy toolkit provides information regarding the following terms. Please use the definitions below as a reference when reading through the toolkit.

+ **Social-Emotional Learning (SEL):** ISBE defines "Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) [as] the process through which children and adults acquire the knowledge, attitudes, and skills they need to: recognize and manage their emotions; demonstrate caring and concern for others; establish positive relationships; make responsible decisions; and handle challenging situations constructively."⁸ ([ISBE Social and Emotional Learning](#)) See Appendix A for more information on standards.

+ **Trauma:** The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) highlights the National Institute of Mental Health's definition of "childhood trauma [as] the experience of an event by a child that is emotionally painful or distressful which often results in lasting mental and physical effects."⁹ ([ISBE School Wellness: Trauma](#)) Trauma is unique to each individual; it is an event which overwhelms their ability to cope and makes it difficult to behave in an optimal regulated way.

+ **Trauma-Informed Practices (TIP):** A system for recognizing and approaching students who may have experienced trauma. The system aids students within an academic setting. These [practices](#) can help all students build coping skills and self-efficacy.¹⁰

+ **Teacher Self-Care:** Teacher self-care refers to the ways educators tend to their emotional and mental needs. Educators who work with students impacted by trauma run the risk of experiencing *secondary traumatic stress*, also referred to as *compassion fatigue* or *vicarious trauma*. According to The National Child Traumatic Stress Network, compassion fatigue is "the emotional duress that results when an individual hears about the firsthand trauma experiences of another." Compassion fatigue is a common result of working with those who have endured traumatic experiences; it is prevalent amongst healthcare professionals, social workers, and educators.¹¹ ([Self-Care for Teachers of Traumatized Students.](#))

+ **SB100 (Public Act 99-0456):** The legislation, passed by the Illinois legislature in 2015, limits the use of "zero-tolerance" policies and requires that schools "limit the number and duration of expulsions and suspensions to the greatest extent possible." Schools are required to "make reasonable efforts to provide ongoing professional development." See Appendix A for more details.¹² [Public Act 99-0456 \(SB 100\)](#)

+++++ ENDNOTES +++++

- 1 The National Child Traumatic Stress Network. Child Trauma Toolkit from Educators. Retrieved from <https://wmich.edu/sites/default/files/attachments/u57/2013/child-trauma-toolkit.pdf>
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