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## **An Evaluation of the Trauma-Informed Approach Implemented at a Title I Elementary School**

Aleli Vazquez  
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An Evaluation of the Trauma-Informed Approach  
Implemented at a Title I Elementary School

Aleli Vazquez Santiago

Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

Approved:

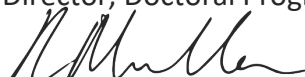
  
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September 10, 2020

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An Evaluation of the Trauma-Informed Approach  
Implemented at a Title I Elementary School

Aleli Vazquez Santiago  
Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements of  
Doctor of Education

National Louis University

2020

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## Abstract

*An Evaluation of the Trauma-Informed Approach Implemented at a Title I Elementary School* assesses the merits of the implementation of an intervention to support the social-emotional ability and stability of students within elementary schools; called the Trauma-Informed Approach. Many children attending elementary schools bring diverse and complex experiences to the classroom setting. Students with multiple adverse childhood experiences attend the educational system. Many students have a more difficult time concentrating and succeeding due to anxiety and lack of physiological needs being met. These needs must be met to secure positive learning gains for these students.

For data gathering tools, I surveyed teachers and school counselors and conducted interviews with teachers, administrators, and school counselors, as well as observed teachers. The results of the study indicated that many staff members request additional training on trauma-informed practices, support for implementation, and time to plan and practice. During my Change Leadership Plan study, I found that there was a necessary need to improve the training protocol, support systems, and time management resources. In reviewing my data results, I found a need for a policy amendment for mandatory training for teachers through state level inclusion of trauma-informed competencies in recertification requirement criteria. I further contend in my policy amendment that district and school leadership support trauma-informed competencies by monitoring and coaching teachers during teacher implementation of trauma-informed practices currently included in the allocated funds dedicated to training.

## Preface

The trauma-approach was an initiative by the district, with the sole purpose of addressing the needs of mental health at the schools. Ten WXYZ District schools were selected to conduct the Trauma-Informed Approach (TI) pilot program for this initiative. This practice has been implemented since February 2018. I was invited to attend a trauma-informed conference in Washington, D.C., and ever since, I have had a great passion for researching more about trauma-informed and ways I can help children. The goal is to understand the relationship between trauma and children's cognitive development and academic success. Based on my research and data collected, I concluded that the trauma-informed approach could significantly benefit students' academics, behaviors, and school culture.

I believe in the whole child approach and the importance of meeting students' social-emotional needs while meeting their academic needs. Back in 1991, my parents decided to move from Puerto Rico to Brooklyn, New York. This change had a rough impact on my childhood as I experienced cultural shock and trauma when I started school in the United States. It was a completely new world for me. It was not until one of the ESOL teachers started to attend to my trauma that my academic achievement improved, and my confidence increased. This teacher took the time to build a relationship with me and care for my emotional needs. She took the time to gain my trust and build a relationship. This had a significant impact on my motivation and academics. Now, it is my time to "pay it forward" to students in need. I want to be that educator that connects with students and make them a better version of themselves.

Two of the significant leadership lessons that I learned is how leaders have the

moral responsibility of standing up and advocating for what is best for children. This research study taught me that I have a voice to advocate for children and their education. This journey has motivated me to continue researching ways to support children in schools and create support systems to build teacher and administrator capacity. Another lesson learned is the importance of self-care and how I need to remind myself to stop and take care of myself to help others with the strength and competency that I need. Being a school administrator is no easy task. Every day there are more expectations and pressures on the job that we do with so much love and passion. Throughout this research study, I encountered many cases that hit close to my heart. It took much emotional intelligence to deal with these scenarios and continue my responsibilities as a school leader. This experience has contributed to my growth as a leader by researching a topic that I know can make a difference in students' lives and teachers. It has allowed me to have a voice and become an agent of change.

## Acknowledgements

I want to thank my husband, Jowey. He has been supportive of all my initiatives and ideas over the years. His love and support are what keep me going in good times and in bad times. His patience and care have been outstanding during this three-year dissertation journey.

I want to thank my staff and students. Thank you for your unconditional support and for always willing to help. You inspire me every day to become a better leader and advocate for education. My students are the motor that keeps me going. I have learned so much from them, and they make me a better person.

I am grateful to my professors. Thank you for your support, advice, guidance, and flexibility. You were always available through this process and challenged me to step out of my comfort zone to push my ESOL brain to write an entire dissertation in English (my second language). Thank you for believing in my research study, for the words of encouragement and professionalism.

Finally, I would like to thank a "tiny blessing" that made my nights better by lying next to me for very long hours until I decided to go to bed. Thank you to my little ray of sunshine, Maya, my fur baby. In the quietest of nights and the most stressful ones, you were next to me keeping me company. You bring joy to my life even on my worse days. Thank you for being there for me, little one.



## Dedication

I dedicate this paper to my loving family. They have been my cheerleaders through this challenging journey. This degree is for you, Jowey, Mom, Dad, Melissa, Kiara, Daniel, and Katiria. Thank you for the support, guidance, and love you have provided me throughout my life. Thank you for understanding and enduring the many hours spent in front of a computer surrounded by many books during late-night hours, staying home with me, and sacrificing weekends and holidays because I had work to complete.

I also dedicate this research to an exceptional person who was like a second mom to me, my aunt Luz. She died just a few months before my doctoral completion. My “Titi” use to get excited every time I achieved a goal or received recognition. She always rooted for me and believed in my potential. I know that she was incredibly proud of my choice of obtaining a doctoral degree, and I do not doubt that she would have celebrated this achievement with great pride. To the best aunt in the world! This is also for you.

I thank God for giving me the strength and health to endure this challenge even during a pandemic. He allowed me to stay the course and achieve one of my greatest dreams. Thank you for your protection and for the wisdom that you granted me to complete this. I am forever grateful to you, dear God.

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **Introduction**

A change has slowly happened within our nation's educational system as well as with our current generation of students. Schools needed to implement curriculums that support the social-emotional stability of students and the community they serve. Schools have begun to shift the way discipline was implemented and they have begun to approach a more proactive way to help students succeed instead of punishing them. There was a need for schools to plan for implementation of trauma sensitive strategies within school practices and a shift of mindset within their school culture (Sporleder & Forbes, 2016). To achieve a positive outcome, it is required that all educational stakeholders have skills in understanding and managing a complex mind shift to a more proactive approach to address the needs of students. It is imperative for educators to learn how to deescalate behaviors, manage student stress, and have the capacity to maintain objectivity and control when addressing specific situations regarding students- social emotional needs (Sporleder & Forbes, 2016).

TS Elementary School (pseudonym) was located in the heart of the southeast community in the southern region of the United States and was one out of the 234 schools from WXYZ District (pseudonym). It had an enrollment of 800 students with demographics of approximately 80% Hispanics, 13% African American, 5% Caucasian, 2% Asian, 0.1% American Indian and 0.9% Multiracial. Thirty-four percent of the students were English Language Learners and fourteen percent were Exceptional Students with disabilities. The school qualified as a Title I school. A Title I receives federal funds to provide additional resources for economically disadvantage students.

School TS School's mission was to lead students to success with the engagement of the families and the community. The mission's goal was to create a partnership with the families and the community to work together as a team to find strategies and new initiatives to improve the educational process for the students.

A federal grant for creating trauma-informed schools was provided to the school. TS School was a primary school with approximately 800 students. Many of these students have experienced a type of trauma during their childhood. Traumas such as natural disasters, civil wars, hunger, domestic violence, sexual abuse, alcohol and drug use at homes and child neglect are some of their adverse childhood experiences. The trauma-approach pilot program was adopted by the district, with the sole purpose of addressing the needs of mental health at the schools. Ten WXYZ District schools were selected to conduct the Trauma-Informed Approach pilot program for this initiative. This practice was implemented in February 2018. For two years they monitored data to evaluate the efficacy of this initiative in the schools. Their goal was to understand the relationship between trauma and children's cognitive development and academic success.

The pressing issue the nation had in K-12 schools in the United States was the increase of violence at the schools and how the system was failing the current generation. "A total of 3,380 threats were documented in the 2017-2018 school year, a 62% increase from the previous school year" (Klinger & Klinger, 2018, p. 15) "One alarming trend is that the overwhelming majority of 21st-century shooters were adolescents" (Katsiyannis, 2018, p .4). The problem statement of this research was that educators understood more than ever that there was a desperate need for mental health support and trauma-informed schools. There was a need to focus on changing how stakeholders at the schools interact



with children. We needed to be more proactive and positive when approaching students' needs.

At TS School there was an increase of concerns on how students behaved and how the behaviors were addressed in specific cases. WXYZ District implemented this additional support in a proactive way of supporting students in diverse communities. TS School had a variety of students coming from traumatic backgrounds such as: natural disasters, violent society, violence at home, foster care, lack of parental engagement, and community influence. These factors were affecting the academic and behavioral performance at the school. Teachers were struggling more to address these cases and they were leaving it to the school-based administrators to address.

The goal of the Trauma-Informed Approach at TS School was for adults to have a better understanding of students' traumas. If each child was seen through a different lens based on their emotional needs and was provided with the right interventions to improve their behaviors, there was a high probability for that child to respond to the academic expectations in a different way. These changes would not only support students and help them succeed academically and socioemotionally but would alleviate the struggle of teachers who are trying to address and support students at different levels of performance each school day.

### **Purpose of the Program Evaluation**

The program that I evaluated was the trauma-informed schools' practice. The trauma-informed schools' movement was less than a decade old. The trauma sensitive approach was part of an educational reform used to address the needs of social-emotional education at the school level. This approach included strategies such as positive behavior

interventions, conscious discipline strategies, and a direct collaboration with mental health counselors, social workers, psychologists, teachers, parents and administrators. It also provided educators with the right tools to design instruction that develops the child's brain and social-emotional skills. It was an effort to create a positive school environment and to ensure the safety of children and educators. This practice was a positive approach for schools to care for the mental and emotional needs of students. It was a change of paradigm that will empower educators to educate students with a whole-child approach.

TS Elementary School began the Trauma- Informed Approach in February 2018. WXYZ district decided to apply for a Title XI grant with the intent of addressing mental health in schools in a proactive way after the *one state's* (*one state* is used as a pseudonym for the actual state to preserve anonymity) school shooting in the state under study. This decision was made before the one state decided to implement one Senate Bill. Area Superintendents recommended principals for this pilot program based on the schools' needs and principal willingness to pilot the program. Administrators, Guidance Counselor, and Dean attended the Creating Trauma-Informed Schools conference in Washington, D.C, on February 2018. Teachers and staff attended various trainings in the months of June, July, and August 2018, to learn more about the new initiative and how to implement it in their classrooms. Conscious Discipline, Positive Behavior Interventions Systems, Trauma-Informed Schools, Mindfulness, and Second Step were the topics of the conferences that teachers and staff attended. An action plan was designed to release the Trauma-Informed implementation gradually.

Once school staff was trained and had the content knowledge to put in practice the trauma-informed approach, the implementation phase had begun. "Trauma-informed

schools incorporate policy, procedure, and curriculum into a holistic approach that supports every student's potential" (Eilers, 2019, p. 1). A trauma-informed approach goes side by side with student learning. The trauma-informed approach prepared the brain for learning and it helped with students' critical thinking skills. A key characteristic that distinguished a trauma-informed school was awareness. The staff developed an awareness of factors that could cause adverse reactions, or that could potentially cause trauma. This awareness helped them act in proactive ways to prevent children from experiencing trauma. Staff developed an awareness of socioeconomic factors, home environments, community environments, the emotional state of students, and early trauma signs.

The school addressed de-escalating behaviors and building positive relationships with students. Every classroom has a "safe-zone" or better known as a calming corner. Students have been made aware that in their rooms they had an area to calm down, self-reflect, and control their emotions. The school also had a "safe zone" for staff to de-escalate and control their emotions during the school day. Teachers were trained with different morning strategies to welcome students and build relationships. They were also trained to identify students' behaviors to address them in a proactive way.

A committee has been created with the purpose of meeting monthly, or as needed, to discuss students of concern and determine systems of support to help the child. This committee includes administrator, guidance counselor, social worker, psychologist, school resource officer, teacher, staff, and parent. They determine what type of support systems the teacher would use to manage behaviors in their classrooms. There was a system in place for submission of student referrals. An electronic form had been created

for teachers to inform the school counselor and school administrators of any concerns they might have about a student. This form was viewed daily and addressed based on the concern. Data was collected to monitor progress of implementation and modification of behaviors. This form collected student's name, grade, teacher, teacher observation/concern, suggested action, and parent contact log. Interventions provided to students were documented and monitored for effectiveness. The school counselor followed up with the students and ensured that interventions were supporting the improvement of the student in the classroom.

Academic progress and behavior data were used for correlations. It was also used to drive decision made on planning, curriculum, the coordination of events, workshops, and professional development sessions. The goal was to increase academic performance, close the achievement gaps, improve behavior data, and enhance a safe learning and working environment for children and staff.

I became aware of the program on January 2018 when I was approached by WXYZ District, Student Services' Senior Administrator, that the school was granted a Title IV grant that would be used to implement trauma-informed practices in ten schools from the district. Schools were selected based on principal's receptivity to the new initiative. In February 2018, I attended the Creating Trauma Sensitive Schools 2018 Conference at Washington, D.C. This conference was sponsored by the Attachment and Trauma Network, Inc.

I am a firm believer in the whole-child approach and how important it is to develop the child social-emotionally parallel to academically. After being approached by the WXYZ District, I continued with my own research on this topic. I had the opportunity

to attend various conferences related to this approach: Conscious Discipline with Dr. Becky Bailey, Trauma-Informed Schools with James Moffet, Mindfulness and PBIS provided by district professionals.

I also began to read books that helped me understand the needs of the Trauma-Informed approach. The information gathered from all these outstanding resources, have been my baseline to help with the implementation at TS Elementary School. The trauma-informed approach is now a highlight in education. Politicians and educators are now emphasizing the need of meeting the needs of the whole-child and addressing their social emotional and mental health development.

Recent reports of student behaviors are telling us that it is time to change the way we are educating students. There was a need for a change of paradigm that was focused on the needs of all students, regardless of their socioeconomics, academic performance, and mental or emotional needs. The trauma-informed framework revealed how trauma impacted the social-emotional health of a child and how it affected their brain. This framework was designed with the objective of helping individuals address trauma at an early stage and prevent post traumatic syndrome disorder by helping them learn how to cope with stress and manage their emotions.

Schools have become places where much class time was spent on addressing behaviors instead of instruction. Students with behavior issues were reflecting the trauma they have endured in their past and present lives. We cannot expect students to focus on learning when they are encountering trauma. Children are emotional beings and need to have a connection with a caring adult to develop their intellectual level.

Maslow's hierarchy is a great example of the statement above. The "Hierarchy of

Learning” suggests humans need their psychological needs, safety, love, and esteem met and developed prior to having a desire to learn and improve themselves. By implementing the trauma-informed approach and prioritizing the social-emotional needs and mental health of students, they would develop self-motivation and the desire to learn. This would positively reflect on their academic performance and graduation rates.

The purpose of the evaluation was to evaluate how this program positively impacts or does not impact schools and how it might relate to students’ academic achievement and behavior data. I wanted to evaluate the process and how meeting social emotional needs of students can impact growth and proficiency on standardized assessments and how it can reduce negative behaviors in school. I wanted to find efficient strategies to support the whole child and influence a paradigm shift at the school that can highly impact our school’s academic performance.

I evaluated how this new approach of meeting the specific needs of all students and letting go of archaic disciplinary policies can impact student’s academic achievement. The zero-tolerance policy was an example of a policy that ignored the mental health of vulnerable students and it did not meet their individual needs. “When students are highly escalated, they are working from the stem of their brains and physically not able to engage in the learning for fear of failure or feeling unsafe” (Sporleder & Forbes, 2016, p. 35). It was imperative that educators understood the difference and the impact they had in the lives of their students. Evaluating the effectiveness of this approach and monitoring the impact on student behavior and learning development was my central focus for this evaluation.

## **Rationale**

The reason I selected this practice to evaluate was because I am a firm believer in the whole child approach and the importance of meeting students' social emotional needs while meeting their academic needs. In my practice as a school administrator, I could observe how teachers were disconnecting from the students' emotional needs because of the pressure they must meet proficient academic performance. I could see how student behaviors were communicating the need for motivation, support, and understanding. We educate students who are coming from out of the country and many have been exposed to adverse childhood experiences.

In October 2017, WXYZ district enrolled approximately 2,200 students from Puerto Rico and the Virgin Island after both islands were hit by hurricane Maria (cite withheld to preserve confidentiality). They arrived from different socio-economic and personal backgrounds and they needed to be approached in differentiated ways. Students who are new to the United States educational system go through a cultural shock and trauma. These students have a more difficult time concentrating due to anxiety and fear. Because their emotional state is disturbed by the lack of feeling safe, they can become easily frustrated and experience a low desire to improve themselves. They are not able to learn until their emotional needs are met.

My parents decided to move from Puerto Rico to Brooklyn, New York State when I was only ten years old. I went through a cultural shock and trauma when I started school in the United States. It was a completely new world for me. I was always a 4.0 GPA student, but once I started school in New York, my grades started to drop. It was not until one of the ESOL teachers started to attend to my social emotional needs that my grades started to increase. She took the time to build a relationship with me and care for my

emotional needs. She had a significantly positive impact on my motivation and academics. Now, I feel that I have the responsibility to “pay it forward” to students in need.

A critical issue related to the trauma-informed schools’ approach is the need to create new policies that open doors to a paradigm shift that incorporates education with neuroscience and psychology. Educational policies only have a focus on state academic standards and test-accountability. They put aside the needs of addressing the whole child. Policies such as No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top only focused on student academic proficiency and the mastery of standards, not caring about the social emotional needs of students and how it impacts their academic achievement.

A new State Senate Bill was passed in 2018 with the purpose of addressing mental health at the K-12 school level to promote safety in schools and enhance collaboration between law enforcement and education. WXYZ District and the county assigned a school resource officer to K-12 schools, provided mental health training to teachers and administrators, required additional mental health counselors supporting schools and required guidance counselor at every school. School resource officers are trained to identify early warning signs in students, offer counseling, and implement positive role modeling opportunities.

The shift of paradigm has begun, and the state is now starting to address the needs of students, not only academically but as a whole child. A reform in education and how we are addressing the needs of students was needed. Unfortunately, tragic events had to happen at different schools for stakeholders to react and make changes. The trauma-informed approach will shift educator’s mindset and will transform how we are educating



future generations.

This evaluation is important to stakeholders and the educational community at large because it has the potential to shift the way education is perceived and save student lives. According to the Crisis Prevention Institute, everyday experiences can cause trauma in children. Some of these experiences are bullying, deportation, death on the family, social violence, medical trauma, and discrimination (Eilers, 2019). If not treated at an early stage in life, these experiences can cause adverse health outcomes when they become adults. During their childhood, these experiences can potentially limit the student's ability to learn and have a healthy social-emotional development. This shift needs the active involvement of stakeholders involved in the educational fields; to ensure that new generations of students are receiving the quality education that they deserve.

Students, teachers, parents and administrators will be part of a shift of paradigm that will serve to educate the whole child. As a result of this shift, students will receive the interventions they need to cope with their own social emotional needs which will lead to a positive impact on their academic achievement. Parents and teachers will receive the training and the tools necessary to proactively intervene with children to meet their needs. Teachers may struggle to engage students who are experiencing anxiety, fear, or anger. These students need additional time and support and teachers are concerned about how time consuming this task can be. By implementing this new approach and providing the right resources, they will learn strategies that can address specific situations more effectively. Families and the community are included in this paradigm shift. Schools need to support families and find ways to collaborate as a community of learners that works toward a common goal, help children succeed. They will be provided with the training

and necessary tools to support students at home and will have access to community services that address family issues and parenting skills.

This evaluation is important to the district because it will impact, not only academics, but also behaviors. Teachers may start to educate students with a different mindset and parents will feel supported by the school system. If implemented district wide, they will obtain high results on student growth and proficiency, as well as an increase in graduation rates as the achievement gaps closes. They will also address the need to provide a safe learning environment for students by diminishing possible cases of violence at the schools due to mental health problems and social emotional issues.

### **Goals**

The goal of the program evaluation was to assess the effectiveness of the trauma-informed approach and monitor how addressing the whole-child can increase academic proficiency, close achievement gaps, and improve behavior. I evaluated how embedding it to the school culture and core subjects increased the time spent on instructional time and decreased the time consumed addressing poor behaviors. By increasing instructional time, we see a proficiency growth and learning gains on the state assessments.

I used assessment scores and student of concern forms to compare the impact that the trauma-informed was having on student academic and social-emotional performance. I analyzed closely student data of children that have been struggling academically and behaviorally. Since the trauma-informed approach is a school-wide practice, I looked at the school wide impact in academics and behavior infractions. Surveys and interviews provided the information needed to determine the effectiveness and the challenges of the implementation and practice process.

A practice that might emerge from the collected data could possibly be an implementation of options for student accountability. By eliminating punishments and out-of-school suspensions from our school and replacing them with trauma-informed proactive responses, students will learn to be responsible for their academics and demonstrate a change in behaviors. The goal is to expose students to more instruction and prevent instructional time interruptions due to in-school suspension, out-of-school suspensions, time-outs, and visits to administration as a punishment. Students will learn expected behaviors by receiving modeling of behaviors and clear expectations from their teachers.

The evaluation goals for the trauma-informed approach are related to student learning because it will meet the needs of the whole-child. Student academic and behavioral data will be closely monitored, and I will assess it to effectiveness of implementation of the framework. By shifting the way behaviors are addressed in the classrooms, we will limit the time spent disciplining students and increase the instructional time. Strategies used to teach students how to self-regulate their emotions and be more mindful of their feelings will help students concentrate more on their learning.

The possible benefits of this practice were that students increased their academic success and social mastery. Teachers improved best practices by differentiating instruction and using a proactive approach to address behaviors. I believe that discipline will be seen through a different lens and out-of-school suspensions and punishments will decrease significantly. Benefits include using consequences that keep students in school and foster the building of trust and safety with trauma-informed trained adults. Point

systems, rewards, behavior contracts, and level systems were eliminated as they are considered “triggers” for students with trauma and behavior issues. Instead, they used trauma informed proactive responses.

### **Definition of Terms**

The following are key terms of my research with definitions provided:

- Trauma-informed school (trauma-sensitive school is a synonymous term used in research) - The trauma informed approach is a paradigm that addresses the needs of adverse childhood experiences. “It is a safe and supportive community that enables both students and adults to feel safe, build caring relationships with one another, regulate their feelings and behavior, as well as learn” (Alexander, 2019, p. 65).
- ACE (Adverse Childhood Experiences) - It is a research study that correlates adverse childhood experiences with social and health problems. “ACE are defined as some of the most intensive and frequently occurring sources of stress that children might suffer in life” (Forbes & Sporleder, 2016, p.11).
- Calm zones/room - These are assigned areas in classrooms to allow students to self-regulate. “The use of a calm room focuses on helping students to regulate within the context of the relationship rather than leaving students to their own devices to regulate” (Forbes & Sporleder, 2016, p. 62).
- Whole-child education - The whole child education approach balances meeting the physiological needs and academics needs of students. “A whole child approach, which ensures that each student is healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged, sets the standard for comprehensive, sustainable school

improvement and provides for long-term student success” (ASCD, 2015).

### **Research Questions**

The primary research questions that I used to evaluate this program were:

1. What do the participants (teachers, counselor, and administrators) at TS School perceive as working well with the trauma-informed approach?
2. What do the participants (teachers, counselor, and administrators) at TS School perceive as not working well with the trauma-informed approach?
3. What do the participants (teachers, counselor, and administrators) at TS School perceive as the greatest challenges in the implementation of the trauma-informed approach?
4. What do the participants (teachers, counselor, and administrators) at TS School suggest as methods to address these challenges, if any, and improve the trauma-informed approach?

The related research questions that I used to evaluate were:

1. What professional development opportunities do teachers at TS School need in order to support the trauma-informed approach at the school?
2. What do teachers in the Trauma-Informed Schools framework report as the greatest benefit on students’ social skills mastery and accountability for their learning (behavior)?

These research questions served as guide for my investigation and the results allowed me to share data that can potentially impact the way whole-child education is perceived and implemented.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, there is a need to step back from the archaic educational systems of addressing students' mental health needs. Educators need to start trying new strategies to educate the whole child. We are educating a different generation. We now have access to more information on how the brain functions and how children develop. "When we can understand the brain, we can understand our children because of this concept: The brain drives behavior" (Forbes, 2012, p.1). Heather T. Forbes conducted research presented in her book, *Help for Billy* (2012), and Ross W. Greene as well in his book, *Lost at School* (2014), on the urgent need to address the mental health of our students. "An estimated two in three children are exposed to traumatic experiences that have the potential to impact brain development, social functioning, and ability to learn and engage in school" (McInerney & McKlindon, 2014, p. 15). The educational system and policymakers are responsible for allowing schools to adopt the trauma-informed schools approach and make it part of the educational framework. Many educators and psychologists are collaborating to embrace this new approach to change the way we are educating our students. Academic achievement and behavior mastery can be positively impacted if the whole child's socio-emotional and mental health needs are met.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **Review of the Literature**

Society, natural disasters, and violence are some examples of events that cause trauma in children. For this evaluation, I will use the following definition: “Trauma is an exceptional experience in which powerful and dangerous events overwhelm a persons’ capacity to cope” (Rice & Groves, 2005, p. 3). Trauma can cause in children social-emotional damage and suffering.

Natural disasters can cause trauma and post traumatic disorders. Hurricanes Maria and Irma are two recent examples. Many students from the Caribbean islands, majority from Puerto Rico, lost their homes, family members, and their valuables. According to WXYZ District, there were approximately 2,200 students from Puerto Rico enrolled in their district (citation omitted to preserve anonymity). These 2,200 students were suspected of experiencing some type of trauma and needed additional support to meet their emotional needs for them to obtain proficient academic performance.

Trauma is also caused by violent acts. Many students, teachers, and parents feel that schools are no longer a safe place and this feeling can interfere with the process of learning. Dr. Patricia Jennings (2018) expresses that childhood trauma can have severe and long-term consequences in students’ cognitive and social-emotional development. Other students experience other types of trauma such as: sexual abuse, domestic violence, deaths of loved ones, and neglect, etc. These students may have a more difficult time coping with life challenges, and they tend to react in unsafe ways that can hurt themselves and others. They also experience frustration and anxiety when they see themselves struggling academically- most of the time we see these frustrations converted

into discipline issues and failing grades.

Other traumatic events are natural events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, which has caused the closure of schools and directly impacted children and their families. Many families experienced housing and financial loss and the stress of finding food to put on their tables. The impact of structural racism with the Black community and the police brutality that kids are watching on television and social media, instilling stress, and fear in them. “Researchers have found that Black adolescent males who are exposed to publicize cases of police killings through the media nationally have serious concern for their personal safety and mortality on the presence of police” (Francis, 2020, p. 1-4). What will happen when Black students return to school and see their School Resource Officer? Will this change the trust students had in them?

The purpose of my evaluation was to assess the relationship between trauma and student learning, as well as to evaluate the effectiveness of the trauma-informed approach at the school level and how it can benefit students’ academic learning. This evaluation was framed with an improvement-oriented, formative evaluation approach. This Patton (8) technique for evaluation is used to identify a program’s weaknesses and strengths, monitor the progression of the participants, identify barriers of implementation, share participants opinion about the program, and to identify what emerged from the program, the outcomes, and next steps (2008). The main themes I discuss in this chapter are how trauma affects the child brain, trauma effects on students learning, trauma effects on student’s behavior, and the trauma-informed mindset.



## **How Trauma Affects the Child Brain**

Extensive research has been conducted over the years to study the brain and its function. Scientists can identify the adverse effects that trauma plays on brain development beginning at an early stage. Authors Souers and Hall (2016) describe these effects of trauma as extreme, causing body stress. They report that the body responds to trauma in a state of alert called the *flight, fight, or freeze* response. Children are at high risk of experiencing stress in their brains instead of a state of development when they experience trauma. Because the child's brain is still developing and is still so sensitive, elevated levels of stress can cause brain damage (Shonkoff, 2009). The areas of memory, emotions, motor skills, and functioning skills can all be affected in a child's brain due to trauma. All these areas are crucial to students' academic achievement. Authors Craig and Stevens (2016) state that students with trauma are highly responsive to high-risk scenarios. Their complete attention is to find-ways to survive. These emotions are present during instructional time and it limits their ability to participate and be engaged. (Sporleder & Forbes, 2016) believe that if educators take the time to build relationships and connections with their students to balance their brains, learning can take place.

## **Trauma Effects on Students' Learning**

Year after year it has become more difficult to educate children in the classrooms. Teachers continue to struggle managing their time between dealing with behaviors and delivering instruction in compliance with common core expectations. Anya Kamenetz (2016) explains how teaching has become a stressful occupation due to the pressure from administrators to meet standards while students bring the effects of poverty and trauma to

the classrooms. She also mentions how in the last few years, teachers have reported less job satisfaction and how the turnover has increased, specifically for new teachers.

Classrooms are flooded with students who have some type of trauma and that is affecting their learning. Paul Tough (2016) provides as evidence to support this belief from research on neuroscience and pediatrics, where it was found that adverse environments such as poverty and violence can create biological changes in the brains and bodies of children. He mentions that these changes can impair a child's capacity to regulate their feelings and thoughts, process information and manage emotions; all these important areas needed to succeed in school. The greatest challenge for teachers is to balance the push for academic performance with the exhausting need to provide students who have trauma with a trauma-informed environment where trust, love, care, and safety is promoted (Souers & Hall, 2016). By providing the right resources to teachers and proper training, they will improve best practices and learn how to balance these challenges by focusing on the whole child.

Craig and Stevens (2016) explain how trauma affects children's readiness to learn. Trauma can affect children at a very early age. Negative experiences with building relationships with caring adults can interfere with the child's representational thoughts. Representational thoughts are the foundation for empathy and language, as well as attention, memory, and executive functioning (Craig and Stevens, 2016). The educational field is starting to become more aware of these needs.

The trauma-informed approach embeds time during the school year for adults and children to build strong connections and healthy relationships. When a child feels safe

and cared for, they respond differently during a crisis. Students need to know that they have a caring adult educating them and that their school is a safe place for them.

Students with a history of negative life experiences are often the students that struggle with meeting the academic and behavioral performance expected at schools. Early trauma negatively affects every aspect of a child's learning development. Rogers and Forbes (2018) explain how children who experience trauma, are usually on survival mode and how they are unable to learn or follow the rules when they are feeling stressed due to the brain's rational part reaction to shut off while in stress. When school staff is trained to meet the needs of these students with a trauma-informed approach, they know how to teach those foundational skills to support them and understand them. By doing this they can gain better engagement from the students and increase their capacity to learn.

### **Trauma Effects on Students' Behavior**

Trauma has a negative effect on the child's brain; hence it affects the child's behavior. "Social development refers to a child's ability to interact with other children and adults" (Forbes, 2012 p. 45). By the time children start school, they are expected to have all the social skills needed to interact with peers in a classroom setting. These skills are developed at an early stage in life through positive interactions with caring adults.

When a child begins school with a lack of social skills due to early trauma, their interactions with peers may be self-centered and awkward. For a child with trauma, the classroom can become a great challenge affecting the ability to behave as expected in a classroom environment. It takes understanding of these reactions to trauma to understand the rationale behind poor behaviors. Forbes (2012, p. 49) explains how emotional skills a

critical factor in a child's ability is to do well academically. Studies have evidence of how lack of social-emotional skills can have an adverse effect on early childhood learning (Forbes, 2012). The brain needs to be prepared to learn. If traumatic events block a child's brain, they are not able to process academic information. The schools need to be a safe environment for them, and they need to feel that the adult in front of that room cares for them. They need to have some connection for learning to happen.

Some children are not able to express their emotions, they become anxious and defensive. They are extremely sensitive to any trigger and they can have an emotional crisis. It only takes one small thing to trigger them and their outrage is uncontrollable. They can go into a rage of destroying classrooms, fighting, hurting him/herself, and/or threatening others. If a teacher is not aware and trained on trauma-informed approach, he or she could think that this child is overacting to a small situation, but they are not reacting to that situation, they are reacting to early experiences that are still in their brains. Forbes (2012, p. 50) explains this reaction as a moment of emotional release. Sadly, these students are unable to control their emotions and it is up to the adult present to teach them how to. As society becomes more corrupt and children are exposed to more traumatic experiences, there is a compelling need for educators to learn how to address these cases and use systems of support to help students develop not only the academic piece but also the social-emotional part.

### **The Trauma-Informed Mindset**

Author Tony Wagner (2008) states there is a need for an educational reform since the world is changing, and the schools are not keeping up with the changes of the world converting them into "obsolete." Wagner shares what students need in this day and age.

Students want to learn in more productive ways, and they want to be challenged. They want to be taught how to be critical thinkers and how to solve problems. They want to know the rationale behind every lesson and why teachers are teaching them specific topics (2008). Based on my observations, contemporary students, crave creative and engaging lessons, as well as having a caring adult in every classroom. It is time to start looking at the whole child instead of looking at students like a test score.

During a recent teacher chat discussion facilitated by Sherwin (2018), teachers expressed the importance of building relationships with students prior to presenting academic content. Schools are stepping away from this practice by putting all the importance on teaching academic content and gaining academic proficiency. Educators need to be mindful of the many traumatic life experiences many students go through and how their behaviors are their communication and their tool to express their true feelings.

Rose W. Greene, Ph.D. shares how difficult and time consuming it can be to deal with students' behavioral challenges (2014). Many teachers are quitting their profession and students are dropping out of school for this reason. Schools have the responsibility to teach their staff how to approach these challenges in a more proactive way by providing resources to solve problems based on the social-emotional needs of students and by teaching those skills to help them succeed. There is a need for a shift of mindset to start seeing every child as an individual and every behavior as a way of communication.

Failure of schools in academic performance will continue unless there is an acceptance of how severe childhood trauma is and a commitment to solve the problem (Craig, 2016). Trauma is mental health and an educational issue. If this trauma is not treated, we are putting the academic success of thousands of students at risk. Schools that

are trauma-informed do not segregate students by subgroups and abilities, instead they find ways to teach behaviors with a proactive approach. Trauma-informed teachers are more responsive to students needs and know how to provide support, nurturing, safety, and comfort. These schools become safe zones for students where they can heal their negative emotions and they can prepare to learn. Students become more resilient and can overcome early trauma when teachers and schools have a better understanding of children's emotional development.

### **Trauma-Informed within the United States**

The TI approach is used across the United States. Many schools have shared success stories with similar results to TS School. A school in Texas used a tracking system to alert staff if a child experienced some adversity at home. They worked on being proactive by connecting with students and families to external resources to support them at home. Their staff received proper training about the impact childhood adversity has on learning and behaviors (Merck, 2019).

In California, where students experienced poverty, discrimination, and parental separation, a program was designed to help students build resiliency in the face of trauma. They implemented a school-based intervention to provide mental health services to students. They used strategies such as mindfulness and therapies to help students (Merck, 2019). Another school district in Oregon also helped students facing adversity by training their personnel on a trauma-informed approach and creating a mental health department within their district. Because of the positive results, the superintendents are now pushing to start a statewide trauma-informed professional development opportunity to educate others on supporting students with trauma (Merck 2019).

## **Conclusion**

The trauma-informed approach advocates for children's needs to become successful academically and behaviorally. If schools continue to ignore the risks of students with trauma and leave their needs unattended there is a probability of a decrease in educational quality (Craig and Stevens, 2016). Academics and behaviors cannot be separated and when trauma becomes a barrier between these two, the child struggles with academic performance and social interactions.

There is no doubt that every educator hopes every student will become a successful and productive citizen to society. To have the results of meaningful change we must connect to the heart and then the mind; it is important to build relationships and trust (Couros, 2015). We want them to learn and enjoy their school experience. This literature has helped me have a more intensive knowledge about trauma-informed schools and it has provided the tools to evaluate the trauma-informed framework at TS School. The goal of this evaluation was to assess how effective the framework is and how it can benefit students with their academic learning.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **Methodology**

#### **Research Design Overview**

This program evaluation had a focus on trauma-informed schools' practice. The trauma-informed schools' movement has been emphasized in the last ten years. The trauma-informed approach is part of the educational reform used to address the needs of social-emotional education at the school level. This approach includes strategies such as positive behavior interventions, mindfulness, restorative justice, and conscious discipline strategies. In a direct collaboration with mental health counselors, social workers, psychologists, teachers, parents, and administrators, it focuses on the mental needs of students. It also provides educators with the necessary resources and strategies to plan instruction that develops the child's brain and social-emotional skills. The trauma-informed approach has been implemented in to create a positive school environment and to ensure the safety of children and educators. This practice is a positive way for schools to care for whole-child development. It is a change of mindset that will empower educators to educate students with a whole child in mind.

The research methods that I used for this program evaluation included interviews with teachers, administrators, and guidance counselor, and surveys of teachers, counselors, and administrators. In addition, I conducted observations of the trauma-informed classroom environment. Collection of data for this evaluation of the trauma-informed approach began in fall 2019, and it was completed in spring 2020.

Patton (2008) defines a program evaluation as a traditional way to "determining the extent to which a program attains its goals or intended outcomes" (p. 39). The



objective of this program evaluation was to assess the effectiveness of the trauma-informed approach and analyze how addressing the whole-child might affect students' behaviors and the way they perform academically. I also evaluated how implementing it, increased the time spent on teaching and learning and decreased time consumed to address behaviors. If the results show that the approach were having a positive effect on increasing instructional time, we should see proficiency growth as well as learning gains on the state assessment.

### **Participants**

The evaluation of the trauma-informed approach included up to two counselors, three administrators, and up to seventy-five teachers in one K-6 Elementary. Participants of the interview, survey, and observation process were between the ages of 21 to 75 years old, with an approximate number of seven males and 70 females. All instructional personnel were eligible to participate in the research methods. Students were not participants of the research. School counselors, administrators, and teachers' roles was vital in the implementation of the trauma-informed approach at TS School. They are all called upon to assess and support students' social-emotional development as well as their mental health.

### **Data Gathering Techniques**

**Surveys.** The participants for this survey were instructional personnel, counselors, and administrators from TS Elementary. Three types of data were collected for my program evaluation. I used teacher and staff mailboxes to distribute voluntary surveys to instructional personnel, counselors, and administrators with a total of up to 80 participants. Surveys were used to collect baseline data and comparison data. An

explanation of the process was provided and shared with them during time allocated for professional development, as a partial requirement in completing my doctoral studies.

On the Adult Participant Consent Form, it was stated that participation in the survey was voluntary; participants may discontinue their participation at any time during the process. If they decided to discontinue participation, there will not be any consequences because of their decision. A cover letter was placed in their mailboxes explaining the voluntary participation in the survey, as well as two copies of the Informed Consent for Adult Participation-Survey and two envelopes. One envelope was for a signed consent form, and the other one was for the completed survey. Surveys (Appendix B) were placed in an envelope and the consent form in a separate envelope. Directions asked participants to return the envelopes to a covered box with a slot in the mailroom, with the consent form and survey. By providing this confidential opportunity to submit their feedback, it prevented teachers from feeling forced to participate.

**Interviews.** Teachers, counselors, and administrators were all participants of the interview process. A copy of the Interview Protocol (Appendix A) and two copies of the Informed Consent for Adult Participation-Interview were placed in participants' mailboxes attached to an envelope to return the Informed Consents Adult Participation Form-Interview. A covered box with a slot was placed in the mailroom for return of the consents from inside the sealed envelope. Interviews were recorded with the permission of the participants. A copy for the study was retained by me, and the second copy is for their records. Interviews had a length of 30 minutes or less and were followed by a maximum of six emails to clarify information provided during the meeting.

**Observations.** Teachers were asked to participate in the observation process. A copy of the Trauma-Informed School Checklist (Appendix C) and two copies of the Informed Consent for Adult Participation-Observation were placed in teacher's mailboxes with an envelope to return the Informed Consents Adult Participation Form-Observation. A covered box with a slot was placed in the mailroom for return of the consents from inside the envelope. Participants' permission was obtained before conducting observations of their classroom environment. A copy of the consent form and checklist was retained for my records of the research, and the second copy was for their records. Observations had a length of no more than twenty minutes; with a total amount of four observations during the research period, once quarterly.

### **Data Analysis Techniques**

Data analysis for this research study had a focus on qualitative and quantitative data. I used interviews (Appendix A) and observations (Appendix C) to build a qualitative description of the evaluation of the program. This data allowed me to identify what practices are useful and which ones are the least effective in the school setting. Also, surveys (Appendix B) and academic and behavior data were used to complete the quantitative data. I analyzed and assessed the trauma-informed approach of how its effect on the school setting academically and behaviorally.

**Survey.** Data on teachers, counselors, and administrators' perceptions on the trauma-informed approach came from surveys (Appendix B). I used an accountability focus to identify if the resources that were part of the program were appropriately used and had the impact expected on students' academic performance, instructional strategies, and behaviors. Descriptive and quantitative data provided the information I needed to

assess this program. Once I collected baseline data in fall 2019 and final data in spring 2020, I used an inferential and effectiveness focus to assess to what extent the program was valid and if the objectives for it were met or not. The survey questions helped me analyze the level of content knowledge of teachers, the challenges they had with implementation, and how was this impacting their instruction and classroom management. I collected data on their perspective on the administrators' role in the implementation process and the role of the guidance counselor in monitoring and supporting the trauma-informed approach.

**Interviews.** I interviewed teachers, counselors, and administrators to collect an expository description of the trauma-informed practices in the school setting (Appendix A). I used an accountability focus to identify if the resources that were part of the program were appropriately used and had the impact expected on students' academic performance, instructional strategies, and behaviors. I used an inferential and effectiveness focus to assess to what extent the program was valid and if the objectives for it were met or not. The interview questions helped me analyze the level of content knowledge of teachers, the challenges they had with implementation, and how was this impacting their instruction and classroom management. I also collected data on their perspective on the administrators' role in the implementation process and the role of the guidance counselor in monitoring and supporting the trauma-informed approach.

**Observations.** I conducted random classroom observations to obtain qualitative data on how students and teachers used the Trauma-Informed Approach during instructional time (Appendix C). Observations had a length of fifteen to twenty minutes of duration, over four quarters. Instruction was not interrupted during this process and

observations was non-evaluative. The “look-fors” of this observation were: expectations communicated as needed, students’ strengths and interests are encouraged and used to guide instruction, the structure of the learning activities, opportunities provided for self-regulation, use of positive supports for behaviors, differentiated teaching and learning, opportunities for interactions with peers and teacher, and differentiated formative assessments. These observations were for data collection purposes; not meant to evaluate or provide any type of feedback to teachers. The focus of this method was to obtain data on what was happening in the program, and the developmental staged of it. An observation rubric, “Classroom Strategies and Techniques,” part of the Trauma Sensitive School Checklist from Lesly University and Trauma Learning Policy Initiative from Harvard Law School and Massachusetts Advocates for Children “n.d.”, was used to collect the data necessary to evaluate the program adequately.

### **Ethical Considerations**

To maintain and protect the confidentiality of minors, there was no collection of student record information. Beyond that of everyday life, there was no emotional, physical, social, or political risk to the participants in this project. To protect the anonymity of minors, students’ names were not used to associate data or scores. The identity of the school, school district, and participants was confidential. Instead of names, I used pseudonyms instead. I have access to all surveys and interview tapes and transcripts, and field notes, and I will keep these documents in a locked cabinet at my home or on a password-protected hard drive for up to five years after the completion of this research. After the five years period, I will shred all interview transcripts, tapes, and notes.

Participation in this research was voluntary. Participant teachers, guidance counselors, and administrators were informed of the voluntary nature of this study. They were notified that they may discontinue their participation at any time with no consequences. “A parallel use of evaluation was to increase shared understanding between program managers and line staff” (Patton, p. 163). I wanted participants to have a full understanding of their role and how they collaborated in the process of this research study. Participants may contact me to request a copy of the final report via email address.

### **Limitations**

Limitations to this research study were associated with three major categories: my job role, the sample size, and my not being able to interview parents and students. As researcher, my job role as a school administrator may have had an impact on the participant’s responses. Although survey responses were anonymous, teachers may still have felt the need to demonstrate loyalty to school administration, which may have caused them to soften any responses that may have seemed negative toward the school’s leadership. The constraints placed on the sample size associated with the availability of only one elementary school as a sample pool, a more significant sample size was unavailable. My research would have benefitted from data obtained by interviews from parents and students as a means for determining the amount of impact that the trauma-informed approach had on the parent and student population.

### **Conclusion**

Through the collection and analysis of data, I evaluated the trauma-informed approach and if TS Elementary was implementing the program correctly and obtaining the outcomes of the program’s objective. I wanted to see this program have a positive

educational contribution to the students at TS Elementary and for it to increase their academic success and social mastery. Every child is deserving of a loving and caring environment where safety and mental health are promoted. I hope to share the data collected with school faculty as well as district staff to allow them to assess findings and support the trauma-informed approach in every school.

TS School started the implementation of the trauma-informed approach. The school-wide goals for this new framework are to address the needs of students' social-emotional stability and ways of learning. Administrators, teachers, and staff attended multiple conferences, trainings, and resources to implement the framework effectively. School leaders have the responsibility to promote and support their staff during the phases of implementation to establish the framework in the most effective way to benefit students.

The trauma-informed approach was embedded to the regular school day instruction. Best practices, procedures, and routines were refined for implementation. At the beginning of the school year, I conducted classroom walkthroughs and provided feedback to teachers about their safe zones for students and the self-regulation posters and areas provided in each classroom for students. During the school year, I encouraged teachers to teach students how to use self-regulation strategies and classroom areas to approach behaviors in a more proactive way. I conducted walkthroughs and provided feedback about room layouts, best practices, and trauma-informed usage during instructional time. Teachers did not have to plan for any of these strategies, as they were culturally embedded to the school's policies, expectations, and daily routines.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Results

#### Findings

The research tools I used to evaluate the Trauma-Informed Approach implementation included interviews (Appendix A), surveys (Appendix B), and observations (Appendix C) data conducted with teachers, administrators, and school counselors. I conducted a paper-pencil survey with teachers, administrators, and school counselors; interviews were conducted with teachers and school counselors; a group of teachers also participated in observations. The findings from my program evaluation provided answers to my research questions about the trauma-informed approach in one elementary Title I school and the impact on student academic achievement, students' behaviors, and school culture. I analyzed the implementation practices of the trauma-informed approach at one elementary Title I school and the influence it had on the school.

#### Survey Questions

To maintain a sequential and logical progression for this survey, questions were presented numerically. Nine of the survey questions were formulated as open-ended questions to capture responses; these questions are 18, 19, 20, 21, 23, 24, 25, and 26. The upcoming sub-headings indicate the survey questions and the type of data discussed; qualitative or quantitative.

**Teacher Survey Questions 1-17: Quantitative Data.** I used teacher and staff mailboxes to distribute voluntary surveys (Appendix B) to instructional personnel, counselors, and administrators, with a total of 62 participants as a goal. The envelope placed in mailboxes also included the consent form for participation in the survey. I



obtained in return 22 responses out of 61, making this a 36% response rate.

The first two questions are demographical; they reflect the experience level of instructional staff members based on teaching as well as experience with using the trauma-informed approach. For these survey questions, 22 out of 61 staff members voluntarily participated by providing their responses to the first survey question, which asked them about the number of years of experience they have as classroom teachers. The response rate for the years of experience included a consistent number of 5 teachers (23%) each for the four experience categories of 0-5 years, 8-10 years, 15-20 years, and more than 20 years. The lowest representation was in the 10-15 years category with 2 teachers (10%).

Table 1.

*Survey Question 1: Participant Experience Levels*

Participant Information	0-5 Years	8-10 Years	10-15 Years	15-20 Years	More than 20 Years
Survey Question 1. How long have you been teaching?	23% (5)	23% (5)	10% (2)	23% (5)	23% (5)
n=22					

The second survey question asked how many years they had experience using the trauma-informed approach with the option of 0-5 years and 6-10 years. The expected response rate was 22 (100%) of the teachers indicated the 0-5-year range, as the TS School began implementing this approach in 2018.

Survey question 3 asked participants if they have attended training on the trauma-informed approach. Again, 22 instructional personnel out of 61 answered the question. Of the 21 teachers, 22 (95%) of them indicated that they had attended trauma-informed

approach training. Only 1 teacher (5%) did not attend training because she began working at TS School after the implementation training was provided.

The next portion of my quantitative data analysis survey focused on participants' perceptions of the implementation of the trauma-informed approach at TS school. Table 2 presents the teachers' responses to perception statements. They were asked to rate their perceptions by indicating one of the four responses: strongly agreed, agreed, disagreed, or strongly disagreed.

In response to question # 1 of the study about how the trauma-informed approach positively influenced students' academic achievement, 10 (45%) of participants strongly agreed, 11 (50%) agreed, and only 1 (5%) disagreed. There were 0 (0%) responses strongly disagreed. In answer to question # 2 of the survey about how the trauma-informed approach positively influenced students' behaviors, 14 (64%) of participants strongly agreed, and 8 (36%) agreed. There were 0 (0%) responses to disagree and strongly disagreed. Question # 3 of the survey about how the trauma-informed approach positively influenced the school's culture, 15 (68%) of teachers strongly agreed, and 7 (32%) agreed. There were 0 (0%) responses to disagree and strongly disagreed.

In analyzing data, I was very impressed and excited to observe that 21 (95%) of participants somehow agree that the trauma-informed approach is having a positive influence in students' academic achievement and 22 participants (100%) somehow agree that the trauma-informed approach has had a positive influence in students' behaviors and school culture. These three questions answer one of my primary research questions: What do participants at TS school perceive was working well with the trauma-informed approach? Participants are experiencing a change in student academic

achievement, student behaviors, and school culture in TS School. As a school administrator, all these three areas are critical factors in obtaining school improvement and overall achievement.

Questions 4, 5, and 6 were designed to answer one of the essential questions: What do participants at TS School perceive as the most significant challenge in implementing the trauma-informed approach? In response to question # 4 of the survey, if the trauma-informed approach implementation has been a challenging process if any, 1 (5%) of participants strongly agreed, 4 (18%) agreed, 13 (59%) disagreed, and 4 (18%) strongly disagree. The representation that I see for this question is that 77% (17) participants did not experience challenges, and 23% (5) of participants experienced some challenges during the implementation process.

For question # 5 of the survey, participants were asked if attending professional development for the trauma-informed approach implementation has been a challenging process, 1 (5%) of participants strongly agreed, 3 (14%) agreed, 14 (67%) disagreed, and 3 (14%) strongly disagree. The representation that I see for this question is that 77% (17) participants did not experience challenges attending professional development, and 18% (4) of participants experienced some challenges attending professional development. One participant did not participate in this question.

In response to question # 6 of the survey participants, if they experienced challenges understanding the trauma-informed approach, 1 (5%) of participants strongly agreed, 3 (14%) agreed, 13 (59%) disagreed, and 5 (23%) strongly disagree. The representation that I see for this question is that 82% (18) of the participants did not experience challenges understanding the trauma-informed approach, and 18% (4) of

participants experienced some challenge understanding the approach during the implementation process.

Questions 7 and 8 were designed to answer the following essential question: What do participants at TS School perceive as not working well with the trauma-informed school? In response to question # 7 of the survey, it asked participants if they needed additional professional development for trauma-informed approach, 4 (18%) of participants strongly agreed, 14 (64%) agreed, 4 (18%) disagreed, and 0 (0%) strongly disagree. The representation that I see for this question is that 82% (18) of the participants expressed the need for additional professional development and training, and 18% (4) of the participants do not feel the need for additional professional development opportunities for a trauma-informed approach. In a review of the data, I concluded that there is a need for professional development. This could be a factor that is not working well at TS School. They may need to refine the professional development plan to be more strategic and purposeful with what is provided to teachers, administrators, and school counselors.

For question # 8 of the survey, participants were asked if they needed additional support from school counselors and administrators for the implementation of the trauma-informed approach, 4 (18%) of participants strongly agreed, 10 (45%) agreed, 6 (27%) disagreed, 1 (5%) strongly disagree and one participant did not participate of this question. The representation that I see for this question is that 64% (14) of the participants expressed the need for additional support from administrators and school counselors, and 32% (7) of the participants do not feel the need for additional support for trauma-informed approach implementation. TS School counselor and administrators may

need to differentiate the support provided to teachers, based on my reported data.

Questions 9 and 10 were designed to evaluate the role and participation of the school administrators during the implementation process. In response to question # 9 of the survey, it asked participants if their administrators had played an active role in the implementation process, 17 (85%) of participants strongly agreed, 2 (10%) agreed, and 1 (5%) strongly disagree. The representation that I see for this question is that 95% (19) of the participants expressed that their administrators actively participated in the implementation process, and 5% (1) of them felt that their administrators were not active. Through the data, I concluded that the administrators at TS School were active participants in the trauma-informed implementation process and felt their support. For question # 10 of the survey, participants were asked if they understood the role of their administrators in the implementation of the trauma-informed approach, 14 (70%) of participants strongly agreed, 4 (20%) agreed, and 1 (5%) strongly disagreed. The representation that I see for this question is that 90% (14) of the participants expressed an understanding of their administrators' role in the implementation process, and 10% (2) of the participants did not understand their role.

Table 2.

Survey Questions 1-10: Participant Perceptions of Trauma-Informed

<b>Participant Perception</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
1.) The trauma-informed program has positively influenced students' academic achievement.	45% (10)	50% (11)	5% (1)	0% (0)
2.) The trauma-informed program has positively influenced students' behaviors.	64% (14)	36% (8)	0% (0)	0% (0)

3.) The trauma-informed program has positively influenced our schools' culture.	68% (15)	32% (7)	0% (0)	0% (0)
4.) Implementing the trauma-informed approach in my classroom has been a challenge.	5% (1)	18% (4)	59% (13)	18% (4)
5.) Attending trauma-informed professional developments has been a challenge.	5% (1)	14% (3)	67% (14)	14% (3)
6.) Understanding how the trauma informed approach works has been a challenge	5% (1)	14% (3)	59% (13)	23% (5)
7.) Additional professional development opportunities for trauma-informed approach is needed.	18% (4)	64% (14)	18% (4)	0% (0)
8.) Additional support from counselors and administrators is needed.	18% (4)	45% (10)	27% (6)	5% (1)
9.) My administrators have played an active role in the implementation of the trauma-informed approach.	85% (17)	10% (2)	0% (0)	5% (1)
10.) I understand the role of my administrators in the implementation of the trauma-informed approach.	70% (14)	20% (4)	5% (1)	5% (1)

### **Teacher Open-Ended Survey Questions 18-26 and Interviews: Qualitative Data.**

Data has been a powerful tool in my decision-making process as TS School has implemented the trauma-informed approach. I have found that while the instructional personnel feel supported by the administration and the school counselor, additional support is needed to implement this program with fidelity fully. Participants at TS School feel that the implementation of the trauma-informed approach works and is shifting and improving students' academics and behaviors and school culture.

As part of my data collection, I scheduled interviews with TS School staff members. I interviewed classroom teachers and resource teachers. The goal was to obtain up to 10 interviews from staff members. I was able to obtain 11 interviews in total. To categorize responses for data, I decided to use the coding table.

Coding was helpful in the aspect that it helped me to categorize and organize thoughts given by many participants. I noticed a recurrence of many words, phrases, and statements as I created Table 3. Most of the statements I provided through my coding was known as in vivo coding. "In vivo coding is a form of qualitative data analysis that places emphasis on the actual spoken words of participants" (Manning, 2017). This method of coding takes the survey takers' words into account verbatim.

In response to positive attributes (Table 3), participants expressed how the trauma-informed approach is improving TS School. The participants focused more on students' outcomes and shared how this approach has increased the relationships between teachers and students, how students are now coping with their emotions and self-regulating, and how students are now feeling accountable for their learning and behaviors. As a school administrator, this is an outcome that I would want for every school in the nation. Through this feedback, I can observe that students' basic needs are being met while receiving a whole-child education.

A trend in concerns (Table 3) expressed by the participants in TS School is that additional professional development and training on trauma-informed is needed and also time to continue practicing and implementing this approach. A trend that surprised me was that participants felt that resistance from students and staff was a challenge and concern. The reason why this trend surprised me is that TS School's data is not showing these results. This is a potential topic to continue researching.

Some of the trends for challenges (Table 3) were getting parents on board, implementation with fidelity, lack of understanding for this approach, and number of kids with trauma. Again, we see that participants are expressing the need to learn about the

topic to improve their practices. They also suggested that the district and administration provide more learning opportunities and time to connect and build relationships with their students. Participant's responses also show that they want to connect with students' families and make them aware of this approach.

The trends for the roles of the administrators, instructional, and school counselors are very similar. Once again, the participants of TS School are expressing their need for more professional development and time to collaborate. They also highlighted the need of additional support from administrators and school counselors. Participants are wanting to implement this trauma-informed approach with fidelity and through collaborative ways.

The next category in my coding table (Table 3) is culture. "Many schools today have a can't culture. If adults buy into the mindset that kids cannot, then how can we complain when kids won't?" (Casas, 2017, p. 48). As a school administrator, I have seen many times, students in classrooms with a checked-out attitude "The difficulty many students experience in school began as early as elementary school" (Casas, 2017, p.48). TS School participants' responses show that a school that uses a trauma-informed approach has a high potential of overcoming these issues. The response trend for this category shares that participants have a better understanding of kids, that the school culture is happy and healthy, and that students feel more welcomed and happier when in school. Like Rita Pierson stated in her TED Talk in 2013, "every child needs a champion." Behind the success of students, there is a loving and caring adult involved.

The next category is academics. This is probably the category that is of more interest to state departments of education and district leaders. Sporleder & Forbes (2016), state in their book *The Trauma-Informed School* that a child experiencing trauma has



difficulties learning. A child's brain with adverse childhood trauma is underdeveloped and can experience various disabilities such as fine-gross motor skills struggles, learning disabilities, and speech/language impediments. They also struggle with focus and engagement in the classroom setting. They can struggle with attention deficit and get easily frustrated. All these struggles to be a possibility in a child with trauma are because their "brain is wired rigidly and concretely, which makes it difficult to understand multiple perspectives and multiple outcomes" (Sporleder & Forbes, 2016, p. 26).

The participants in the TS School expressed that implementing the trauma-formed approach has improved the overall students' academic performance. Participants expressed that students' concentration on academics instead of trauma improved, that students feel safe, more comfortable, and confident, and that this approach has given them a chance to refocus on academics. These responses are also supported by standardized state data (Table 7 & 8), where an increase in academics was obtained for students in grades third, fourth, and fifth in learning gains and proficiency.

The final coded trend is behaviors (Table 3). Students with trauma can "...lack the ability to connect socially outside of a structured academic environment and typically demonstrate high anxiety, insecurity, and operates from fear-based platform" (Sporleder & Forbes, 2016, p. 26). Students with trauma show a strong need for connections and relationships with adults that they can trust. TS School participants' responses show that the implementation of the trauma-informed approach has effectively improved students' overall behaviors. They expressed that this approach has improved the communication between students and teachers, they are now taking a more proactive approach to help students, and students are taking ownership of their behaviors. These trends are also

backed up by quantitative data.

Table 3.

*Coding of Trauma-Informed Perceptions from Interviews and Survey Open-Ended*

*Questions*

Code	Description	Examples
Positive Attributes	What is working well with the trauma-informed approach?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Ownership with students"</li> <li>• "Proactive Approach"</li> <li>• "Relationship Building"</li> <li>• "Expressing emotions in an appropriate way"</li> </ul>
Concerns	What is not working well with the trauma-informed approach?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Resistance from students and staff"</li> <li>• "More practice needed"</li> <li>• "Need more training"</li> </ul>
Challenges	What are the greatest challenges to the trauma-informed approach at your school?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Lack of understanding for this approach"</li> <li>• "Getting parents onboard"</li> <li>• "Implementation with fidelity"</li> <li>• "Number of kids with trauma"</li> </ul>
Suggestions	What would you suggest as an improvement to the trauma-informed approach at your school?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Making a community connection"</li> <li>• "Time to train"</li> <li>• "Time to build relationships"</li> </ul>
Administrative Role	What role can the administration play in the improvement of the trauma-informed approach implementation process?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Continue to be supportive"</li> <li>• "Set an example"</li> <li>• "More professional development"</li> <li>• "Time to share and collaborate"</li> </ul>
Instructional Role	What role can teachers play in the improvement of the trauma-informed approach implementation process?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Implementation with fidelity"</li> <li>• "Better understanding of different traumas"</li> <li>• "Collaborate with one another"</li> <li>• "Move away from older habits"</li> </ul>
Counselor Role	How can counselors support in the implementation and improvement process?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Be more available"</li> <li>• "Push in to help implement in the classroom"</li> <li>• "Provide staff development on this approach"</li> </ul>
Culture	Do you think that proper implementation will improve the school culture? Why or why not?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Yes, better understanding of kids"</li> <li>• "Yes, because the culture is happy and healthy"</li> <li>• "Students feel more welcomed and are happier"</li> </ul>
Academic	Do you think that proper implementation will improve the students' academic performance? Why or why not?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Yes, improved concentration on academics instead of trauma"</li> <li>• "Yes, students feel safer, more comfortable, and less insecure"</li> <li>• "Program offers a chance for students to refocus"</li> </ul>

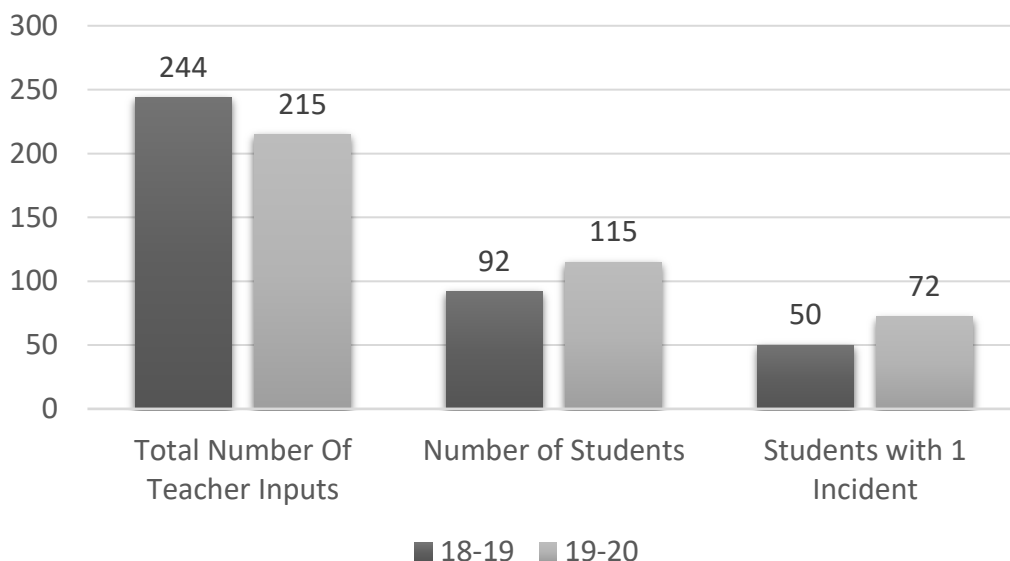
Behavior	Do you think that proper implementation will improve the students' behavior? Why or why not?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Better communication for students and staff members"</li> <li>• "We are taking a proactive approach"</li> <li>• "Students taking more ownership of their behavior"</li> </ul>
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TS School uses a *Student of Concern* (SOC) form to track student's behaviors in different categories: emotional, physical, and social. The emotional category includes: yelling, cussing, teacher disrespect, refusal, left the area, crying, sadness, silence, aggravation, isolation from peers, lack of participation, and anxious. The physical category includes physical aggression toward peer and physical aggression toward object. The social category includes peer disrespect, excessive absence, poor hygiene, excessive tardiness, uniform/clothing need, and hunger. This form was adapted to meet the needs of the school under study from Sporleder and Forbes (2016) student of concern form (p. 219). The SOC Form is an ongoing document that any staff member uses throughout the school year to document and communicate any type of concern that they can experience with a student. The form also includes name of the student, grade level, staff member reporting the concern, issue of concern, level of urgency, recommended consequence, parent/guardian contact, interventions, action plan, person assigned to implement, outcome, and date completed. This information helps the school identify trends in different areas.

TS School staff members SOC Form Inputs (Figure 1) shows that in the year 2018-2019, there was a total of 244 teacher inputs and 215 inputs in the year 2019-2020. This is a 29 (12%) input drop in one year. The number of students reported as a concern in the 2018-2019 school was 92 (11%), and in the year 2019-2020, it went up to 115 (14%). The number of students with one incident in 2018-2019 was 50 (.06%), and in the

year 2019-2020 went up to 72 (.08%).

When comparing the number of students with the one incident students in the year 2018-2019, 46% of students were repeated concerns, and in the year 2019-2020, it dropped to 28%. That is an 18% decrease. This is an indicator that interventions and behavior plans proactively put in place to avoid repeated infractions had positive results.

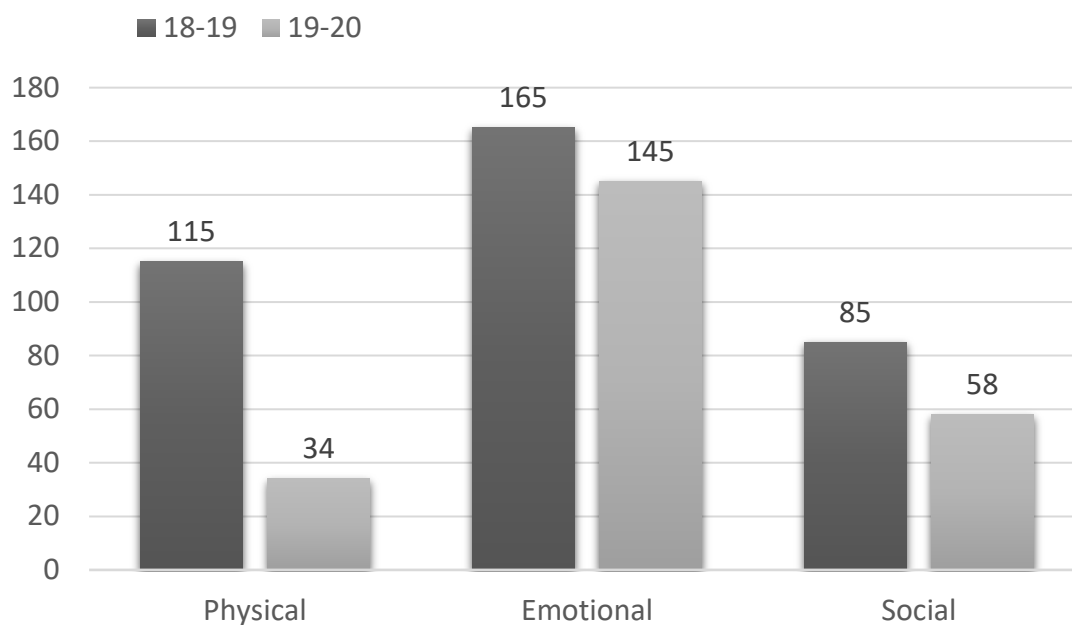


*Figure 1.* Student of concern (SOC) form inputs

The types of behavior reported (Figure 2) by participants at TS School show decreased reported repeated behaviors. In the school year 2018-2019, staff members reported 165 cases under the emotional category, and in the year 2019-2020, they reported 145 emotional concerns. That is a decrease of 20 emotional cases. For the social category, 85 concerns were reported in the 2018-2019 school year, and in the year 2019-2020, 58 concerns were reported. This reflects a decrease of 27 concerns.

The most significant results are observed under the physical category. In the year 2018-2019, staff members reported 115 concerns, and in the year 2019-2020, they reported 34 concerns. That is a total of 81 decreased cases. These results support teaching

students how to self-regulate, practice mindfulness, and learn how to problem-solve. These were the interventions that TS School staff used as part of their implementation plan. TS School staff members also had a strong focus on building relationships with students. “The reality is that the more a child has a relationship with at least one trusting adult, the less acting out this student will have in the classroom” (Sporleder & Forbes, 2016, p. 34). Many times, when students experience trauma, they have a hard time self-regulating and can get quickly escalated. The reason this happens is because of fear of failure or because they feel disconnected and unsafe. The interventions used at TS School helped students feel safe and regulated. “Trauma-informed discipline focuses on helping students develop their own internal sets of controls, mainly how to self-regulate and deal with stress and anxiety” (Forbes, 2016, p. 206). The more these interventions are practiced with fidelity, the longer these students can regulate through school hours. TS School staff is beginning to obtain these results based on their SOC data.



*Figure 2. Types of behavior reported*

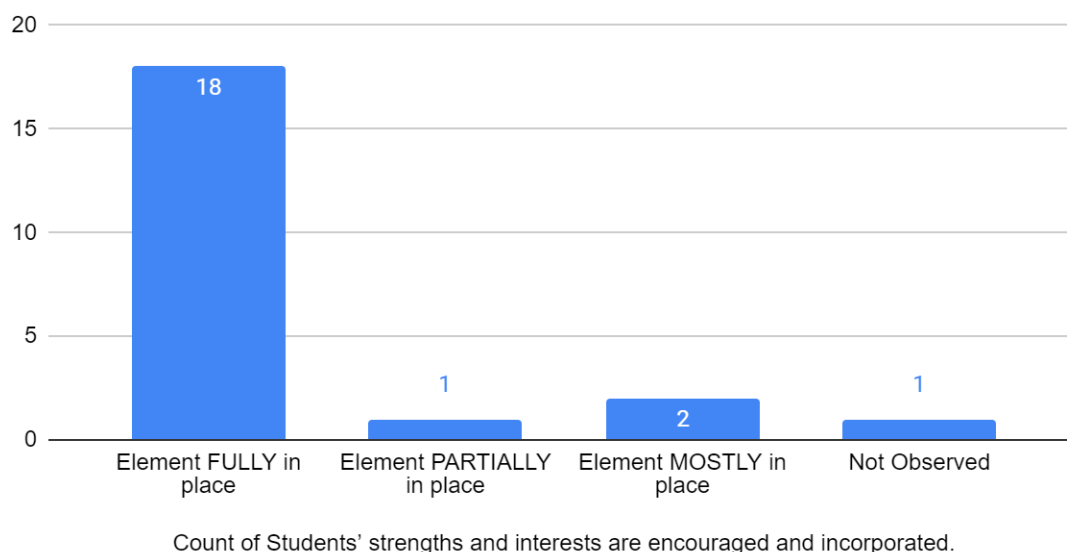
### **Trauma-Informed Observations: Quantitative Data**

The final portion of my data analysis came in the form of classroom walkthroughs. The data was collected by me over the course of nine weeks. A total of 23 walkthroughs were conducted. The observer focused on language, room layout, learning, and trauma-informed structures in place across all grade levels (K-5). The graphs below (Table 5), graphs each question and the results for whether each element was not observed, not in place, partially in place, mostly in place, or entirely in place.

Data provided through these walkthroughs showed that TS School has done well and implemented most elements of the trauma-informed approach in classrooms. The areas that show strength are through support and regulation of behavior. The teachers reported the need of more training to continue accelerating the momentum. TS School staff are seeing improvement in academics, behaviors, and culture and it is in their best interest to continue utilizing this approach. This ties back to the training the school personnel have already received. Much of this training encompassed how they help students cope and regulate their behavior, and this has reflected by transference into their classrooms. Conversely, the way teachers craft their activities could show improvement because they may not always be done so in an emotionally safe way. The observation data that I collected and analyzed, shows me that an area that TS School should improve is providing more opportunities for learning how to plan and follow through on assignments (Figure 10. Classroom Walkthrough Results, p. 58). Deconstructing assignments and identifying areas of needs improvement can help target the students' needs by providing interventions and building student confidence and growth mindset.

The trauma-informed observation rubric (Appendix C) was not something that was as intensely focused on in the trainings that took place over the summer before the school year started. Walkthroughs also showed an improvement in implementation as they approached the latter weeks of the study (Figures 3-10). That data shows that frequent walkthroughs with focused feedback help instructional personnel to implement the program better because staff members know the administration and school counselor are monitoring for implementation and providing actionable feedback to the instructional staff of what can be improved.

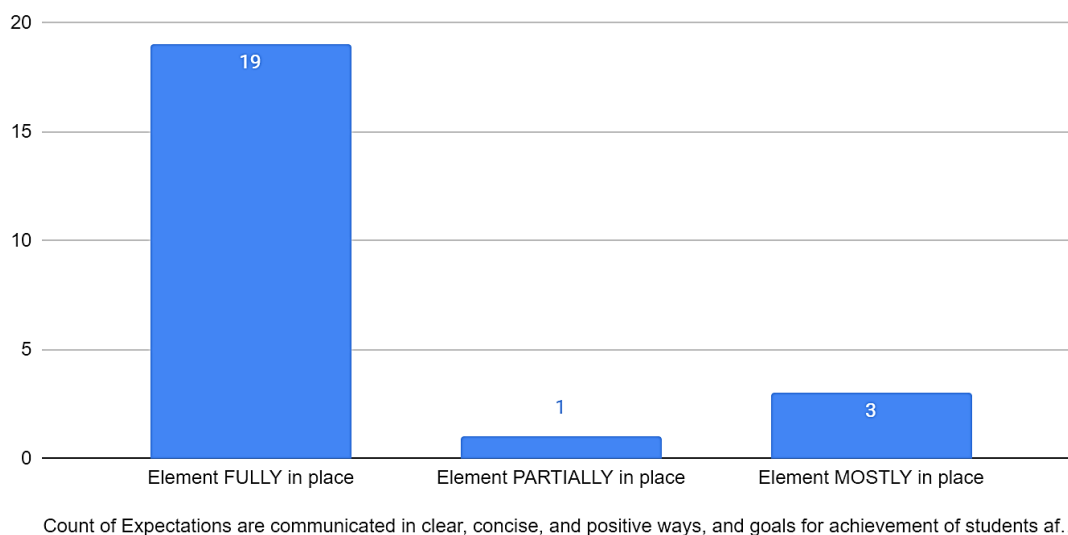
An observation rubric, “Classroom Strategies and Techniques,” part of the Trauma-Sensitive School Checklist from Lesly University and Trauma Learning Policy Initiative from Harvard Law School and Massachusetts Advocates for Children, was used to collect the data necessary to evaluate the program. The first item assessed during classroom walkthroughs using the trauma-informed rubric (Appendix C) is the student’s strengths, and interests are encouraged and incorporated (Figure 3). A total of 23 teachers were observed during regular instructional time. During this time, 18 (78%) teachers were observed fully implementing this item. One teacher (.04%) was partially using this item. Two teachers (.08%) were mostly using this strategy. Overall, the teachers at TS School are using students’ strengths and interests to encourage and incorporate learning. This part of connecting with students and building relationships. “Conversations offer student respect, an attribute we ask them to give us, and offer support rather than pure control” (Forbes, 2019, p. 222). By allowing students to have a voice and giving those choices and initiatives when it comes to their learning, teachers can use their strengths and interests to increase their engagement and focus.



*Figure 3.* Classroom walkthrough results: students' strengths and interests are encouraged and incorporated, n=23 teachers observed

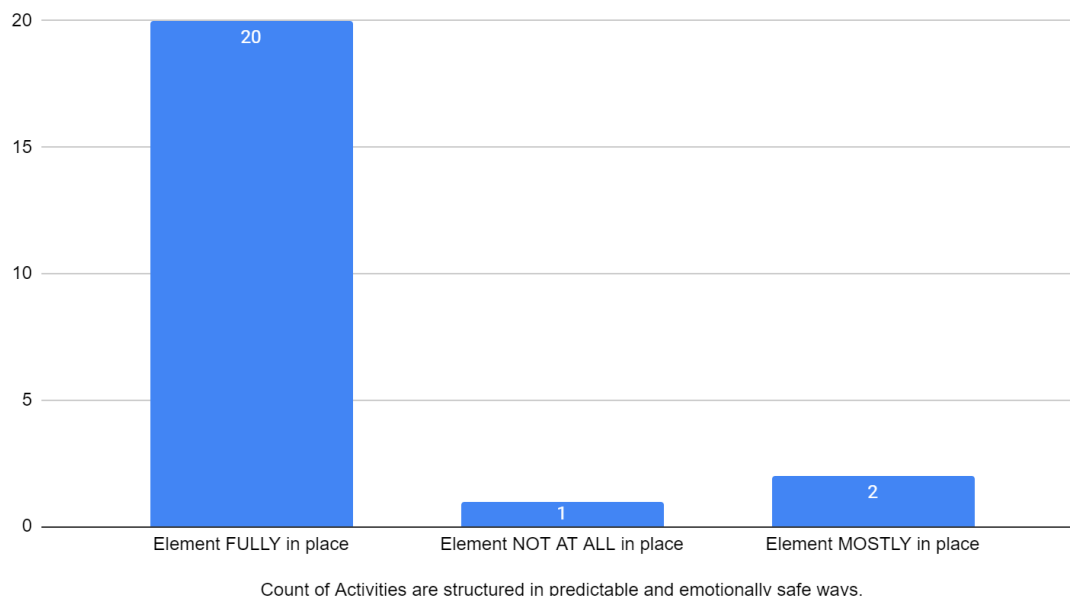
The second item assessed during classroom walkthroughs using the trauma-informed rubric (Appendix C) is expectations are communicated in clear, concise, and positive ways, and goals for the achievement of students affected by traumatic experiences are consistent with the rest of the class (Figure 4). A total of 23 teachers were observed during regular instructional time. During this time, 19 (83%) teachers were observed fully implementing this item. One teacher (.04%) was partially using this item, and 3 (13%) teachers were mostly using this strategy. Overall, the teachers at TS School are communicating goals clearly and positively to students with trauma and are consistent with the rest of the class. "To help students improve their grades, the focus should be on short-term task-oriented goals, chunking them down into attainable steps, one by one rather than setting an abstract and nebulous long-term goal of making a better grade" (Forbes, 2019, p. 239). When students understand and know their goal, it reduces their stress level and helps them have a better focus on their learning.





*Figure 4.* Classroom walkthrough results: expectations are communicated in clear, concise, and positive ways, and goals for achievement of students affected by traumatic experiences are consistent with the rest of the class, n=23 teachers observed

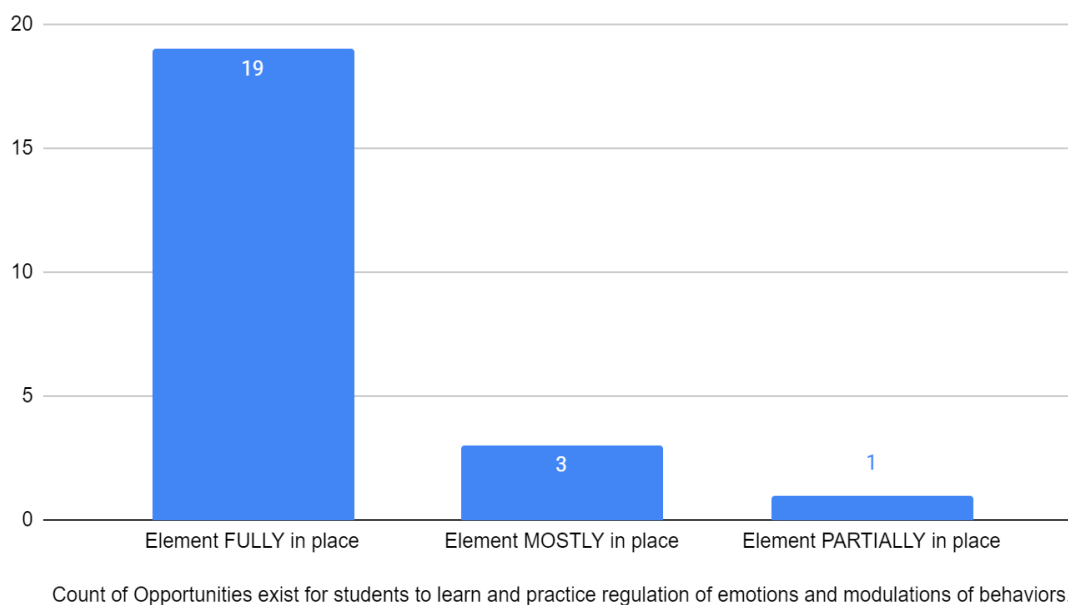
Another item assessed during classroom walkthroughs using the trauma-informed rubric (Appendix C) is that *activities are structured in predictable and emotionally safe ways* (Figure 5). A total of 23 teachers were observed during regular instructional time. During this time, 20 (87%) teachers were observed fully implementing this item. Two (.08%) teachers were mostly using this item, and 1 (.04%) teachers were not using this strategy. “Trauma typically happens by surprise, so students impacted by trauma tend to be less flexible to change” (Forbes, 2019, p. 73). When teachers provide a structured and predictable learning environment to students with trauma, students tend to feel safe, less stressed, and comfortable. When a student feels this way, it increases their cognitive engagement.



*Figure 5.* Classroom walkthrough results: activities are structured in predictable and emotionally safe ways, n=23 teachers observed

The fourth item assessed during classroom walkthroughs using the trauma-informed rubric (Appendix C) is *opportunities exist for students to learn and practice regulation of emotion and modulation of behavior* (Figure 6). “When adults are unable to meet the relationships and regulatory needs of young children and when life events for these children become overwhelming and scary, they enter school with compromised regulatory systems and view life from a lens of fear” (Forbes, 2019, p. 64). A total of 23 teachers were observed during regular instructional time. During this time, 19 (83%) teachers were observed fully implementing this item. Three (13%) teachers were mostly using this item, and 1 (.04%) teacher was partially using it. Overall, the teachers at TS School are allowing students to practice self-regulation, mindfulness, use the corner. A calm corner is an area in the classroom where students can take a break to de-escalate in a private setting. They are also teaching the students how to use these strategies adequately. When teachers provide opportunities for self-regulation to students with trauma, students

can manage stress and fear better. The components that Forbes (2019) mentions in her book for effective use of the strategy of regulation to focus on the mind are mindful moments, set intentions, meditation, and manage sensory surprises (p. 82-83). All these components were observed in classrooms a TS School. Students and teachers knew how to use them effectively and incorporate them during instructional time.

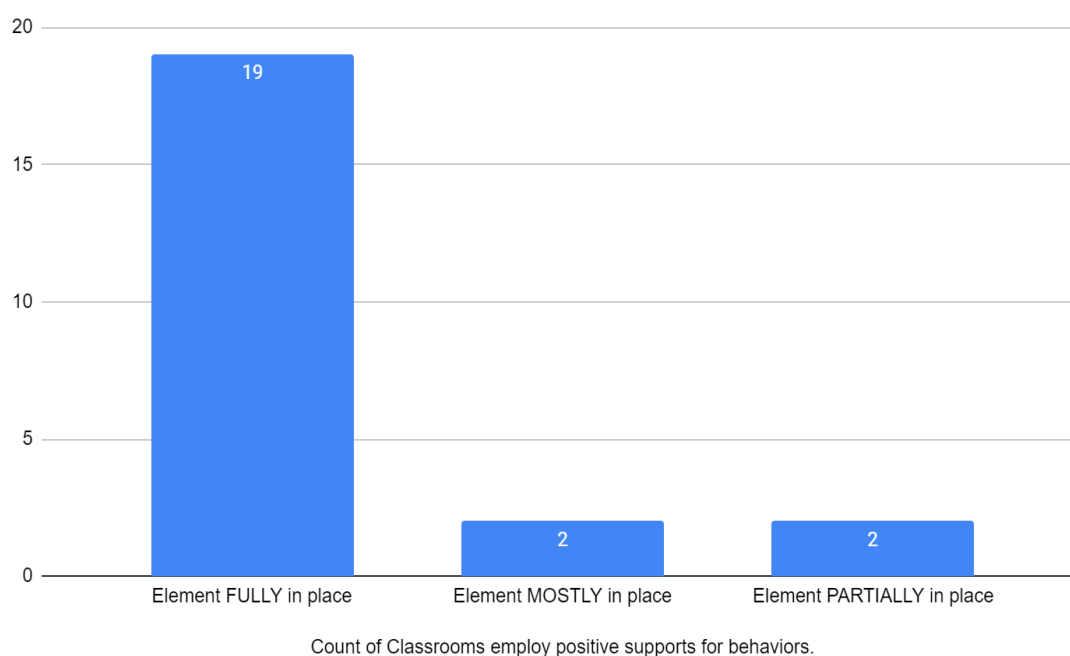


*Figure 6.* Classroom walkthrough results: opportunities exist for students to learn and practice regulation of emotions and modulations of behaviors, n=23 teachers observed

The next item assessed during classroom walkthroughs using the trauma-informed rubric (Appendix C) is *classrooms employ positive supports for behaviors* (Figure 7).

"When students engage in unhelpful behaviors, trauma-sensitive consequences can help students remember the importance of working on new skills, including building in time for instruction as well as practice for those very skills, and improve students' understanding of cause-and-effect relationships" (Alexander, p. 205). A total of 23 teachers were observed during regular instructional time. During this time, 19 (83%) teachers were observed fully implementing this item. Two (.08%) teachers were mostly

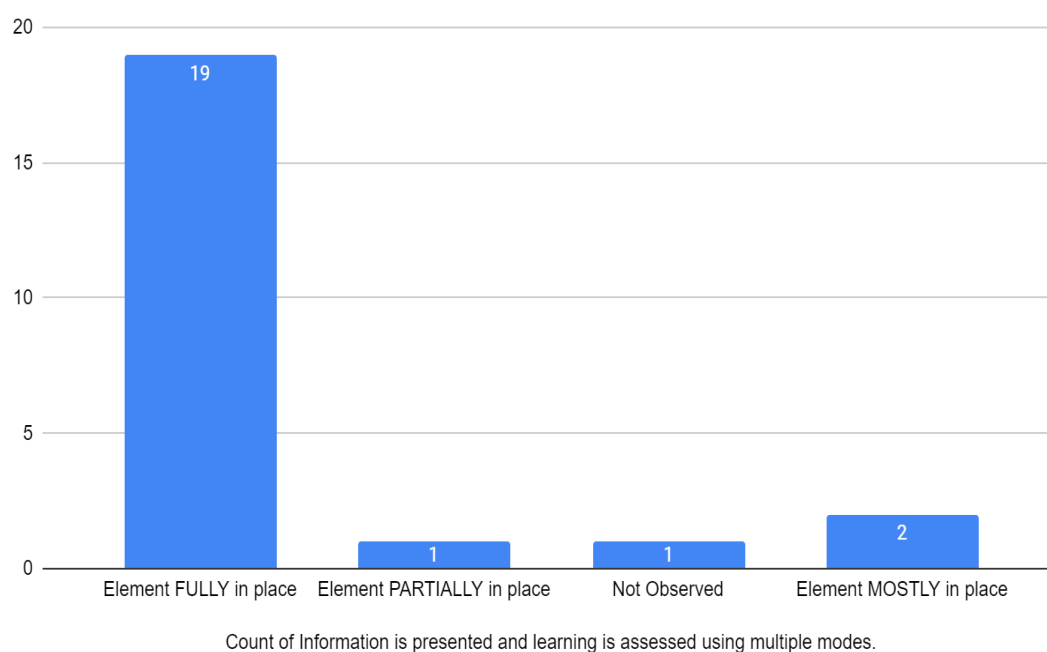
using this item, and 2 (.08%) teachers were partially using it. Overall, the teachers at TS School are using positive support systems and trauma-informed consequences to address students' behaviors. They are also individualizing these consequences and support by using age-appropriate strategies and meeting each student's individual needs. While doing this, they also take the time to build relationships with students and teach them the expected behavior.



*Figure 7. Classroom walkthrough results: classrooms employ positive supports for behaviors, n=23 teachers observed*

The sixth item assessed during classroom walkthroughs using the trauma-informed rubric (Appendix C) is *information is presented, and learning is assessed using multiple modes* (Figure 8). A total of 23 teachers were observed during regular instructional time. During this time, 19 (83%) teachers were observed fully implementing this item. 2 (.08%) teachers were mostly using this item, and 1 (.04%) teacher was

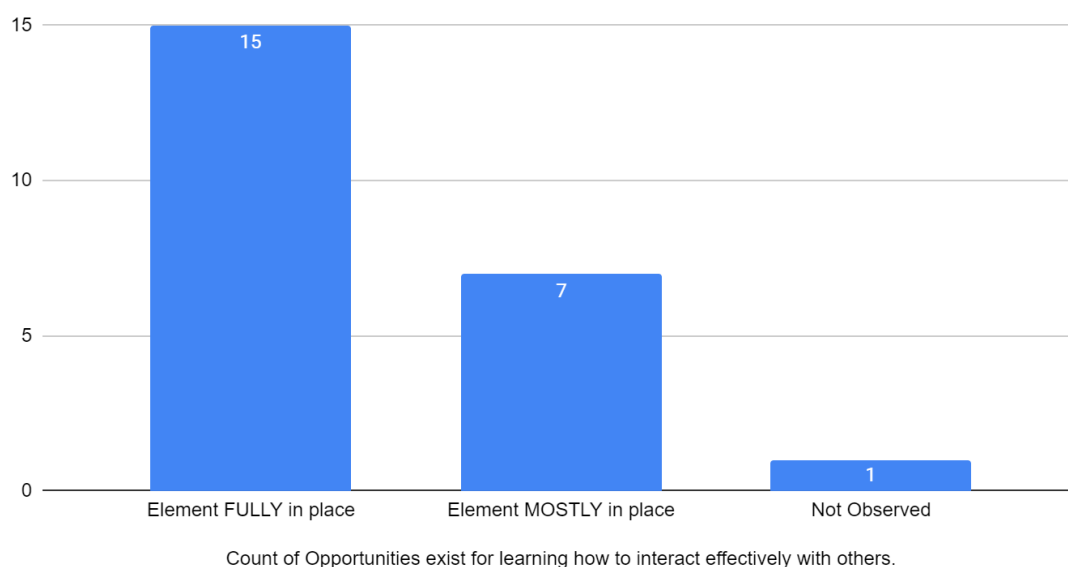
partially using it. One teacher was not using the strategy at all. Overall, the teachers at TS School were presenting and assessing students using various modalities. They are also individualizing these lessons and individualizing levels of support by differentiating skills and concepts during interventions. Forbes (2019) mentions that students with trauma need to be asked what their goals for the lesson (p. 265) are. Not only does the student feel like he or she has a voice but also helps them focus on small attainable targets.



*Figure 8: Classroom walkthrough results: information is presented, and learning is assessed using multiple modes, n=23 teachers observed*

The next item assessed during classroom walkthroughs using the trauma-informed rubric (Appendix C) is *opportunities exist for learning how to interact effectively with others* (Figure 9). A total of 23 teachers were observed during regular instructional time. During this time, 15 (65%) teachers were observed fully implementing this item. 7 (30%) teachers were mostly using this item. One teacher was not using the strategy at all. Overall, the teachers at TS School are providing students the opportunity to collaborate

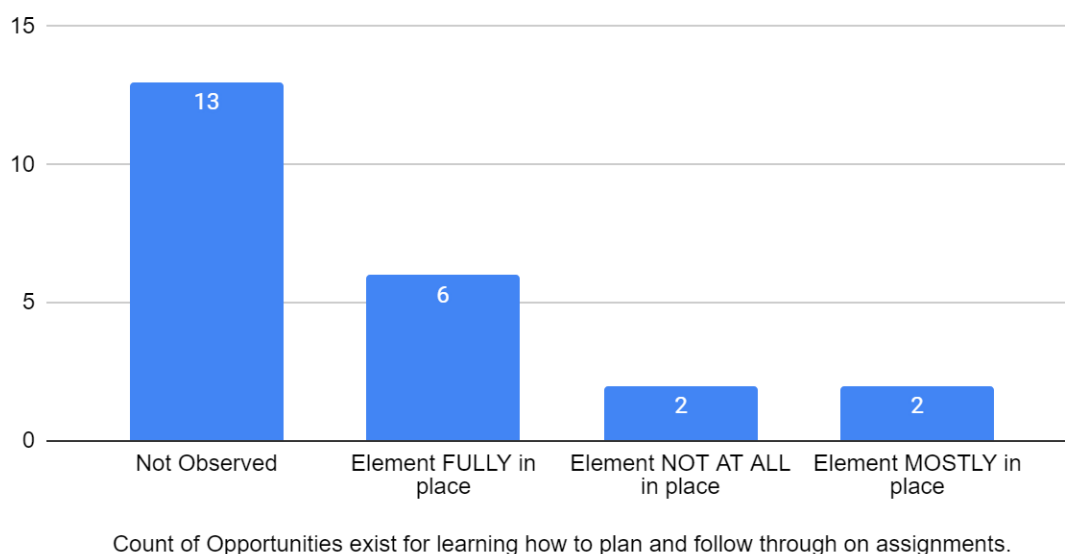
and interact with peers. “When students are taught the skills on how to interact and develop meaningful friendships, along with the words to express themselves, they no longer feel isolated, and their communication through negative acting-out behaviors decreases” (Forbes, 2019, p. 240). Teachers at TS School allow students to build trusting relationships with their peers and teach them how to be socially engaged. This strategy produces a collaborative and safe learning environment for students at TS School.



*Figure 9. Classroom walkthrough results: opportunities exist for learning how to interact effectively with others*

The eight and last item assessed during classroom walkthroughs using the trauma-informed rubric (Appendix C) is *opportunities exist for learning how to plan and follow through on assignments* (Figure 10). A total of 23 teachers were observed during regular instructional time. During this time, 6 (26%) teachers were observed fully implementing this item. Two (.08%) teachers were mostly using this item. Two (.08%) teachers were not using the strategy at all. And 13 (56%) classrooms were the strategy was not observed. This strategy was not used in every classroom at the time that the teachers at

TS School were observed. Only 8 (35%) of the teachers used this strategy, which tells me that this is an area of needs improvement. “Research is showing that when teachers focus less on grades and more on the tasks required to earn the grades, students excel more” (Forbes, 2019, p. 239). Teachers at TS School could benefit of a training on how to help students set attainable goals to focus on their assignments.



*Figure 10.* Classroom walkthrough results: opportunities exist for learning how to plan and follow through on assignments

The existing problem upon which this program evaluation is stated is the fact that early childhood trauma does have an impact on students’ academics and behaviors. The educational system’s mission of developing the whole child needs to include the need to implement professional development, trainings, and programs that incorporate the trauma-informed approach in schools.

### **As Is: Four Change Agent Components**

The 4 C’s, contexts, culture, conditions, and competencies are a systematic

approach to thinking about the challenges and goals of a school district (Wagner & Kegan, 2006). I created and used an AS-IS diagnostic analysis of the evaluation of the trauma-informed approach and the impact in one title I school. I used the AS-IS diagnostic chart to describe the existing challenges for my evaluation in terms of the 4 C's (for AS-IS diagnostic chart see Appendix D).

**Context.** Context refers to the demands and expectations within a large organizational system (Wagner & Kegan, 2006). When determining possible reasons for contexts, I look for what is deeply impacting the work of the organization of the research, what areas are out of our control, and what political and educational factors are provided by the district and the state. The context of my evaluation stems in student early childhood trauma and the impact that trauma-informed approach in schools can have on them. My survey questions, *The trauma-informed program has positively influenced students' academic achievement* and *The trauma-informed program has positively influenced students' behaviors*, are directed at the context of the state's and district's problem of addressing early childhood trauma in schools. I wanted to research if the implementation of the trauma-informed approach would impact student academics, behaviors, and the school's culture.

TS School had one of the highest numbers of threat assessments in WXYZ district during the 2018-2019 school year. Once the teachers and staff became more aware of the signs of trauma and began implementing the trauma-informed approach, they began to identify students that needed additional support with their social emotional learning. Having the highest threat assessments is nothing to be content about it, but this could mean that teachers knew how to identify childhood trauma signs and reported them to the



school counselor for immediate response to meet their emotional needs. By the end of the school year, the number of threat assessments had decreased to only three, compared to 12 at the beginning of the school year, and 23 in the beginning of the second semester.

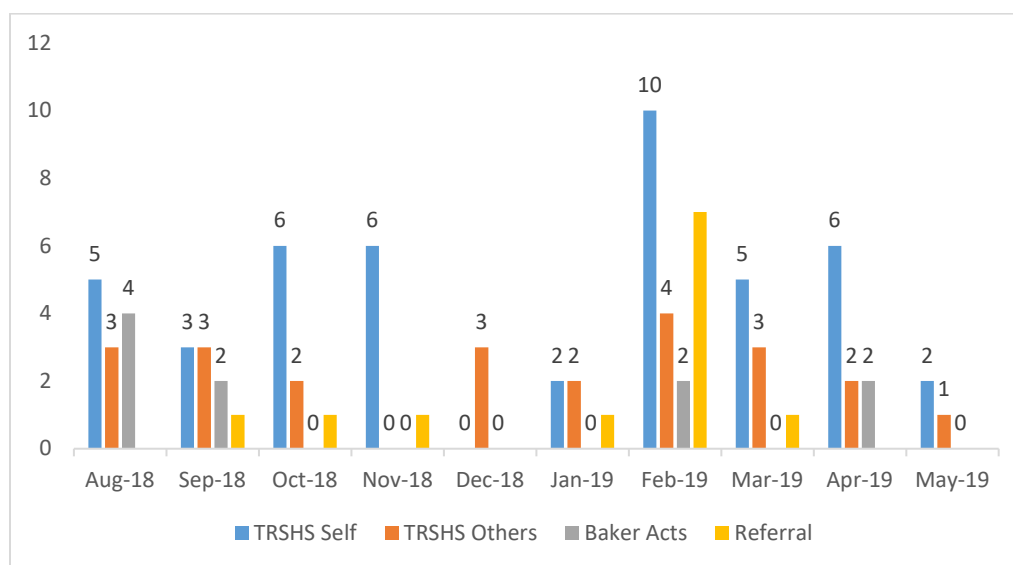


Figure 11. Threat assessments data 2018-2019 for TS School

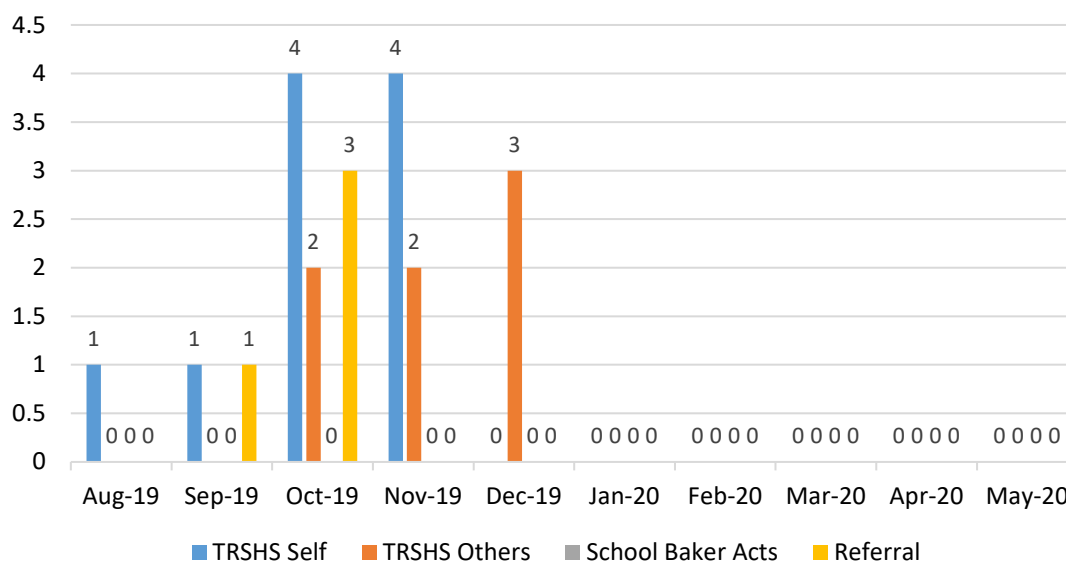
Table 4 presents this data in numerical form.

Table 4.

*Threat Assessments by Month 2018-2019*

TS School 2018-2019				
	Threats			
	Threats to Self	to Others	Baker Acts	Referral
Aug-18	5	3	4	0
Sep-18	3	3	2	1
Oct-18	6	2	0	1
Nov-18	6	0	0	1
Dec-18	0	3	0	0
Jan-19	2	2	0	1
Feb-19	10	4	2	7
Mar-19	5	3	0	1
Apr-19	6	2	2	0
May-19	2	1	0	0
Total	45	23	10	12

At TS School, there was a significant decrease in students' threat assessments (Tables 4, 5, 6) (Figures 12 & 13). In the year 2018-2019, 45 students were referred to the school counselor for a threat to self-assessment. In the year, 2019-2020 TS School only had 10 cases. That is a decrease of 35 cases. In the year 2018-2019, 23 students were referred to the school counselor for a threat to others assessment, and in the year 2019-2020, TS School had 7 cases. That is a decrease of 16 cases.



*Figure 12.* Threat assessments 2019-2020 TS School

Table 5.

*Threats Assessments by Month 2019-2020*

TS School 2019-2020				
	Threats to Self	Threats to Others	School Baker Acts	Referral
Aug-19	1	0	0	0
Sep-19	1	0	0	1
Oct-19	4	2	0	3
Nov-19	4	2	0	0
Dec-19	0	3	0	0
Jan-20	0	0	0	0
Feb-20	0	0	0	0
Mar-20	0	0	0	0
Apr-20	0	0	0	0
May-20	0	0	0	0
Total	10	7	0	4

For Baker Act cases, in the year 2018-2019, 10 students were referred to the school counselor and law enforcement for the Baker Act, and in the year 2019-2020, TS School had 0 cases. That is a decrease of 10 cases. Under the category of referrals in the year 2018-2019, 12 students were referred to the school counselor for a referral, and in the year 2019-2020, TS School had only 4 cases. That is a decrease of 8 cases. The data collected by me shows that TS School implementation of the trauma-informed approach is providing the strategies and support systems need to help students' mental health and their social-emotional behaviors.

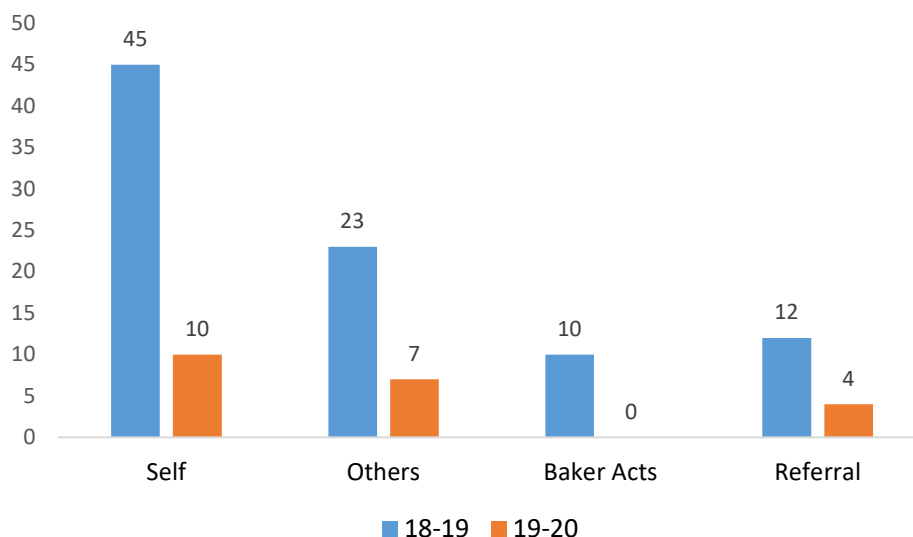


Figure 13. Threat assessments comparison 2018-2019 to 2019-2020

Table 6.

*Threat Assessments Comparison 2018-2019 to 2019-2020*

TS School Threat Assessment Type Comparison by School Years				
	Self	Others	Baker Acts	Referral
18-19	45	23	10	12
19-20	10	7	0	4

The context included a strong academic focus, stemming from legislated academic mandate in literacy, science, and math, leaving little time to address emotional issues. After the tragic incidents of school shootings and threats across the country and after the tragic event at a state high school happened, politicians decided to act and allocate funds for mental health in schools. The State Senate Bill allocated over \$69 million to the Department of Education to fund the mental health assistance in schools. These funds are now used to support schools with high needs of mental health in students.

**Culture.** Bolman and Deal (1997) described organizational culture, as the "way things get done around here ". In other words, while an organizational chart might demonstrate how things "should" get done, culture is the reality: it is the patterns, shared assumptions, and interpretations that shape behavior within an organization.

Culture refers to the mindsets and meanings that exist in a system (Wagner and Kegan, 2006). The culture also shapes the behaviors of stakeholders. One of my survey questions, *The trauma-informed approach, has positively influenced our school's culture*, and one of my interview questions, *Do you think that the proper implementation of the Trauma-Informed Approach process will improve the culture of the school?*, are dependent on the culture of the school before and after the implementation of the trauma-informed approach.

School setting can be a place in which children with trauma can struggle with academics, behaviors, and building relationships with others. Many times, their biggest struggle is to build relationships with adults. "Children are molded by their family culture. By creating a family culture within the classroom, teachers can help mold, guide, and strengthen their student's positive direction" (Forbes, 2012, p. 19). When children's social-emotional needs are not addressed, they will use behaviors as a way of communication. This can cause frustration and reactions in teachers. Actions that can cause confrontation and adverse reactions of the adults that are trying to educate them.

When educators are asked to focus on academics and are not provided with the tools and resources, they need to support students' behavioral needs, they have an arduous task to complete. When children have difficulty processing social cues and communicating feelings in an adequate manner, it hurts students' classroom behavior, as

well as academics. Therefore teachers, many times, struggle with identifying behavioral symptoms of trauma. Not understanding behaviors and knowing when to use the right approaches can lead to a disconnect between the student and the teacher. This can eventually lead to affecting relationships, creating a culture that can lead to complete failure in both areas: academics and behaviors.

The current culture of the TS School is one where educators want to know how to help their students. They are noticing the need for addressing the whole child through social-emotional learning and are requesting support from the administrators, district, and state. They are beginning to understand that learning cannot happen unless the child's brain and emotional state are ready to do so. They also know that behaviors are a way of communication for children, but they do not know which approach or strategies to use to meet the students' individual needs. Although the state and district have allocated funds to support mental health in schools, more funds must be allocated for additional strategic support as well as the opportunity for all schools to implement the trauma-informed approach. "Being willing to treat kids differently does not negate the demand for high standards. It simply means that we are willing to recognize that different students have different needs, and it is okay to treat them accordingly" (Casas, 2017, p. 37). TS School data completed by the participants show that they are advocating for a school culture where every child has an opportunity to learn and develop social-emotional skills. They want a culture where there is a connection between students and teachers and the school community.

TS Elementary School has positive quotes around the building, poster with self-regulation strategies in specific places, calm zones, and calming manipulatives for

students. During the first twenty-one days of school, they spend 30 minutes every day going over habits, routines, expectations, and building relationships with students. In the mornings, students are welcomed with a joyful environment that includes music, welcoming adults, and positive affirmations to set the tone for their school day. Adults can identify before school starts, which students need emotional support before they enter the classroom. These students meet with the school counselor or school psychologist to receive the proper support before they begin their learning for the day.

Through my research on the trauma-informed approach implementation, I want to raise awareness on the positive impact that these approaches can have on students and teachers and how it can help in the improvement of students' academics and behaviors and also school culture. I also want to raise awareness on the needs that teachers have on managing students' social-emotional needs and their hope to obtain more training in this area so they can better support their students.

**Conditions.** Conditions are defined as “the external architecture surrounding student learning, tangible arrangements of time, space, and resources” (Wagner & Kegan, 2006, p. 101). My research question, *What are the greatest challenges to the Trauma-informed Approach at your school? What are the ways to address the challenges?* is affected by conditions of the school district and state level. The level of implementation and having the right resources is directly affected by the current school district and state-level policies and procedures. For example, the school schedule mandated by the state and supported by the district does not allow time for other than academics. Expectations are for instruction to happen from bell to bell, limiting the time that teachers must build relationships with their students. Nevertheless, according to teachers' responses, this is

not enough time to connect with their students to get to know them individually and find ways to meet their needs.

Based on interview responses, teachers feel the pressure of the district and state to have a strong focus on academics. They are under the impression that they could be penalized for deviating from instruction to meet students' social-emotional needs. Survey and interview data show that teachers are requesting more time to spend with their students to understand their backgrounds, getting the families on board with the approach, communicating and reaching out to families, and learning new ways to use the different approaches.

Since time is limited for teachers, they rely on the administration, school counselor, and other student support services personnel, to help them with behaviors and trauma cases. This being the case that would have a ratio of 140 students: 1 adult at TS School. Based on their responses to the interviews, they feel like there is an insufficient number of adults to work with students' social-emotional needs. In 2018, the district made it mandatory for each elementary school to have a full-time school counselor to support mental health support and other areas. This is not enough support, based on the interview data collected which reflected that 63% of the participants said that *additional support from counselors and administrators is needed*.

WXYZ District, in the year 2020, decided to implement a three-year training opportunity for administrators and teachers on social-emotional learning. Each year has been assigned a goal for schools to achieve. Year one will focus on strategies and resources on social and emotional learning to build academic expertise. The second year will focus on integrating and monitoring resources and strategy. Moreover, the last year



will focus on applying social and emotional learning skills to support academics. This is an excellent opportunity for teachers to learn how to embed social-emotional learning into their daily routines and schedules, focusing on the whole child.

**Competencies.** Competencies are defined as the repertoire of skills and knowledge that influences student learning (Wagner & Kegan, 2006). The survey showed that 94% of the participants attended training for Trauma-Informed Approach implementation. Through my survey questions, *I understand the role of my administrators in the improvement of the trauma-informed approach, I understand the role of the school counselor in the improvement of the trauma-informed approach, and I understand my role as a teacher in the improvement of the trauma-informed approach*, I explored how the participants had a clear understanding of the roles assigned in the implementation process. According to data, 90% of participants understood the role of the administrator, 80% understood the role of the counselor, and 85% understood their role as a teacher in the trauma-informed implementation. They also shared suggestions and examples of stakeholders' roles during the interview process. Some of the participants expressed that the role of administrators, teachers, and school counselors in the trauma-informed approach improvement are:

1. Providing opportunities to learn more about the trauma-informed approach
2. Monitoring the usage of strategies/approaches with fidelity
3. Working in small groups to attend the needs of students with trauma
4. Maintaining a positive mindset
5. Sharing ideas, strategies, and stories
6. Hold each other accountable

Another area to address competencies is the demand for more training on trauma-informed approaches. My survey question, *Additional professional development opportunities for a trauma-informed approach, is needed*, reflected that 82% of participants want more opportunities to learn more about the approach and finding ways to help students. Although funds have been allocated to schools for mental health support, not enough trainings are provided throughout the school year to support teachers in the classrooms.

Participants stated on the survey that to improve and continue embracing the trauma-informed approach at TS School, the following needed to happen:

1. Allowing time for teacher collaboration on the subject
2. Additional training on trauma-informed and understanding backgrounds
3. Training families and the community
4. Allowing time for teachers and students to connect while being instruction free
5. Allowing time to visit and observe other trauma-informed schools

The mindset of addressing and teaching the whole child is present. It is now up to the school, district, and state to provide the funds and resources to continue the efforts that these participants are putting in place to address the social-emotional needs of the students.

### **Interpretation**

I investigated the effectiveness of the trauma-informed approach at TS Elementary School. The trauma-informed approach implementation had a positive impact on students' academics, behaviors, and school culture. Survey and interview participants

indicated that 95% agreed that *The trauma-informed program has positively influenced students' academic achievement*, 100% agreed that *The trauma-informed program has positively influenced students' behaviors*, and 100% agreed that *The trauma-informed program has positively influenced our schools' culture* (Table 3).

There are several factors to consider when interpreting the results. The length of the program has only been for two years. The state and the district may need more than two years to continue modifying and adding to their plan of action to better support mental health in schools. Policies and procedures for mental health in schools are still being revised as they continue to find more pieces of evidence on the one state high school tragic shooting event investigation. Additionally, TS Elementary School's enrollment continues to grow, and additional staff is hired, and teacher turnover is a constant for the school under study. Bringing new staff on board requires initial trauma-informed training as well as time allocation for practice, monitoring, and adaptation. The same case with new students, who are new to the school's expectations for behaviors and take time to adapt and acclimate to new ways to self-regulate and communicate emotions to peers and adults.

In my experience as a school administrator and based on my observations, I can deduce that the four to five teachers who experienced some challenges were probably new to the system, new to the school, or new to teaching. These participants would benefit from additional training and support from administrators and school counselors. I observed that a high percentage of participants experienced little to no challenges in implementing the approach, attending training, and understanding the trauma-informed approach. This piece of data shows that TS School administrators, school counselors, and

teachers had the right systems in place for effective implementation and shift of paradigm.

An analysis of the interview and survey data (Table 3) revealed key findings which can serve as a guide to create a plan of action for improvement of the trauma-informed approach implementation and expansion to other schools to impact the district:

1. Time needs to be provided for educators to visit and study the community they work in, to become more aware of their surroundings, culture, demographics. This was one of the trends for suggestions that participants had for improving implementation (Table 3).
2. Opportunities provided to observe and learn from other schools that are also trauma informed.
3. Training provided to learn more about trauma-informed approaches and how to use them in specific scenarios.
4. Providing more time for educators to collaborate on the subject, discuss hypotheticals, and ask questions.
5. Allocating funds to receive external providers to support mental health in schools.
6. Modifying the school schedule and allowing teachers to have time to build relationships with their students.
7. More school counselor's support.
8. Educating and training the school community on the subject.

My analysis of interview and survey data revealed a vast desire of the participants to continue with the trauma-informed approach at TS Elementary School. The district can

use these findings to expand the trauma-informed approach as a district-wide implementation and to justify the need to approve future funding for this program. The district can also use the data to create additional student services support positions that could assist teachers and students with mental health assistance, provide trainings to school staff, provide more social-emotional learning opportunities to students, and educate the community on the subject.

### **Judgments**

My primary research questions were:

- *What do participants at TS School perceive was working well with the trauma-informed approach?*
- *What do participants at TS school perceives as not working well with the trauma-informed school?*
- *What do participants at TS school perceives as the greatest challenges in the implementation of the trauma-informed approach?*
- *What do the participants at TS school suggest as methods to address these challenges, if any, and improve the trauma-informed approach?*

My related research questions were:

- *What professional development opportunities teachers at TS school need in order to support the trauma-informed approach at the school?*
- *What do teachers in trauma-informed school report as the greatest benefit on students' social skills mastery and accountability for their learning and behavior?*

My quantitative data analysis found that while our instructional personnel feels supported by the administration (95%) and the school counselor (90%), additional support is needed to fully implement this program with fidelity, as 63% of respondents indicated (Table 2). TS Elementary School's staff needs additional opportunities to learn more about the trauma-informed approach. They also need time to collaborate with other schools using the approach as well as within the staff. Although data reflects that the trauma-informed approach is having a positive impact on behaviors, academics, and school culture (Tables 2 & 3, Figures 1 & 2), they would like to continue expanding their knowledge to better support their students with a whole-child approach.

State Standards Assessments data for TS Elementary School shows academic improvement between the years 2017-2018 (no trauma-informed) and 2018-19 (year one of implementation) for students in grades third, fourth, and fifth. I will use this data as an indicator. "A score on a Reading test is an indicator for reading capability but should not be confused with a particular person's ability. All kinds of things affect a test score on a given day" (Patton, 2008, p. 245). This data was used as an approximation of the TS School students' academic growth and proficiency. The State Standards Assessments are given to elementary students in grades third, fourth, and fifth. In the year 2017-2018, 49% of the students in grades third, fourth, and fifth tested proficient in ELA on a scale from 1-5 (lowest score in level 3 is the passing score and level 2 in third grade). There were 46% of the students obtained learning gains from 2016-2017 to 2017-2018 (only students in grades fourth and fifth). Of the lowest 25% (students with the lowest ranking score in their grade level), 37% obtained learning gains from one year to another. For Math, 52% of the students in grades third, fourth, and fifth tested proficient in ELA on a

scale from 1-5 (passing scores level 2-5). 43% of the students obtained learning gains from 2016-2017 to 2017-2018 (only students in grades fourth and fifth). From the lowest 25% (students with the lowest ranking score in their grade level), 37% obtained learning gains from one year to the other. Fifth-grade students are also tested in Science. In the year 2017-2018, 42% of the students in grades fifth, had a passing score of 2 or higher on the Science standardized assessment. TS School students obtained a total of 145 percentage points in proficiency, 94 percentage points for learning gains, and 72 percentage points for the lowest 25%, giving them a total of 311. This total is divided into seven components obtaining a total of 44 percent of points earned. This total score placed TS School at a low C school grade, only two points away from a D.

Table 7.

*State Standardized Assessment 2017-2018 Results for TS School*

School Grade 17-18				
	ELA %	Math %	Science %	Total Percentage Points
% Proficient	49	53	43	145
LG	51	43		94
LG Lowest 25%	44	28		72
				311
Cells total points will be divided by:		7	Percent of Points Earned	44
A = 62% of points or greater		D = 32% to 40% of points		
B = 54% to 61% of points		F = 31% of points or less		
C = 41% to 53% of points				

In the year 2018-2019, 47% of the students in grades third, fourth, and fifth tested proficient in ELA on a scale from 1-5 (lowest score in level 3 is the passing score and level 2 in third grade). 58% of the students obtained learning gains from 2017-2018 to 2018-2019 (only students in grades fourth and fifth). Of the lowest 25% (students with the lowest ranking score in their grade level), 55% obtained learning gains from one year

to another. For Math, 53% of the students in grades third, fourth, and fifth tested proficient in ELA on a scale from 1-5 (passing scores level 2-5). 56% of the students obtained learning gains from 2017-2018 to 2018-2019 (only students in grades fourth and fifth). From the lowest 25% (students with the lowest ranking score in their grade level), 45% obtained learning gains from one year to the other. Fifth-grade students are also tested in Science. In the year 2018-2019, 47% of the students in grades fifth, had a passing score of two or higher on the Science standardized assessment. TS School students obtained a total of 147 percentage points in proficiency, 114 percentage points for learning gains, and 100 percentage points for the lowest 25%, giving them a total of 361. This total is divided into seven components obtaining a total of 52 percent of points earned. This total score placed TS School at a high C school grade, only two points away from a school letter grade of B.

The data that I collected from tables 7 and 8 reflects a significant improvement in academics, specifically in learning gains. From the school year 2017-2018 to 2018-2019, the ELA proficiency dropped two percentage points (49 to 47), ELA learning gains for students in grades fourth and fifth increased seven percentage points (from 51 to 58), and the ELA lowest 25% increased 11 percentage points (from 44 to 55). For Math proficiency, the numbers were the same; for Math learning gains, there was an increase of 7 percentage points (from 51 to 58), and for the Math lowest 25%, there was an increase of 17 percentage points (from 28 to 45). The total percentage points increased by 50 points (from 311 to 361) and the percentage of points earned increased by 8 points (from 44 to 52) putting TS School from one year of being two points away from a “D” to being two percentage points away from a “B.” Due to COVID-19 school closures, the state



commissioner of education canceled all assessments for the 2019-2020 school year. This reflects the academic growth of TS Schools to which many staff members adjudge part of this success to the trauma-informed approach implementation (Table 2 & 3).

Table 8.

*State Standardized Assessment 2018-19 results for TS School*

School Grade 18-19				
	ELA %	Math %	Science %	Total Percentage Points
% Proficient	47	53	47	147
LG	58	56		114
LG Lowest 25%	55	45		100
				361
Cells total points will be divided by:			7	Percent of Points Earned
A = 62% of points or greater			D = 32% to 40% of points	
B = 54% to 61% of points			F = 31% of points or less	
C = 41% to 53% of points				

There were 90% of respondents who felt that the trauma-informed approach has positively influenced their students' academic achievement; and 100% of respondents felt that the trauma-informed approach had influenced their students' behavior positively. Participants' responses reflected that they feel that some of the reasons why students' academic achievement has progressed are because of the trauma-informed approach:

1. Gives students the confidence to support their needs and motivates them
2. They feel safe and comfortable, and their brain is ready to learn
3. They know how to identify their emotions and know how to self-regulate stress when testing
4. Teachers knowing how to manage students' feelings and emotions within the classroom, decreases the number of time students is out of class
5. They learned to trust adults and feel comfortable asking questions

6. Students feel that they are cared for and their emotional needs are met
7. Teachers take the time to connect with the students, and they align instruction to students' interests and backgrounds
8. Because of strong bonds between teachers and students, students want to make teachers proud by always putting in their best effort

For this reason, I believe that the trauma-informed approach was a vital factor for

TS Elementary School's academic progress in one year. "A correlation only suggests that a relationship exists" (Carroll & Carroll, p. 131). Therefore, I suggest that there is a possible relationship between TS School's academic growth and the implementation of the trauma-informed approach. Observations data (Figures 3-10) shows that 78% of the teachers are fully implementing the trauma-informed approach in classrooms. As a result, the learning experience for these students is designed to meet their emotional needs. For this, I suggest the results are favorable and have great potential to expand this approach to more schools in the district. WXYZ district leaders may use my program evaluation as a criterion and layout to building upon a plan of action that would expand the trauma-informed approach to every school in the district as part of the mental health assistance required by the State Senate Bill.

My qualitative data analysis found that teachers, school counselors, and administration at TS Elementary School strongly supported the trauma-informed approach. My survey findings show that 100% of participants felt their school culture had been influenced positively (Tables 2 & 3). They are requesting additional training opportunities and advocating for future continuation of this approach in their school.

Most of the participants perceived the valuable benefit of the trauma-informed approach for students and teachers. Improvement suggestions were identified by all participants for the trauma-informed approach. The most continual suggestions were additional training opportunities on the subject and additional time built in the school schedule to build relationships with students.

### **Recommendations**

The results of this research can help the school district with an opportunity to utilize this data and findings to expand the trauma-informed approach to more schools within the district. This evaluation can also be used as an advocacy tool to demand more funds for mental health assistance in schools and the allocation of funds for more training for educators. Threat assessment data shows that the WXYZ district needs stronger systems of support to meet the social-emotional needs of the students that they serve.

Table 9.

*WXYZ District Threat Assessments Reports*

District Wide Elementary Totals 2018-2019				
	Threats to Self	Threats to Others	Baker Acts	Referrals
Region #1	285	218	40	76
Region #2	355	288	37	122
Region #3	300	324	26	161
Region #4	286	176	26	73
Region #5	220	121	16	61
Region #6	126	83	12	65
Region #7	28	14	2	12

I found a keen interest in seeing the trauma-informed continued and funded in future years. “The shelter-in-place orders due to COVID-19 ignited widespread alarm, anxiety, and depression for adults concerned about interrupting their daily routines, falling ill, and maintaining their economic stability. Simultaneously, children and youth were struggling with the same fears” (Francis, 2020). Many students have been affected by school closures and disconnecting from peers and teachers. They also experienced additional stress due to structural racism happening almost conjunctively with the pandemic crisis. These students will return to school with anxiety and fear of getting ill, losing a loved one, or being a racial target. Racial target can cause them fear, anxiety, and additional stress. There is much work to do in education to set those minds back to learning. Their social-emotional needs and mental health will need to be addressed before

moving forward with academics and other educational expectations.

According to my survey and interview results, teachers are noticing the benefits and results of this approach, and they believe that if implemented with fidelity and consistency, it could potentially have a higher and better impact on students. My main recommendation for organizational change is to increase the training opportunities on the subject. This was the main request by participants, and I believe that is a valid request. State funding is now allocating to school districts for mental health. Districts need to use these funds wisely and invest in the adults' growth in this specific content area. Trainings need to occur during assigned pre-planning hours and throughout the school year during professional learning communities as well days assigned for professional development. Teachers and support staff should be required to attend these trainings.

Teachers and staff that are hired later in the year or that are new to the school, will participate in differentiated training sessions to help them learn the new content. Teachers and staff will also get time allocated within their work hours to brainstorm and collaborate with colleagues about the support systems and approaches they are using in their classrooms during professional learning communities. They also need to fully understand their role and their boundaries when it comes to meeting students' social-emotional needs of students. Rose W. Greene, Ph.D. (2014) shares how hard and time-consuming it can be to deal with students' behavioral challenges. Administrators and school counselors can conduct observations and provide actionable feedback to teachers and provide coaching cycles that could help teachers improve their trauma-informed best practices. Teachers and staff can also request opportunities to observe peers to bring back to their classroom new strategies implemented by peers. Coverage can be provided for

those teachers that request peer observation opportunities and additional support. Many teachers are quitting their profession, and students are dropping out of school for this same reason. Not knowing their role can potentially cause secondary trauma in teachers, as they get too involved emotionally when dealing with students with trauma.

As a school, all adults involved in students' learning and development should frequently review and assess students' individual data and progress. TS Elementary School currently uses the Student of Concern Form (SOC), modified from the book *The Trauma-Informed School* by Sporleder and Forbes (2016). This form and the threat assessments are used to determine the levels of support needed for individual cases as well as used to create interventions to meet the needs of students (Figures 1 & 2).

I also recommend that educational and informational sessions are provided to the school's community. Families need to know about the trauma-informed approach and how they can implement it at home. Community resource list should also be provided to families that are seeking help to support their children. The community needs to feel like part of the process. The connection between schools and the communities must be active for this approach to work. Schools can provide monthly workshops for parents. In these sessions, families will learn various academic strategies and social-emotional learning techniques to help children at home. Families will be invited to multiple workshops throughout the school year, and food and incentives will be provided. Title I schools have funds allocated for parental involvement activities. Non-Title I schools can collaborate with PTA or PTO to get funding for this. Schools can also involve community business partners and local faith-based partners to participate and fund these workshops for families.

TS Elementary School is seeing an improvement in students' academic achievement and behaviors. The data in *tables 2 and 3*, as well as in *figures 1, 2, 5, and 6*, is a reflection on the improvements that TS School has been able to achieve adjusting part of this success to the trauma-informed approach implementation. I recommend that they continue with the implementation of strategies such as self-regulation, mindfulness, growth mindset, and high academic expectations for all students. I also recommend that in the meantime, they find ways on how to incorporate relationship building activities within instructional time. The trauma-informed approach is not a program or curriculum. The trauma-informed approach is a shift in paradigm. Trauma-informed strategies should be embedded in the regular school curriculum. Allowing students to collaborate during instruction, teaching them how to make the right choices, and providing time to learn in multiple modalities are just a few ways that inclusion could continue to happen. Schools can also use the observation tool (Appendix C) to monitor inclusion and provide actionable feedback. Based on participants' responses, building relationships with the students has had a significant impact on trust and communication. For this reason, I also recommend for the district to consider incorporating time within the school schedule for this to happen daily.

My recommendation as a result of my research is that WXYZ district needs to provide more mental health support to schools and staff. These mental health support services usually meet in isolation with the student, administrator, and school counselor. I believe that they should be connecting directly with teachers by providing actionable strategies and discussions on how to support students in individual scenarios. They should be in classrooms conducting mental health observations and providing feedback to

teachers. I also recommend that they model how to implement a trauma-informed approach for teachers.

I believe that administrative support can lead to a better result and a more significant impact on students' social-emotional needs. Administrators and school counselors can provide trauma-informed training throughout the school year. Pre-planning and days allocated for professional development should be used to provide these learning opportunities. Teachers and staff can also request individual support for administration or the school counselor to meet with them to provide coaching. Non-evaluative observations and data monitoring can help administrators and school counselors provide actionable feedback to help teachers improve their best practices. Failure of schools in academic performance will continue unless there is an acceptance of how severe childhood trauma is and a commitment to solving the problem (Craig, 2016).

I recommend for TS Elementary School to continue building a robust school-wide culture and common language. Administrators need to engage staff in the implementation process and support staff by finding new approaches to better support social-emotional learning in students. The leadership team and other resource teachers are also part of the training process. The leadership team should meet every week to discuss areas where they can support teachers and students. Decisions must be data-driven by identifying trends in observations and the student of concern data. Administrators and district leaders should also survey teacher training needs and provide them with opportunities for growth on the subject. This will take an in-school, district, and state effort to provide this support to all teachers and students.



## **Conclusion**

My evaluation of the Trauma-informed Approach in One Elementary Title I School provided answers to my research questions and my secondary questions. The findings revealed that the trauma-informed approach is having a positive impact on students' academic achievement, behaviors, and school culture. TS Elementary School participants expressed how the trauma-informed approach has caused a mind shift on how they now look at behaviors and understand students' emotions and ways of communication. Academic data also showed how the trauma-informed could influence academic performance, and the way instruction is delivered in classrooms.

My findings suggest that this trauma-informed approach must be used in every school with higher needs. Educational policies and state funds need to increase mental health support in schools and training opportunities for teachers. WXYZ district can utilize data from my evaluation to create a plan of action to better support schools with social-emotional learning and assessing the needs of teachers on this subject. This evaluation is only a reflection on one elementary Title I school. Imagine if this approach is used in every school under the WXYZ district and the results they could potentially have. This could potentially lead to improvement of districtwide academic achievement, reduction of districtwide threat assessments and discipline referrals, increase in districtwide teacher retention, increase in districtwide graduation rate, and improvement of the districtwide culture.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **To-Be Framework**

Trauma-informed professional development was highlighted in surveys and interviews as a need and issue that will be necessary to change in the organization. A framework and strategic plan are also needed to ensure that these professional development opportunities take place and become part of the plan of action of TS School. This section will discuss my focus on the importance of trauma-informed professional development in schools and the impact it will have on students and staff. The trauma-informed survey (Appendix B) given to instructional personnel at TS School clearly shows that teachers want to expand their knowledge on this topic and have a vested interest in helping students with trauma (Tables 2 & 3). On the survey, instructional personnel expressed the need for professional development on six different codes of open-ended questions: concerns, challenges, suggestions, administrative role, instructional role, and counselor role. A few of their responses were “need more training,” “lack of understanding for this approach,” “time to train,” “more professional development,” “better understanding of different traumas,” and “provide staff development on this approach.” I believe the data clearly supports the need to learn more about the trauma-informed approach in schools as well as the willingness to help students with trauma in a more proactive way.

#### **Envisioning the Success To-Be**

With the current issues that are happening in society that are affecting students and how this affects the educational environment in schools, there is a high need for trauma-informed in schools and a need to improve what is implemented. “While the

trauma-informed movement is intended to help our most challenging students, it is also a movement that can help ALL students” (Forbes, 2012, p. 12). All children could benefit from learning how to self-regulate, practice mindfulness, build healthy relationships, and solve problems. It would be ideal to see more schools that embrace a culture of healthy connections between teachers and students as well as schools and the communities they serve. All students should feel safe and loved when they go to school. They need to connect with an adult and build trust. Yes, the children with trauma can benefit from this, but every child should also experience what a trauma-informed school can offer.

Instructional personnel expressed on the survey (Appendix B) that there is a need to learn more about the trauma-informed approach to help students’ mental health and social-emotional development. They want to completely shift the paradigm because they can observe the benefits of this paradigm in schools. They understand that this comes with a mindset shift and a willingness to view a student through a different lens.

Therefore, they are requesting more professional development opportunities and time to practice and implement these practices. My TO-BE chart (Appendix E) reflects the results of the implementation of the program and policies in the organization. This will require training, practice, monitoring, and a few organizational shifts. The TO-BE chart represents TS School as I envision its results of the trauma-informed implementation.

### **Competencies**

I will begin with competencies because the development of the adults that serve students is my focus. Wagner and Kegan (2006) mention that developing adults is the most prominent and most typical strategy for organizational change (p. 98). Investing in adults to get results in children is a way to improve education to educate the whole child.

Wagner and Kegan (2006) define competencies as “the repertoire of skills and knowledge that influences student learning” (p. 99). This is what I envision for TS School and WXYZ district for teachers to master trauma-informed practices to better support children and, as a result, obtain better results in student learning. On the TO-BE chart (Appendix E), there are three competencies presented. The first competency is that teachers and school staff are trained on trauma-informed approach and self-regulation strategies. The second competency is that teachers use time effectively during the day to manage behaviors and academics, and the third competency is that teachers and school staff are trained on how the child’s brain works and how mental health impacts learning. Wagner and Kegan (2006) state in one of the case studies in their book that competencies are considered successful when there is evidence of students’ learning progressing (p.113). The outcome of the trauma-informed approach should be for schools to improve students’ academic achievement and behaviors. These competencies will help TS Schools obtain the results they want for their students and school and help identify what other systems need to be in place to get the desired outcomes.

**Trauma-informed approach and self-regulation strategies.** WXYZ District will train school staff in trauma-informed and self-regulation strategies. Training opportunities will happen during pre-planning, professional learning communities and on teacher workdays allocated for professional development. This will be an ongoing opportunity throughout the school year. Educators and other school personnel will use trauma-informed strategies and self-regulation strategies during the school day. Adults are taught to understand students' behaviors and identify what the child is attempting to communicate through their behaviors. The best future practice would be that they take

responsibility for using interventions to support the child with coping with emotions, and they will seek resources address the students' mental health needs whenever necessary. Students will be taught how to self-regulate in classrooms by using safe zones and de-escalation techniques when needed without having to disrupt or interrupt instructional time. This will decrease the amount of time that teachers spend addressing behaviors and will increase instructional time.

According to Alexander (2019), anything that affects children and youth's emotional state can have a possibility of affecting school functioning. Teachers and staff will need adequate resources and knowledge to promote positive relations with students, offer a safe learning environment for them, and proactively address the whole child's needs. TI has a noted outcome of impacting and changing a school's culture, building relationships, and improving communications. "Trauma-sensitive schools focus on the people; leaders help develop educators who understand the role trauma plays in students' lives and who work together to help kids in creative, flexible, and trauma-sensitive ways" (Alexander, 2019, p. 74). If schools do not provide adequate staff training, the implementation process could have errors that could provide unwanted results.

**Using time effectively.** Using time effectively when managing behaviors will also have a positive impact on academics. "We truly don't have a moment to waste with students who are struggling" (Pearlman, 2020, p. 125). Dr. Pearlman is a veteran teacher and a school administrator. He also is a mental health therapist with expertise in trauma and challenging behaviors and a co-founder for a mental health organization. Students will know how to cope with emotions, self-regulate, and use the provided de-escalating strategies taught by their teachers in class; this will decrease interruptions and

disruptions. Providing teachers with interventions to address specific behaviors will allow them to take a more proactive approach to support the student without interrupting a lesson to address a situation. Teachers will also learn how to understand behaviors, and this will eliminate the power struggle between teacher-student. They will understand that a child's behavior is a way of communication and not necessarily a personal conflict with the teacher. Learning how to manage behaviors and academics will increase relationships and decrease the number of times that a student is removed from the classroom or suspended. According to Tough (2016), adults' intuition to react to students' misbehavior is to assume that they are doing it with bad intentions and sometimes think that it is a personal issue. Adults often want for the consequence to be a punishment (p. 53). The goal is to allow students to be in classrooms as much as possible to continue receiving instruction and improving their academics while learning how to cope with their emotions and correct behaviors.

**The child's brain and mental health.** Last, through completing the TI training, teachers and staff are taught how the child's brain works and how mental health impacts learning. They will see the connections between mental health and academics and how to educate the whole child by understanding how their brain works. They will know when and how to get additional support to help students learn and feel safe. Teachers will plan lessons accordingly and are monitored on how to differentiate instruction to meet the individual needs of students. They will also improve the "Maslow Before Bloom" attributes empathy, compassion, flexibility, grit, growth mindset, communication, problem-solving, relationship building, creativity, and collaborator, to name a few of Dr. Pearlman's (2020) list of attributes (p. 124-125). The phrase Maslow before Bloom

embraces the importance of addressing the child's physiological needs before addressing the academic needs. Educators that understand the importance of these attributes in their educational setting can affect how students learn to have a higher probability of obtaining better results from children. "We can't Bloom if we don't have a solid Maslow" (Pearlman, 2020, p. 124). I envision schools in WXYZ district where children's emotional and mental needs are met before moving to academics. The basic needs of children must be met before moving to academic development. Children and youth need to feel safe in a trusting environment. They also need to feel that the adults teaching them have a genuine care for their success and feelings. This should have positive results in academic performance and teacher performance.

### **Conditions**

Wagner and Kegan (2006) define conditions as "the external architecture surrounding student learning, the tangible arrangements of time, space, and resources" (p. 101). The conditions are the support systems, action plans, and curriculums that are in place to help students learn. There are four conditions in place on the TO-BE chart. The first condition is the time allotted to address social-emotional development. Teachers and staff need to be taught how to embed these practices to their daily schedule and when is necessary to use them. The second condition is a sufficient number of adults to work with students' social-emotional development, which means an increase in human resources. The state and the district need to consider assigning resource personnel to support schools based on their case workload. This can include but not limited to more psychologists, social workers, school counselors, and other mental health professionals. The third condition is time allotted to build relationships with students. Schools should allow

teachers to spend at least 10 to 15 minutes of the school day to hold class meetings. During these meetings, teachers can have informal conversations with students allowing them to learn their interests and backgrounds. It will also give students a voice and a safe environment to share their concerns and celebrate success. The last condition is a balanced state focus on academics and mental health. School letter grades and standardized assessments many times deviate the focus to one side of the balance. Teachers may feel the pressure to focus on academics to obtain the results expected by their administrators and districts, which leads to unbalanced use of time to focus on academics and mental health at the same time. Although states and districts are now adding social-emotional learning opportunities within the curriculum, teachers must be taught how to balance that time. By implementing all these conditions at WXYZ district, teachers can improve their instructional performance, and students can have a better focus on academics.

**Time factor.** Time is always a factor that comes up when discussing academic improvement with educators. One of the trends for the category of *suggestions* during my teacher interviews was *time to train and build relationships* (Table 3). This was also a trend under other categories such as *support needed from administrators* and *role of instructional personnel*. Time is a constant issue when one is trying to implement change. The state's Department of Education has strict guidelines on school schedules and how the time is used. The expectation is for academic instruction to happen from bell to bell, leaving little to no time for relationship building or addressing social-emotional development. Teachers need to begin their school year with ample time to connect with their students. In Rita Pierson's TED Talk (2013), "Every Kid Needs a Champion," she



mentions that “kids don’t learn from people they don’t like.” It is vital, especially for students that struggle with mental health and trauma, to connect to an adult. Children usually connect with an adult at home and they also need to connect with an adult while in school. Class meetings, student surveys, student-teacher interviews, among other activities, need to be implemented in master schedules to allow teachers to develop social-emotional skills and build relationships with students.

By increasing the number of adults working with students' mental health and social-emotional development, students' needs will be met promptly, allowing them to return to class to continue learning. Elementary schools in the district under study, usually have one school counselor with a ratio of one adult to support 400-1,000 students. Middle schools usually have two and high schools three to four, with an approximate ratio of four adults to support 750 students. The workload is tedious, and it takes time to provide counseling, create behavior plans for individual students, provide social skills in small groups, and complete requested paperwork by the district. Training all school staff will increase the number of adults that can provide support to struggling students.

New state legislation is beginning to have an enhanced focus on mental health. The last condition is for the state to have a more substantial balance between academics and mental health. It is imperative for educators and legislators to understand the connection between basic human needs with academics. The goal is to see happy students in classrooms, students who feel safe and loved by a caring and trained adult. Hinton & Schiller (2015) conducted a research to find a connection between student happiness and academic grades. "Our results revealed that, on average, students who reported being happier had higher grades" (Hinton & Schiller, 2015). Balancing academics with mental

health will allow educators to address students' needs. "Focusing on students' happiness is key, and the easiest solution to improving students' happiness is to get connected by building strong, healthy, emotionally safe relationships within the school environment" (Forbes & Maki, p. 234). Balancing the way, we educate children by connecting mental health and academics will give better results in learning and student growth and proficiency.

## **Culture**

Wagner and Kegan (2006) define culture as “the shared values, beliefs, assumptions, expectations, and behaviors related to students and learning, teachers, and teaching, instructional leadership, and the quality of relationships within and beyond the school” (p. 102). Wagner and Kegan’s definition of culture connects a school community to student learning, but it also focuses on one fundamental term, relationships. I am addressing five cultural mindsets to describe what I envision as a result of implementing the trauma-informed approach in schools. The first one is a strong focus on teaching the whole child. A school is a place for children to learn, but their basic needs need to be met before expecting them to be ready to learn. The school needs to be a place where students are taught how to interact appropriately with peers, cope with their emotions, learn to have a voice, build healthy relationships, solve problems, and collaborate. Students should finish their school years and walk to society as a productive citizen and a good human being.

Understanding children’s behaviors and reactions to adverse events is another of the five mindsets. To understand behaviors, we must understand what students are trying to communicate. When teachers and staff know how to respond to children’s behaviors

instead of reacting to them, they obtain better results. Yet another is a culture that perceives behaviors as a way of communication for children. The fourth one is a culture where teachers have the necessary tools and knowledge to help students succeed, and the last one is a culture where teachers know how to implement trauma-informed classroom management strategies.

The ideal culture envisioned in this study is a culture where educators have a strong focus on teaching the whole child and connecting with them. “While parents and families form the first level of a child’s relationships, it is the school that forms a child’s next level of relationships” (Forbes & Maki, 2020, p. 17). Teachers have received the necessary training and professional development for trauma-informed classrooms and know the available resources to support students. This learning opportunity provided by TS School administration and district mental health support resource staff was provided as an ongoing plan in training sessions and job embedded. Implementation of learned strategies and best practices are monitored throughout the year by observations and data tracking. They have a better understanding of students’ reactions to adverse events and know how to identify a student attempting to communicate by reacting to a particular situation. Teachers know how to aid a child with trauma, and students feel safe with them. “Brain science is explicitly showing that when children are connected and feeling emotionally secure, they can think more clearly, their memory systems are intact, and most importantly, their love for learning is back online” (Forbes & Maki, 2020, p. 18). This will reap healthy classroom cultures as well as the influential family culture in schools.

Teachers know how to implement trauma-informed classroom management

strategies, and students understand the process and what is expected from them. They learn how to use a universal language that expresses compassion and understanding of students' behaviors and needs. "Classrooms dedicated to creating a family culture will find themselves better able to meet the emotional, social, behavioral, equity, psychological, and academic needs of their students" (Forbes & Maki, 2020, p. 20). Students will learn how to self-regulate, practice mindfulness, and have more accountability for their learning. They are empowered to advocate for themselves and have better communication with their peers and teachers. They feel safe and trust adults in schools, and they feel confident sharing their concerns with them. Every adult on campus and every student feel connected. Every child knows that they have at least one caring adult that will help them find solutions and succeed academically.

### **Context**

The TO-BE chart has envisioned the context for this study consists of trauma-informed having a positive impact on students' academics and behaviors. Context, as explained by Wagner and Kegan (2006), is knowing where the student comes from and what the student needs to be prepared for. A description of this study's context is addressed under five context issues: low socioeconomics, high minority population, balanced district focuses on academics and mental health, a significant decrease in threat assessments, and a decrease in numbers on trauma and mental health issues.

**Balanced focus.** WXYZ district will have a balanced focus on mental health and academics. Teachers will have adequate resources and allotted time to support struggling students. A trauma-informed approach is embedded in the core curriculum and extracurricular activities. Students receiving the support needed are more engaged in their

learning. They feel safe and successful in school. Students feel confident enough to express their feelings and seek assistance when needed.

A significant decrease in numbers on threat assessment is a TO-BE context. Students know how to self-regulate and practice mindfulness. They are using the classroom and school resources provided to de-escalate during instructional time. They know how to communicate their feelings and whom to seek help from. Overall, threat assessment rates decrease because of the increase of the trauma-informed approach in classrooms in a more proactive way. Regardless of socioeconomics or demographics, schools are now more equally distributed in threat assessments. Students are receiving equitable support in each school in the WXYZ district.

Last, the numbers on trauma and mental health issues decrease because they are addressed promptly. School staff knows how to identify red flags of trauma and mental health, and they know how to address them. There are systems in place to problem solve in a short period. Students' mental needs are taken care of by mental health professionals in collaboration with teachers, school counselors, social workers, school psychologists, and school administrators.

## **Conclusion**

The data obtained from surveys, interviews, and observations on the evaluation of the trauma-informed approach reflects a need for a paradigm shift and the need for more professional development and training opportunities. Participants are requesting more capacity building on the topic because they understand the need and importance of addressing trauma in early childhood. Data analysis and interpretation of this data are shared in Chapter 4. In this chapter, I shared the envision of a successful TO-BE of the

trauma-informed implementation. In Chapter 6, I will be connecting the AS-IS with the TO-BE to create strategies and actions to lead the organizational change plan.

## CHAPTER SIX

### Strategies and Actions

In this section, I will bridge two conceptualizations, AS-IS and TO-BE. I will include a series of strategies and actions based upon research and best practice in organizational theory, professional development, leadership strategies, and communication strategies. The strategies and actions chart (Appendix F) address eight steps that will be used to identify specific issues in context, culture conditions, and competencies. It also addresses the steps that will be taken to achieve change.

This study shows that a specific area of needs are training, additional resources, and support. Although the trauma-informed approach implementation at TS Elementary School reflects positive results, teachers, administration, and counselors have expressed the need for more training on this topic. They want to continue accelerating the momentum by expanding their knowledge on the topic and having more time to put these best practices into action.

The trauma-informed approach is a new paradigm for TS Elementary as well as WXYZ district. Table 1 shows that 100% of the survey participants have less than five years using or knowing about the trauma-informed approach. According to the quantitative portion of the survey, Table 2, question seven “*additional professional development opportunities for trauma-informed approach is needed*” and question eight “*additional support from counselors and administrators is needed*”, 18% strongly agreed and 64% agreed both questions obtaining same results. The results show that 82% of teachers agree on the need of more support and more training opportunities. I believe that providing these learning opportunities to educators and any other adults that have a direct

interaction with students in schools will have a positive impact, improve school culture, and improve students' academic performance and behaviors. The trauma-informed approach has the potential to make TS Elementary a transformational school and if used district-wide it can have a significant impact for the county.

In this section, I have identified my plan to make organizational change. I also have included the strategies and actions needed to achieve a successful implementation of the trauma-informed approach in schools. Survey data from administrators, teachers, and counselors of this study indicated that there was a need for training and additional support as a strategy of improvement for this approach implementation. Teachers want to increase their knowledge on this topic, and they also wish for additional support that will guide them through the right process. This plan is intended to bridge the AS-IS conceptualization (Appendix D) to the TO-BE conceptualization (Appendix E).

The Strategies and Action Plan (SAP) (Appendix F) was structured in eight stages. "The most general lesson to be learned from the more successful cases is that the change process goes through a series of phases that, in total, usually require a considerable length of time" (Kotter, 2011, p. 1). Although, through the data reported from TS School, I can deduct that the school is obtaining positive results with the trauma-informed (TI) implementation, some areas will need to continue to improve and refine. Change does not happen overnight. Sustainable change takes time for planning, implementing, and monitoring. Once again, time is a fundamental factor. To ensure a successful implementation and sustainable change, I used Kotter's Eight Steps for Change as my framework for the SAP. Each stage includes strategies and actions through organizational theory, leadership strategies, or professional development (2011).



### **Stage One - Establishing a Sense of Urgency**

In this step, current school concerns are identified and discussed. All school stakeholders will discuss where we are standing as a school and what we need to do to establish a sense of urgency to help and support students to improve our school as a whole. “Change, by definition, requires creating a new system, which in turn always demands leadership” (Kotter, 2011, p. 6). As a school leader, I will develop a specific plan that is data-driven as well as guided by the input of stakeholders. “Leaders set the direction of the professional development agenda” (Reeves, 2009, p. 63). This plan will create a sense of urgency in them, helping them to feel committed and to focus on what we need to do to implement and obtain positive results. “In a trauma-sensitive school, educators and administrators take the time to learn about changes in the local community so that they can anticipate new challenges before they arise” (Massachusetts Advocating for Children, 2019). By knowing the challenges that our community is confronting and anticipating, we can take a proactive approach to support those we serve.

### **Stage Two - Forming a Powerful Guiding Coalition**

This stage consists of motivating and empowering the staff to work as a team and lead change. “It is often said that major change is impossible unless the head of the organization is an active supporter” (Kotter, 2011, p. 7). I will support my staff by advocating for them and finding the necessary tools and resources to help them achieve their goal using leadership and communication strategies. This coalition will be led by school administrators, counselors, dean, school psychologists, social workers, school resource officers, and five to six teachers from different grade levels and areas. Reeves (2009) mentions that it is vital to attend to a teacher’s basic needs. District leaders and

school administrators need to find ways to incentivize teachers even when there are barriers to incentivize them financially. Because this action plan will need additional time to implement and monitor, this coalition will be incentivized by obtaining more professional development opportunities and more flexibility for planning.

The goal is to integrate different mindsets and ways of perceptions to collaborate and work towards a common goal. To implement the trauma-informed approach successfully and effectively will be a primary goal with creating a safe learning and working environment a large part of this. This coalition will learn their expectations and will represent the school community. This will be a team effort where our stakeholders will collaborate to integrate the services and resources needed for our school and students within our school culture. A strong coalition will most likely obtain sustainable results such as school improvement in academics and behaviors.

### **Stage Three - Creating a Vision**

This stage is when a clear and strategic vision is created along with the strategies to achieve it. “A vision says something that helps clarify the direction in which an organization needs to move” (Kotter, 2011, p. 8). This vision was created using a team-based approach and assisted in establishing buy-in by all stakeholders. The vision of TS Elementary for this specific plan is “to provide students with a safe learning environment by using trauma-informed approaches such as strong relationships between educators and students, self-regulation and mindfulness, conflict resolution, and academic competence.” I want students to see school as their safe haven; a place where they can feel safe, loved, and cared for. I hope for students to feel empowered to have a voice to express their feelings and desires. I dream of a school where genuine relationships of trust and respect

connect adults and students. A school where teachers can understand students and their behaviors. A school where resources are available to support students and help them reach their maximal potential.

#### **Stage Four - Communicating the Vision**

In stage four, I will communicate the strategies and actions to our vision. I will also share relevant data with the staff during data meetings and the school community during School Advisory Committee meetings. Some of the data that will be shared is discipline data, threat assessment data, and academic data. Kotter (2011) uses an interesting phrase to describe this stage “without credible communication, and a lot of it, the hearts and minds of the troops are never captured” (p. 10). Data speaks for itself. Staff and the school community will have an opportunity to see how this data correlates and how it is impacting students’ academics and behaviors.

I also want students to understand the vision. They need to know what vision are is for them and how the adults in the building are working to help them succeed. I will present the same data developmentally differentiated. Teachers, dean, and school counselor will share with them ongoing data as well as remind them of our vision.

#### **Stage Five - Empowering Others to Act on the Vision**

During this stage, we will focus on eliminating barriers and applying new strategies and actions. The assigned coalition will develop an implementation plan from our vision and communicate the new direction that we are taking. They will also develop a plan for monitoring and analyzing data. As the school leader, I will oversee the plan and closely monitor the process. The coalition will help the staff to identify and eliminate obstacles that are impeding the process of moving forward.

All staff will be encouraged to develop and try new ideas as they learn new ways through training. Training opportunities will be available for all staff to participate. This stage includes the organizational theory and the professional development best practices for trauma informed. “With an emphasis on internal capacity, the leadership of professional development efforts comes from the faculty itself, and a large part of professional education occurs in the classroom while teachers are engaged in authentic teaching” (Reeves, 2009, p. 63). Most of the training and professional development opportunities will be teacher-led by the coalition, in other words, peer learning.

I intend to bring external resources during assigned professional development days to enhance the training process. Staff will need to commit to attending these workshops and conferences during the school year and summer. Training is going to be differentiated to meet the individual needs of staff. Teachers implementing trauma-informed strategies in their classrooms and showing real data will be asked to share with peers what is working for them. Other teachers will also be encouraged to visit these teachers for peer observations as an opportunity to learn from one another. New staff will also receive differentiated training, a mentor to guide them through the process, and peer observation opportunities.

School administration and school counselor will utilize the trauma-informed observation rubric (Appendix E) to collect data and share with the coalition. This team will support teachers based on data or the principal’s recommendations. WXYZ District’s Mental Health Plan includes the implementation of the Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports (MTSS). The MTSS at TS Elementary will be used to screen barriers in academics and determine whether behaviors and emotional barriers impede the student from reaching his

or her maximum potential. It monitors the child's progress and helps the team determine the interventions that need to be put in place to support the child. This cycle helps teachers monitor the child's progress and apply the necessary interventions in class. This will also be part of the training and support plan. It provides teachers with time to solve specific cases, focus on students learning, interpret data, and collaborate with peers by sharing ideas and resources.

### **Stage Six - Planning for and Creating Short Term Wins**

During this stage, I recognize and celebrate short term goals that are achieved. "Real transformation takes time, and a renewal effort risks losing momentum if there are no short-term goals to meet and celebrate" (Kotter, p. 13). Data is a driving force for this. We recognize quarterly improvements as we monitor MTSS cycles as well as school-wide data. We celebrate student achievements and teacher improvement in performance. It is crucial to celebrate small wins to motivate and reaffirm that what we are doing is working. It is also a great moment to determine what works and what needs improvement. This feedback is used to create other implementation strategies for short term wins.

The coalition will design quarterly plans that produce short-term wins within each quarter. Every two weeks during faculty meetings, data will be shared to continue the monitoring and designing cycle. Counselors and deans can share behavioral data and remind teachers of the various strategies they can use to continue accelerating the momentum. The principal shares observations and discuss how they can implement what they have learned in conferences and workshops in the classroom. Faculty members share resources and success stories to inspire others to do better and try new ways. This allows

for our school community to celebrate success and continue with our commitment to professional collaborations.

### **Stage Seven- Consolidating Improvement and Producing Still More Changes**

Stage seven is to change systems and structures that do not correlate with our vision. It is a step to reinvigorate our plan with new initiatives. The school coalition ensures that our implementation plan is followed through with fidelity. This stage uses best practices in communication strategies, leadership strategies, and organizational theory. The goal is to achieve sustainable change. To sustain change, we refocus on the necessary strategies to proceed at looking at higher goals. “Instead of declaring victory, leaders of successful efforts use the credibility afforded by short-term wins to tackle even bigger problems” (Kotter, 2011, p. 15). This is where the AS-IS bridges to TO-BE conceptualization. It is the stage where reflection happens, and new goals are designed.

Practices and policies are revised to ensure that these are aligned with the trauma-informed approach. Coaching feedback is provided to those teachers that still need support. The leading team conducts monthly meetings with teachers that are new to our school to provide support and additional coaching. As the school leader, I meet monthly with the leading group to support and monitor their work. We use this time to analyze data, celebrating success, and problem-solving to create new ideas. “Although political variables may be beyond our control, at least in the immediate term, the decision we make every day will determine what accountability means in the eyes of our students and communities” (Reeves, 2009, p. 125). Our goal is to continue making changes that impact students’ academic performance but also meet their basic needs. We also want to make changes that continue to educate our community and bring prosperity to it. I want

TS Elementary to be an agent of change in the community we serve and to be recognized as a place where we are all a community of learners with the best interest of children in mind.

### **Stage Eight - Institutionalizing New Approaches**

Kotter (2011) mentions two factors that are important for organizational change. The first one is to show the staff how their change of mindset, behaviors, and new approaches are having a positive impact and steering change, and the second is to allotting time to ensure that change is sustainable by leaving reliable systems in place to continue working towards the school's vision. I want to see a culture of commitment where all stakeholders are accountable for student's success. For this to happen, a shift in paradigm and mindset needs to be in place. Change happens when we move from a fixed mindset to a growth mindset, allowing ideas and opportunities for growth. Sustainable change is also essential for TS Elementary to be a school where students can thrive regardless of whatever trauma they bring. I want students to be resilient and the staff to be relentless.

At the end of each school year, we meet to discuss data and analyze how the year plan was steering change for our school grade. We share success studies of students that were able to receive the mental and emotional support that they needed. This reaffirms that we are changing children's lives. Teachers self-assess and reflect on how the training and other professional development opportunities helped them improve their practices and share their results. As the school leader, I embrace the culture of commitment and genuine love for children. My goal is to fully embed these practices into our school culture for when it is time for me to leave the school, the trauma-informed approach, the

instructional strategies, and the positive culture can continue its path and improve with the years.

### **Conclusion**

This section was written to bridge the conceptualizations of the AS-IS chart (Appendix D) and the TO-BE chart (Appendix E). It explained what strategies and actions (Appendix F) would be used to accomplish the organizational change that I envision for TS Elementary. I used best practices from organization theory, professional development, leadership strategies, and communication strategies throughout each stage. In the next section, I will advocate for policy in my school district. The policy that I will include in section seven is to implement the trauma-informed approach in every school and add trauma-informed endorsement with the current ESE endorsement for recertification.



## CHAPTER SEVEN

### Implications and Policy Recommendations

School districts across the nation are being pressured and mandated to follow policies and adopt programs to support one state's legislation (citation withheld to preserve confidentiality). Although all districts submitted their mental health assistance allocation plan to the state, they are still encountering some challenges with implementing the recommended implementation strategies. The purpose of this plan is to guarantee that each district will follow guidelines and create an action plan to address mental health needs in schools. I believe that one of the significant challenges they have encountered is getting educators prepared to implement the responsibility of recognizing signs of trauma in early childhood and providing appropriate interventions to help their students.

The Department of Education requested that every school district include specific criteria in their Mental Health Assistance Allocation Plan. One of the mandates includes, "Strategies or programs to reduce the likelihood of at-risk students developing social, emotional or behavioral health problems, depression, anxiety disorders, suicidal tendencies or substance abuse disorder"(citation withheld to preserve confidentiality).To meet these criteria, the WXYZ District included in their plan procedures for referring students to school-based mental health interventions and community-based providers, established partnerships with agencies, coordinated services with students' primary care providers, direct services for students at school, and staff to support at schools.

Another criterion included in this memo is "Strategies to improve the early identification of social, emotional, or behavioral problems or substance abuse disorders to

improve the provision of early intervention to assist students in dealing with trauma and violence” (citation withheld to preserve confidentiality). These mandates have presented challenges regarding how to meet the needs of all students and train the adults working with students to learn how to do this. The pressure to provide these requirements on top of a rigorous curriculum, standardized testing, and school grades have been extremely challenging to balance.

District WXYZ began the implementation of its mental health plan in August of 2018. They created the Department of Mental Health Services to support all schools in the district. They currently use the Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) to provide appropriate interventions for students at risk or experiencing trauma. The MTSS protocol consists of three tiers. Tier 1 applies to all students; it includes social-emotional learning curricula, positive behavior interventions, suicide prevention, and mental health awareness. Tier 2 applies to targeted students; it focuses on social skills groups, behavior analysis, and behavior modification strategies. The last tier applies to students with a re-occurring mental health diagnosis or at risk. This tier includes more intensive approaches such as functional behavior assessment, behavior intervention plans, counseling, and referrals to mental health providers. The 2019-2020 school year was their second year of implementation. The first two years of training consisted of training on PBIS (positive behaviors intervention system), mindfulness, self-regulation strategies, and an overview of what is trauma informed. When implemented with fidelity and more practice and expertise, this plan should proactively and effectively obtain positive results. However, because this plan includes not only district staff but also classroom teachers and other school building staff, the district must consider developing a more rigorous and strategic

plan for professional development and training on this topic for all staff members that have contact with students.

Currently, the range of knowledge that classroom teachers have about the trauma-informed approach does not meet the needs of our students. The data presented in chapter four shows that 82% (Table 2) of teachers want additional professional development opportunities on trauma-informed and ways they can help their students. Data also showed that teachers are demanding more time to develop relationships with students and families to learn about their backgrounds and needs to know which strategies to use based on the scenarios they encounter.

### **Policy Statement**

I am recommending for the state to add trauma-informed within the Exceptional Students Education endorsement classes and requirements for recertification. This needs to be mandated for instructional personnel including classroom teachers, mental health professionals, and administrators. It is vital to step away from the train-the-trainer approach and provide the opportunity through the ESE endorsement courses. “Poorly delivered training simply isn’t going have the impact you’re looking for” (Morrison, 2020). They need to learn how to implement interventions for crisis prevention, trauma-informed strategies, de-escalation strategies, mindfulness, and brain functions. School administrators, school counselors, and district personnel will maintain progress monitoring and classroom implementation of this training. Classroom observations are part of the monitoring process along with school data. They provide actionable feedback to classroom teachers to improve their trauma-informed approach in classrooms and also coaching cycles. Although all school staff will have the content knowledge on trauma-

informed, the school counselor must be the essential coordinator for implementation. School behavior data is a fundamental tool to track this progress as well as academic data.

I recommend this policy because it is essential for all schools to have a sharper focus on the trauma-informed approach. The number of trauma students brings to school, and the trauma that schools are causing in children are deteriorating the impact of academic achievement and incrementing discipline issues in schools. School shootings, social injustice, racism, and COVID are all factors that can potentially create or increase trauma in students just to name a few of many other factors. Child help Child Abuse Hotline (2014) reported that the United States loses four to seven children to child abuse. This gives the United States one of the worst records among other countries that are also industrialized. These statistics are impacting the work of educators in schools and hurting students and their learning. These are approximately four million children that attend school with some trauma in a classroom with educators that do not know how to identify the signs of trauma and provide the appropriate interventions or seek for adequate assistance. Trauma not just from domestic or child abuse but also from poverty, racism, homophobia, or other systemic injustices. The load is too much for one school counselor per school and one or two school administrators. The responsibility needs to rely on all school stakeholders, and it needs to allow teachers to have the proper resources and content knowledge to help students in their classrooms proactively.

I recommended for the state to add trauma-informed within the Exceptional Students Education endorsement classes and requirements for recertification since this is a requirement for renewal according to the state department of education. The renewal

criteria mandate instructional personnel and administrators to have at least one semester hour in teaching SWD. I am proposing for trauma informed to be included to these hours of training. I envision the policy to be useful in meeting the problem because school staff will have the content knowledge necessary to support students as individuals as well as learners. They are taught to understand their brains and how they work under trauma. Educators will learn how to adjust their curriculum to address students' individual needs, decreasing the risk of leaving some trauma unrecognized or re-traumatizing students.

"Once we expand our understanding of trauma beyond experiences reflected in ACE scores, we can see how unexamined or even well-intentioned policies can do real harm to students struggling with the trauma of managing systematic injustices" (Gaffney, 2019). ACE (Adverse Childhood Experiences) is a research study about the stress that children experience from birth until 18. This can range from child abuse, sexual abuse, domestic violence, divorce, incarceration, emotional or sexual abuse, community violence, and alcohol abuse. School staff can use this information to understand the child's behaviors and reactions to different scenarios and know what support the child needs. School staff will benefit from these learning opportunity and students will benefit from their teachers by receiving the support they need to address their mental health. All of this has a direct correlation with student academic achievement and school improvement.

The policy change will also include intervention monitoring and an evaluation system for Tier 2 and Tier 3 students. This documentation will be kept in student records in case an outsider provider is needed. The school counselor is to maintain records of interventions and support systems provided as well as communication logs with families, mental health resources, and external providers. A 504 plan can be created to ensure that

students receive support recommended by the mental health providers. This will be monitored in cycles of six weeks to monitor progress and modify the plan as needed.

To make this policy change, a proposal from TS School and WXYZ district to the state senators and the state educational commissioner could be a potential source to add political support to add trauma-based awareness as one of the instructional recertification components. I can present to the district and school board my data and recommendations to obtain their political support in campaigning the department of education. The process will include notifying the state educational chair, the state education commissioner, and the governmental senators and legislators about the results of my research study and recommendations. Adding to this the school board letter of support, letters from TS School teachers, and the mental health department of WXYZ district. I would also meet with the county union to share data and recommendations and allow them to have a voice and obtain their endorsement.

### **Analysis of Needs**

In this section, I strategically analyzed the importance of developing a new policy on trauma-informed approach professional development and how this policy will require for all teachers to be trauma-informed trained and implement practices on their campus. This policy will have a positive response to a student's mental health and a correlation to academic achievement. According to Tough (2016), growing up in a chronically stressful home can have a negative effect on the development of children's executive functions and their ability to learn effectively in school (p. 21). I will explore six different disciplinary areas and provide specific suggestions on the educational, economic, social, political, legal, and moral/ethical aspects of this policy recommendation.

**Educational analysis.** The goal of my recommended policy in the educational field is to meet the needs of the whole child in schools and increase academic achievement and close achievement gaps by allowing educators to have the proper training and resources to do so. According to Sporleder and Forbes (2016), a child that grows up in a healthy environment is very different from the brain of a child that grows up in a stressful environment. The child that grows up in a healthy environment feels safe, and the executive functions of the brain work well in an academic environment, unlike the child that feels threatened and scared. Implementing the trauma-informed approach at TS School has had a positive effect on students' academic achievement, learning gains, and behaviors. Addressing mental health and the whole child has been a plea of the educational community and now the state.

Students face continuous exposure to trauma via social media, video games, and society itself. Unfortunately, school policies are rarely considering these factors. The focus on social-emotional learning and mental health in schools barely started two years ago, and there is much work to do in this field. “Powerful family engagement tends to have a ripple effect across a school and community, transforming mindsets and approaches” (Mapp, Carver, & Lander, 2017, pg. 121). Schools should also receive funding to host parent academies to provide support and guidance at home and even implement trauma-informed strategies. Providing trauma-informed resources to families and building capacity within the topic can significantly impact students’ academics and the school culture. Other techniques that can support families at home are continuous communication in different modalities, home visits, and parent compacts, monthly workshops for families facilitated by teachers, and monthly meetings with school

administration to discuss concerns and celebrate success.

My policy provides an ample opportunity for classroom teachers, administrators, and school staff to learn about trauma-informed awareness and best practices and have the proper tools to support students' mental health needs. They will obtain the knowledge and skills to address students' social, emotional, and behavioral needs inside and outside the classroom. Society is de-servicing children and young adults by not providing them a proper education where academics are prominent and their mental state. "Most teachers and caregivers go into the field because they love children, but they often find that establishing a warm, loving, and responsive relationship with a maltreated child is not as simple as it might seem" (Sorrels, 2015, p. 62). We need to begin reaching children exposed to trauma if we want better results in society.

If meeting the needs of the whole child is a critical factor in improving academic achievement and closing the achievement gaps, we cannot allow this to be a barrier between educators and students. We must provide the necessary tools to create safe and healing environments for all students. "When mental illness starts at this stage of life, they can affect the young person's education, ability to work and form relationships, and lead to the use of alcohol and other drugs" (Mental Health First Aid USA, (2016) p. 6). Students' behaviors are usually a way of communication, a cry for help. If teachers and all staff members learn how to address these needs, they will have the competency to assist families with parenting skills and supporting the child at home or take action when the child is in danger. Learning how to establish secure connections with students is critical.



**Economic analysis.** In 2018-19, the state Department of Education in the state under study distributes \$69,237,286 for Mental Health Assistance Allocation. The WXYZ District was allocated \$4,673,860 in the 2018-2019 school year and \$4,797,538 for the 2019-2020 school year. Based on the 2019 Mental Health Services Mental Health Allocation Budget created by WXYZ District, \$55,000 was allocated for professional development, conferences, and mental health screening instruments and training. WXYZ District employs approximately 24,000 school-based employees and an estimate of 480 school-based administrators. This will give less than \$3.00 allocation to train all staff and administrators every year.

Advocating for a trauma-informed approach implementation in every public school requires schools to provide yearly professional development opportunities to all school staff. Every school should be allocated a specific amount for professional development on trauma informed. For the approximate 200 schools at WXYZ District, that is approximately \$5,000,000. Financially speaking, the cost of preparing school staff to address childhood trauma early will eventually decrease the amount of money that the state spends on medical health, mental health, drug addiction, and prison. Some facts about mental health disorders in children and adolescents shared by Mental Health First Aid USA (2016) state that in 2014, 2.8 million adolescents suffered from depression. Anxiety was reported as one of the most common disorders for trauma and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder was diagnosed with an estimate of 11% of students. Also, an estimate of three percent of students had an eating disorder. By investing in early childhood trauma interventions, we can avoid for children experiencing these disorders and allow them to be successful in life.

Knowing that funding is a factor that affects education, districts should use their funding wisely. Each district receives allocated funding by the state based on district enrollment and their finance calculations. Technology should be used to use a training modality. Trauma-informed training could be offered to teachers and staff to complete at their own pace within each semester. The district and administrators can monitor completion of these required trainings. Administrators will use observation trends and school-wide data to assess implementation effectiveness.

Students who suffer from trauma, experience so many disorders, which makes it very difficult for learning to happen. During that phase of trauma, students need healthy relationships with an invested adult that can address their needs and provides a safe environment. We cannot assume that all children are resilient. “Research indicates that those that do become resilient to one degree or another do so because of a relationship with a loving adult” (Sorrels, 2015, p. 62). If we want educators to be accountable for this task, we must invest in them to obtain the results we want in children.

**Social analysis.** Based on the survey (Table 2) provided to instructional staff at TS Elementary School, the trauma-informed approach had a positive impact on students’ behaviors and academics. Teachers shared that students improved their concentration on academics, felt safer and more comfortable in their classroom environment, and were able to refocus on their goals (Table 3). They also shared that it improved the communication between staff and students and that students took more ownership of their behaviors. TS School has seen a change in demographics during the past five years. The socioeconomic aspect of the community changed from the middle class to low-middle class families. TS is a Title I school with 100% free and reduced lunch. The majority of

the parents/guardians work two or three jobs, and most of these students go home after school with little to no supervision. This is when social media, video games, and the community become part of the problem. “For those with prolonged symptoms of trauma or those who have experienced abnormally adverse situations, they may find that this reward system isn’t doing the job anymore—especially because it is not possible to play video games 24 hours a day” (Widing, 2015). Activities, such as video games, are usually the afternoon activities that these students practice when left alone. These activities rarely encourage children to develop self-regulation, make good choices, or address the mental needs. Under little to no adult supervision, many times, children are exposed to violence, sexual abuse, and drugs. All these activities, to mention just a few, increase the risk of exposure to trauma. “African American and Hispanic young people have increased risks to their health and life that may result in the development of traumatic stress reactions” (Mental Health First Aid USA, p.152). Currently, WXYZ District serves an estimate of 40% Hispanic students and 25% Black students. TS School serves an estimate of 80% Hispanic, 4% White, 14% Black, 2% Asian, and 1% Multi Racial.

The trauma-informed approach will teach children to self-regulate, practice mindfulness, and learn how to resolve conflict. Can you imagine a society where every citizen can manage their emotions, practice mindfulness, and was skilled in solving problems? “An inability to solve conflict factors into most of the world’s pain- war, divorce, prejudice, race, relations, work conflicts, and family feuds” (Sorrels, 2015, p. 148). If we can teach students at school how to be successful in society and how to navigate their emotions and problems, we could potentially decrease the social issues that are currently happening. Schools can become a place that not only educates children but also educates

the community they serve. Teachers and staff can provide families with the necessary strategies and tools to support their children's mental health. If we empower children and their families with the right tools for proper social-emotional development, and mental health aid, we can help them learn how to live in a diverse society with little to no conflict.

**Political analysis.** Politics have a significant influence on educational policies and laws. Sadly, “in a recent Gallup poll, for example, just two percent of voters identified education as the most important problem facing the nation” (Wong, 2018). The United States counts on a society that does not think education is one of their top priorities. The nation has reforms in place that are deserving children and negatively affect teachers. According to Bruns and Schneider (2016), some of the reforms that directly threaten teachers are job stability and security, evaluations, and student performance linked to salaries. Other reforms that negatively affect education indirectly are curriculum reform, standardized assessments, and scheduling (p. 21). Many times, politicians do not take the time to consult their decision related to education with educators and other professionals that serve children.

To support my claim about the lack of connection between politicians and educators, I will name the zero-tolerance policy, which was created in the mid-1990s by the United States Congress. Laws were passed to decrease violence in schools and manage students' misbehaviors. To make a definite statement, these laws use punishments in many cases as the only consequence forcing schools to suspend and expulse students frequently. “The unfortunate fall-out for our most behaviorally challenged students was lost educational opportunities and the labeling of them as delinquents and criminals” (Sporleder & Forbes, 2016, p. 31). With a loss of academic

time and a lack of structured environment, these students most likely experienced a decline in their academics and were impeded from learning self-regulation skills and receiving adequate interventions for their mental health and social-emotional development.

The zero-tolerance policy and many other policies and laws do not meet the needs of children and adolescents in schools. “They ignore the mental health and emotional needs of the most vulnerable of students in schools and allow absolutely no understanding to the individual needs of students” (Sporleder & Forbes, 2016, p. 31). Trauma-informed school policies can create more trauma in children by increasing their anger, frustration, and violence. Many of the students that are victims of these punishments are the students that need trauma-informed the most. These students need to be in school and receive the necessary interventions to learn how to self-regulate and cope with their emotions. They need an invested adult that cares for them and allows them to be successful and showcase their talents. Students need and opportunity to make up for their errors and be welcomed back to schools where they can choose a new path to start again by making better choices.

State Senate Bill is now mandating for districts to provide mental health education and resources to schools. It has been one year now, and we still know that there is a more significant need. Politicians cannot have a direct impact on the 50.8 million public school students that are in classrooms, but teachers can. We must make it a requirement for districts to provide adequate professional development and the necessary tools to teachers so they can support all students. They need to learn how to provide safe learning environments and implement the necessary strategies based on a case-by-case scenario.

Politicians also need to increase their knowledge of trauma and how it directly impacts learning and academic achievement. We need more policies and reforms that are trauma-informed to help students become productive to society instead of creating laws that create a direct pipeline from school to prison. They should also develop initiatives that will help communities engage in educational topics as well as mental health.

**Legal analysis.** The United States of America provides all citizens the Bill of Rights, which is the highest law of the United States Constitution. It provides all citizens with right of freedom of speech, religion, and due process of law. Any citizen under the age of sixteen has the right to receive a free public education with equal opportunity and no discrimination. A good question to ask is, are we truly providing students with equal opportunities of education when we are suspending them because of their traumas and reactions to rules and society? We cannot discriminate students that are not behaving or struggling to integrate to a certain culture just because they have a past that is haunting them.

Students who commit a serious infraction or threat to harm themselves or others are usually handcuffed and taken to juvenile court or Baker Act in our current school system. Many times this arrest happens in front of other students to make a statement to other students that these behaviors will not be tolerated. This creates a trauma on top of all the traumas that this child can possibly have. It shames the students in front of his/her peers and breaks the positive relationships that they have with their peers. Unfortunately, there are cases when an arrest needs to happen and is legally accepted. But in a trauma-informed school this will not be the norm. A School Resource Officer who is trained and knowledgeable on trauma-informed approach can manage these scenarios very

differently. According to Sporleder and Forbes (2016), a few of the SRO approaches that can be used as part of the TI implementation are having a commitment to model and collaborate with the team and interact with students (p. 110-111). The SRO needs to have a paradigm shift and agree to collaborate with the school community. The SRO is not in schools to discipline students but to keep schools safe. They need to be highly visible and in constant interaction with students. They should also establish firm limits. Students should see him as someone they can trust and as an authority figure who defends the law (p. 110-112).

My policy recommendation mandates for School Resource Officers to be an active participant of the trauma-informed professional development opportunities. They should be an authority figure in school that builds positive relationships with students and the community. Their responsibility is not to discipline students but to address legal situations when law enforcement is necessary. The policy will allow SROs to have more positive relationships with students instead of arresting students or making them fear law enforcement. Students need to feel safe and respected as well. If free public education is a legal right, then we must take the right measure to ensure that they are in school and not suspended. Many times, schools are safe havens for children that experience trauma. If we can keep them in school and provide the right interventions, we will see less legal actions against minors.

**Moral and ethical analysis.** As a school administrator, I have the moral and ethical responsibility of advocating for all children. I must ensure that they receive equitable opportunities for learning and equitable interventions that will allow them to showcase their talents. However, I cannot do this alone. All school stakeholders must be

given the opportunities to seek and acquire more knowledge on this topic to better support the children that we serve.

Every school needs a staff that is 100% committed to lead students to successful paths in life. The TS School staff came on board with the trauma-informed approach, and they can testify about the positive changes that a trauma-informed culture has created in their school. Educators have the moral and ethical responsibility to serve all children, protecting them, providing a safe learning environment, and allowing them to grow their maximum potential. Educators cannot continue educating children with a blindfold and not seeing the number of adverse childhood experiences that they bring to school every day. We cannot omit the fact that the brain is not ready to learn until their mental state of mind allows them to do so. We cannot continue doing things the way they were done in the past. This is a different generation that has been exposed to negative behavioral patterns that mold their brain. “These negative experiences and blueprints mold the very essence of whom children become, and ultimately, how they perceive themselves” (Sporleder & Forbes, 2016, p. 48). This generation of students needs meaningful relationships to make up for the time that parents are not home because they have to work multiple jobs. This generation of students needs secure connections and love to ease the toxic stress that society puts on them.

The fear/punishment-based policies that we currently have for students are not going to fix the problem. “They are not out to get us; they want connection but live in too much fear to do it on their own” (Sporleder & Forbes, 2016, p. 27). So there is a moral and ethical obligation to provide students with safe and caring relationships to support them and allow them to learn. If we do not do this, we are not educating students, which



is our top priority. The survey indicates that teachers want to do more for their students. They want to implement the trauma-informed approach with fidelity; they want to understand the trauma-informed approach better, want to collaborate, and want to move away from old habits to better support students. It is in the hands of the state and district to provide the resources for them to be taught how to support students' mental health. It is also the educators' moral and ethical imperative to make sure that mental health is addressed in school settings and advocate for this policy approval.

### **Implications for Staff and Community Relationships**

The trauma-informed approach makes schools a place of student-centered caring relationships. When implemented with fidelity and 100% commitment, it can transform school culture and shift mindsets to better serve students and the community. Schools' top priority is academic learning, but students cannot learn unless their state of mind allows them to do so. When educators connect with students and their families, they have better communication and trust in one another.

Children and adolescents that experience adverse childhood experiences and do not have a connection with a loving and caring adult are the children that end up dropping out of school, suspended or, even worse, end up in prison. "Harsh disciplinary policies that remove students from the classroom typically shift the "burden" of the students to the juvenile justice system and it is being done at alarming rates" (Sporleder & Forbes, 2016, p. 32). Hence why we need to eliminate harsh tactics such as unnecessary student arrests and fear-based consequences from schools. If schools begin to partner up with the community and engage families in this process, we can collaborate to help our children. It will show society how important education is and that every decision is made in the best

interest of students. It can probably increase that two percent of citizens that think that education is a nation's top priority.

When educators have the proper resources and are allowed to meet the needs of the whole child, they invest their time in doing so. Moreover, when educators invest time in children, students can feel and see the difference, and they begin to feel connected to the school. What they learn at school, they will bring back to their communities. Teaching a child how to self-regulate, practice mindfulness, and conflict resolutions are powerful skills they can take back home. Educating families and the community on how to apply these skills at home is even more powerful. When families feel supported by the school, they are less defensive and tend to open more to the school. Students and families need to feel supported by schools. The trauma-informed approach allows them to feel welcomed, valued, supported, and trusted.

As stated earlier, politicians and policymakers need to commit to learning more about mental health and how this topic connects to education. They must listen to educators and build relationships to allow all stakeholders to combine experiences that could contribute to improving schools and helping students. Dr. Bryan Pearlman states in his book *Whatever it Takes* that “the suicide rate for students with mental health concerns were receiving little or no treatment, and there was a significant number of traumatized students that were being suspended from school due to behaviors” (2019). This is reason enough to work as one team to fix the problem and build for our students a more promising future.

## **Conclusion**

To conclude, I have shared my analysis of my policy recommendation in six

different areas. The trauma-informed approach study at TS School found that it has been a successful implementation and that educators are wanting to learn more about the topic to continue accelerating the momentum. They see the results in students and the community they are serving. As the TS School faculty grew in their understanding of trauma support, they experience positive results in academic achievement as apparent in my data results listed in Tables 7 & 8 also indicating a decrease in behaviors as supported in Figures 1 and 2 of my dissertation study.

My policy advocates for mandatory professional development opportunities on trauma-informed for all school staff and adults that directly or indirectly interact with students. It also advocates for trauma informed awareness to be added to the ESE endorsement component for certification. I firmly believe that providing the right tools and content knowledge growth opportunities will allow educators to better support students. These will have a positive impact on academic achievement and behaviors. Students will also obtain the necessary interventions to decrease or eliminate trauma allowing their brains to learn and be part of their community with little to no struggles. This will lead to a more proactive approach in dealing with children's mental health and academic achievement.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### Conclusion

As I finalize this research, a pandemic has spread worldwide, and now more than ever, I think and reflect on the traumatizing effect that drastic changes and inexplicable scenarios can cause in children. Schools are now, more than ever, seen as a crucial piece of society. Schools are no longer a building where children are educated; school is a place where children are fed, have their basic needs met, develop socially, and receive an education. Online learning was the solution during the pandemic's first wave, and families saw themselves in a situation where they had to oversee their children's education while some of them also had to work from home. Others found themselves at home with students and out of work, struggling to survive.

United States' leaders stressed the importance of getting children back in schools, which started many debates on how safe it was to bring them students and how crucial it was for children to go back to their normal once again. Schools now must be prepared to welcome back children who will probably show different effects of trauma. This is one more reason to reflect on the necessity that schools must adopt the trauma-informed approach and provide the necessary resources and interventions for children if we want them to learn.

This pandemic has confirmed that students need to be in schools to learn. When students are not in school, it impedes their learning and social-emotional development. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics (2020), long period of time away from school interrupts services for students that needed, it impacts academic deficits, social impact, food security, and physical activity for children. This is the focus of my study,

and TS Elementary's trauma-informed practices were my motivation because it is a school that helps students to achieve their maximum potential by helping them feel safe, loved, and connected with the school and the adults in the building. Students come to school to learn with a positive attitude, and they have also learned to self-regulate and express their emotions. They feel safe and cared for.

The issues addressed in this research study examined input from teachers, administrators, and school counselors at TS Elementary related to the trauma-informed implementation. Qualitative and quantitative data reflected the desire of faculty for more training and to learn more about trauma-informed classrooms to help children succeed (Tables 2 & 3). They also suggested that they needed additional support from school counselors, administrators, and other health professionals available in the district. If staff and faculty at TS Elementary continue receiving adequate trauma-informed training, they will obtain personal growth, but they will also obtain favorable outcomes for their students and their schools. It could be even more powerful if the WXYZ district would provide this training for all schools. The collective efforts to meet the needs of children with trauma could provide significant academic gains across the district.

When students attend schools where they feel safe and connected to the school environment, they have better learning opportunities. "One out of every four children attending school has been exposed to a traumatic event that can affect learning and/or behavior" (The National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2008). If the necessary resources and interventions are provided in schools to students with trauma, they will obtain a better impact on students' academic learning and overall school performance. Based on this research, TS Elementary has been able to obtain positive results in

academics and school culture overall (Tables 2 & 3). Through using the TI training strategies TS School has experienced the connection between students and teachers and other support staff. Students learned how to self-regulate, cope with emotions, practice mindfulness, solve the conflict between peers, and have a voice to speak up when they need help. Another positive result for TS Elementary is that faculty and staff better understand children's behaviors and emotions. They use a common language to communicate, and they have learned when and how to seek additional support whenever needed. "This movement is about sparking awareness in teachers that brings hope for kids" (Alexander, p. xiv). Students with trauma need educators that can help them, listen to them, and understand them.

## **Discussion**

A synthesis of the trauma-informed approach evaluation based on the research I conducted was a need for additional training at TS Elementary and additional support from school counselors, administrators, and other health support staff from the district. The teachers, administrators, and school counselors feel that implementing the trauma-informed approach has had positive effects on academics and behaviors. Referring to the data found in the trauma-informed survey, participants at TS Elementary strongly agreed (45%) and agreed (50%) that the trauma-informed approach had positively influenced students' academic achievement (Table 2). They also strongly agreed (68%) and agreed (32%) that the trauma-informed approach had positively influenced students' behaviors (Table 3). Standardized assessment data (Table 7 & 8) shows that there were eight total percentage points in school academic performance from the 2017-2018 school year to the 2018-2019 school year.

An organizational change in practice for TS Elementary is needed to increase training opportunities and obtain additional support for teachers and students. Data reflects that systems for change need to be in place to continue accelerating the momentum and increasing the results that TS Elementary is obtaining. The change consists of eight stages following Kotter's (2011) eight steps for change: (a) establishing a sense of urgency, (b) forming a powerful guiding coalition, (c) creating a vision, (d) communicating the vision, (e) empowering others to act on the vision, (f) planning for and creating short term wins, (g) consolidating improvement and producing still more changes, and (h) institutionalizing new approaches.

The policy advocacy requires teachers, administrators, and school counselors to obtain a trauma-informed component as part of their exceptional student education endorsement recertification components. I advocate for the state department of education to add trauma-based awareness to the educational curriculum and teacher training plan. I believe that this is an effective strategy to build capacity and ensure that students receive a quality education that serves the whole child.

The purpose of this evaluation was to determine the effectiveness of the trauma-informed approach implementation at TS Elementary School and its results on students' academics and behaviors. I surveyed, observed, and interviewed administrators, school counselors, and teachers at TS Elementary to obtain their input on the effectiveness of the trauma-informed approach and obtain input on considerations of future continued implementation planning. I determined the implementation's effectiveness by analyzing and collecting data on the effects on students' academics and behaviors. By implementing a trauma-informed approach at TS Elementary through support systems such as training,

discipline management, and curriculum, I addressed my goals of TS school being able to reduce behaviors and increase academic results.

The organizational plan address issues raised by the program evaluation, such as training. TS School and WXYZ district must make the proper planning to ensure that the faculty is trained on trauma informed. They also expressed the need for additional support from administrators and school counselors. Another point for TS school and WXYZ district to consider. 100% of teachers at TS school were trained; however, they felt that there was not enough training for adequate implementation. Table 2, within this dissertation, shows that 95% of participants either agreed or strongly agreed that administrators played an active role in the implementation of the trauma-informed approach. However, some participants expressed that the counselor needs to have a more active role in the process. The vision for this plan is to create a school where students feel safe in their learning environment and teachers feel supported throughout the process.

The policy I am advocating for addresses the need to build capacity and train school faculty and staff, an issue raised in my program evaluation and organizational change plan. I advocate for political support from the state department of education to add trauma-based awareness as one of the exceptional student education recertification components. I will follow the mandated state process to notify the department of education chair and the state education committee chair. I will also reach out to local government senators and legislators to share data and recommendations for trauma-informed schools. Study results will be shared with WXYZ School Board to allow them to see the results and discuss how we can introduce



## **Leadership Lessons**

The leadership lessons I have learned in this process are significant. I highlighted only four of the many lessons that I learned through this challenging journey of conducting a research study. I have learned the importance of culture in a school setting, self-care as a leader, the importance of partnering with families, and the community you serve and advocating for what is best for children. A leader can influence others and make a difference in the lives they touch and the communities they serve.

The first lesson learned is the importance of building positive school culture. “As school teachers and leaders, it is our responsibility to prohibit the average from becoming our standard. We must take time to reflect on and be willing to be vigilant in examining our school cultures through the eyes of students and staff...” (Casas, 2017, p. 4). To build a coalition, take on initiatives, and implement programs, you need a team that shares your vision as their leader and has trust in you. Leaders need to focus on relationships, taking care of their teams, and listening to their ideas, making them part of the decision-making process. This is how you obtain buy-in from the team and collectively work to obtain a common goal(s). To build capacity and gain a community of learners, leaders need to show vulnerability and genuine care and inspire others to become better versions of themselves. If we want to get results on children, we must invest in adults as leaders.

The second lesson learned is the importance of self-care. There is a famous saying that explains how important it is to put “your oxygen mask on first” to serve others better as you stand firm and take care of yourself. The current demands in education continue to add more expectations, more pressure on educators, time, and responsibilities. School and district administrators manage all these mentioned and also the responsibility of

overseeing and protecting staff, students, and the community they serve. Throughout this study, I encountered many cases that hit close to my heart. Learning about the trauma that students bring is heartbreaking. It takes much emotional intelligence to deal with these scenarios and continue with your responsibilities as a leader. Many times, we pour ourselves to help others and forget to take care of ourselves. “Our well-being is influenced by our actions, and our actions are a product of how we frame our thoughts” (Mielke, 2019, p. 189). During the process of learning more about trauma-informed and studying different cases, I became more aware of the trauma that my students and teachers were bringing to class every day. This was overwhelming. I saw myself too involved in many cases and trying to solve every case. These external challenges certainly drained me emotionally. I had to force myself to stop and practice some self-care. I realized that I needed my “oxygen mask” to continue serving and protecting my school community.

Another lesson learned is the powerful results you can get when building partnerships with families and the school community you serve. In the book, *Powerful Partnerships* (2017), Mapp, Carver, and Lander talk about investing time in the school community and how it can have a significant impact during the school year. She recommends that family engagement to be part of the professional practices of the school. Connecting with families and the community played an essential role in this study. Students' families need to trust you as a leader to open their home lives to you. Providing teachers with the right tools to effectively communicate with families significantly impacted behaviors and provided additional support to students with trauma. The school counselor also provided various workshops to inform families about the trauma-informed

approach and how they were equipping the staff to serve their children better. As school leaders, we must find ways to engage with families to support academic achievement, school improvement, and meet the child's basic needs.

The fourth and last lesson that I am highlighting is how leaders have the moral responsibility of standing up and advocating for what is best for children. This research study taught me that I have a voice to advocate for children and their education. Writing a policy recommendation made me reflect and realize that there are things that we should be doing that are in the best interest of students. I realized the importance of the research process and procedures and what it takes to be an agent of change. “The individuals who reach Level 5 lead so well for so long that they create a legacy of leadership in the organization they serve” (Maxwell, 2011, p. 231). As a leader, I want my legacy to go on wherever I go, but to make a meaningful impact, I must be deliberate and conduct meaningful research that can benefit others. Without a doubt, conducting this study has been one of the most challenging moments in my career. It has brought up in me the desire to continue researching ways to support children in schools and create support systems to build teacher and administrator capacity.

## **Conclusion**

I have shared techniques, data, and recommendations about the trauma-informed approach in schools. My wish for this research study is to inspire other educators and non-educators to continue doing more research on the subject. I hope that it can have an impact on children's lives and their academic success. Education is continually evolving, and so is society. Students are exposed to so many challenges in society, and they are bringing them to schools, and many times it affects their learning and social interactions.

Students deserve the best of us; they rely on the adults in their lives. Educators must continue the research to find ways to improve the learning process for students. We may not save them all, but every child that we support and educate it is worth the fight. Educational leaders need to compromise their time to continue supporting teachers and provide them with the resources they need to educate them. Teachers have a big responsibility in their hands, and it can sometimes be exhausting and frustrating. I encourage leaders never to stop learning, to pursue higher education for their professional growth, and to serve others better.

What we do as educators is very rewarding, and we have the future of our nation in our hands. In the words of Dr. Bryan Pearlman (2019), “Let everyone know that fair is not always equal. Ensure that we give students what they need when they need it. Most of all, remember that there are no bad kids!” (p. 138). It is time for schools to evolve with the needs of students. Every school needs to be a place where students are educated, loved, listened to, and cared for. We need to allow them to acquire the skills they need to believe in themselves and have strong beliefs that whatever they set their mind to they can accomplish.

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## Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Appendix B: Trauma-Informed Approach Survey

Appendix C: Observation Rubric

Appendix D: 4Cs AS-IS

Appendix E: TO BE

Appendix F: Strategies and Actions Chart

Appendix G: TS School Student of Concern Form

## Appendix A

### Interview Protocol

This interview will be a face-to-face process of approximately 30 minutes in duration.

The meeting will take place during non-instructional school hours. All participants' names will be confidential, and only I will keep a copy of the verbatim interview responses. I will use a pseudonym during the interview to protect your anonymity. I will use both a tape-recording device and paper-pencil for note-taking purposes and information accuracy.

- a) How long have you been teaching?
- b) How long have you been using the Trauma-Informed Approach?
- c) Did you attend training to implement the Trauma-Informed Approach in your classroom?
- d) What is working well with the Trauma-Informed Approach?
- e) What is not working well with the Trauma-Informed Approach?
- f) What are the most significant challenges to the Trauma-Informed Approach at your school? What are the ways to address the challenges?
- g) What would you suggest as an improvement to the Trauma-Informed Approach at your school?
- h) What role can the administration play in the improvement of the Trauma-Informed Approach implementation process?
- i) What role can teachers play in the improvement of the Trauma-Informed Approach implementation process?

- j) How can counselors support in the implementation and improvement process?
- k) Do you think that the proper implementation of the Trauma-Informed School process improved the school's culture? Why or why not?
- l) Do you think that the proper implementation of the Trauma-Informed School process improved students' academic performance? Why or why not?
- m) Do you think that the proper implementation of the Trauma-Informed School process improved students' behaviors? Why or why not?

## Appendix B

## Trauma-Informed Approach Survey

As a requisite of my doctoral program at National Louis University, I have created a survey to determine the effectiveness of the school's trauma-informed approach. Your participation is voluntary, and you may discontinue participation at any time.

All information is strictly confidential.

Part A:

Directions: Place an X in the appropriate box for each item:

<b>Participant Information</b>	<b>0-5 years</b>	<b>8-10 years</b>	<b>10-15 years</b>	<b>15-20 years</b>	<b>More than 20 years</b>
1. How long have you been teaching?					
2. How long have you been using the trauma-informed approach?					
<b>Program Implementation</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>			
3. Did you attend training to implement the Trauma-Informed Approach?					
<b>Participant Perception</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Provide Examples</b>
4. The trauma-informed program has positively influenced students' academic achievement.					
5. The trauma-informed program has positively influenced students' behaviors.					
6. The trauma-informed program has positively influenced our school's culture.					
7. Implementing the trauma-informed approach in my classroom has been a challenge.					
8. Attending trauma-informed professional developments has been a challenge.					

9. Understanding how the trauma-informed approach works has been a challenge.					
10. Additional professional development opportunities for trauma-informed approach is needed.					
11. Additional support from counselors and administrators is needed.					
12. My administrators have played an active role in the implementation of the trauma-informed approach.					
13. I understand the role of my administrators in the improvement of the trauma-informed approach.					
14. The school counselor has supported the process of implementation of the trauma-informed approach.					
15. The counselor(s) has played an active role in the implementation of the trauma-informed approach and professional development.					
16. I understand the role of the school counselor in the implementation of the trauma-informed approach.					
17. I understand my role as a teacher in the implementation of the trauma-informed approach.					
<b>Please respond to the following questions. Your input is highly appreciated.</b>					
18. What is working well with trauma-informed approach? Give examples.					
19. What is not working well with the trauma-informed approach? Give examples.					

20. What do you consider the biggest challenge with the implementation of the trauma-informed approach? What are ways to address those challenges, if any?
21. What suggestions do you have to improve the implementation of the trauma-informed approach at your school?
22. What impact if any did the trauma-informed approach have on the culture of your school? Give examples.
23. What other resources do you recommend supporting the implementation of the trauma-informed program?
24. In what other ways, if any, can administrators support the implementation of the trauma-informed approach?
25. In what other ways, if any, can counselors support the implementation of the trauma-informed approach?



26. What is the role of a teacher in the implementation of the trauma-informed approach?

## Appendix C

## Observation Rubric

## Classroom Strategies and Techniques

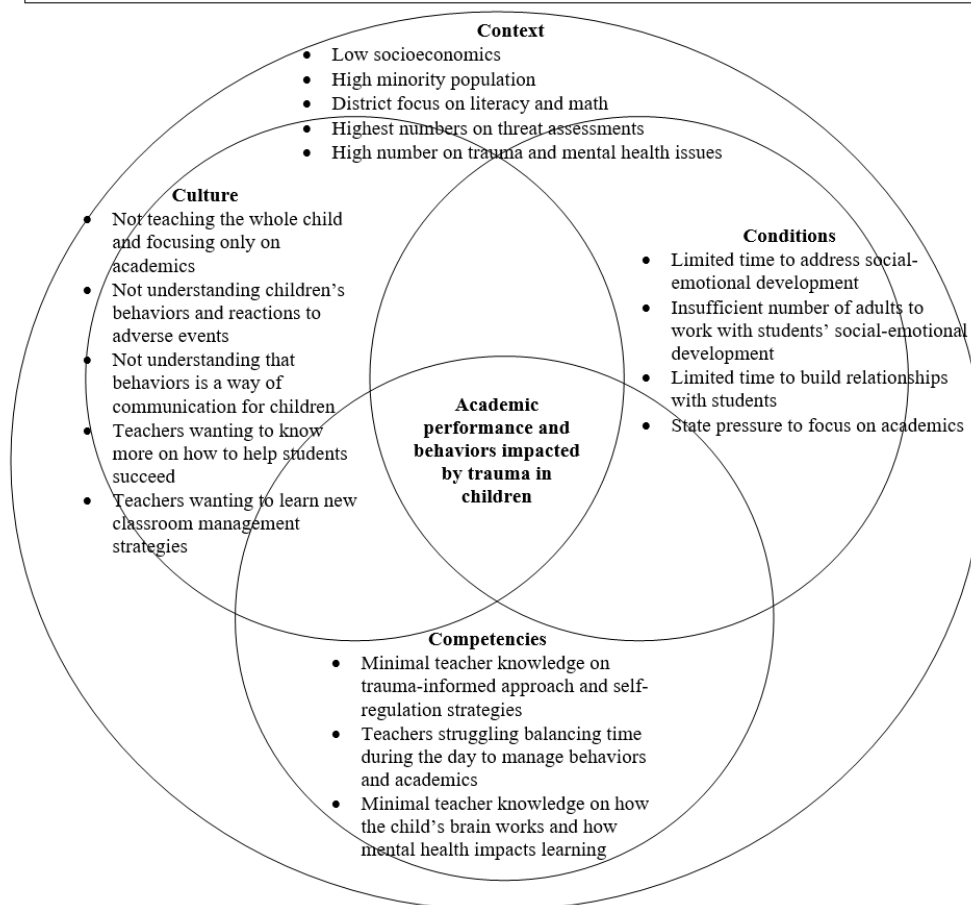
<b>Element</b>	<b>Element NOT AT ALL in place</b>	<b>Element PARTIALLY in place</b>	<b>Element MOSTLY in place</b>	<b>Element FULLY in place</b>
1. Expectations are communicated in clear, concise, and positive ways, and goals for achievement of students affected by traumatic experiences are consistent with the rest of the class.				
2. Students' strengths and interests are encouraged and incorporated.				
3. Activities are structured in predictable and emotionally safe ways.				
4. Opportunities exist for students to learn and practice regulation of emotions and modulations of behaviors.				
5. Classrooms employ positive supports for behaviors.				
6. Information is presented and learning is assessed using multiple modes.				

7. Opportunities exist for learning how to interact effectively with others.				
8. Opportunities exist for learning how to plan and follow through on assignments.				

## Appendix D

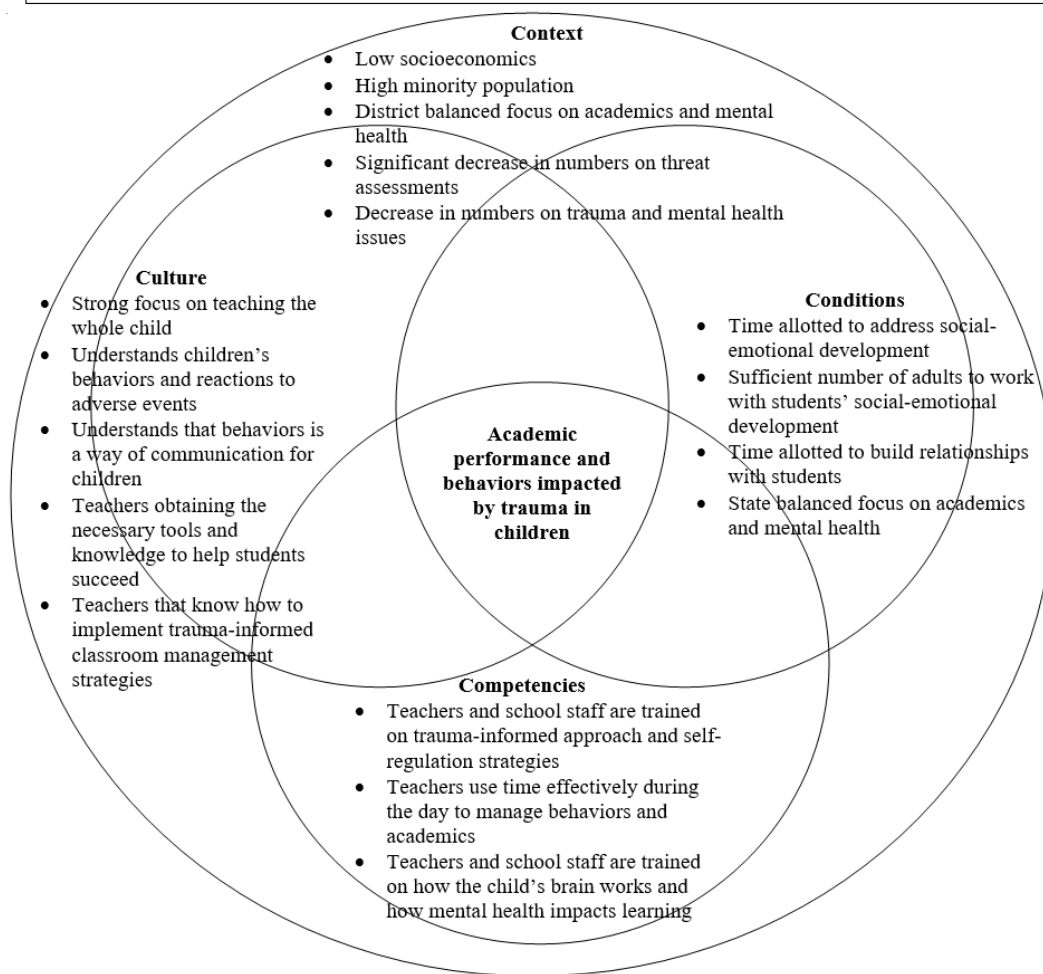
### 4Cs AS-IS

"As Is" 4 C's Analysis for An Evaluation of The Trauma-Informed Approach in One Elementary Title I School



## Appendix E: 4Cs TO-BE

“To-Be” 4 C’s Analysis for An Evaluation of The Trauma-Informed Approach in One Elementary Title I School



## Appendix F

## Strategies and Action Plan

Strategy	Action
Stage One Establishing a Sense of Urgency  <i>a. Leadership strategies</i> <i>b. Communication strategies</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Current school's concerns are identified and discussed.</li> <li>• This plan will create a sense of urgency, commitment and focus on an improvement plan.</li> </ul>
Stage 2 Forming a Powerful Guiding Coalition  <i>a. Organizational theory</i> <i>b. Leadership strategies</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Motivating and empowering the staff to work as a team and lead change.</li> <li>• Principal will advocate for their staff and find tools and resources to help them achieve their goal.</li> <li>• A steering group is established and develops protocols.</li> </ul>
Stage 3 Creating a Vision  <i>a. Organizational theory</i> <i>b. Leadership strategies</i> <i>c. Communication strategies</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Team-based approach vision creation.</li> </ul>
Stage 4 Communicating the Vision  <i>a. Communication strategies</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communicate the strategies and action to the vision.</li> <li>• Share relevant data with staff, students and the school community.</li> <li>• Explain the vision to students.</li> </ul>
Stage 5 Empowering Others to Act on the Vision  <i>a. Organizational theory</i> <i>b. Leadership Strategies</i> <i>c. Communication strategies</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on eliminating barriers and applying new strategies and actions.</li> <li>• Develop an implementation plan using the vision.</li> <li>• Communicate the new direction.</li> </ul>
Stage 6 Planning for and Creating Short Term Wins  <i>a. Organizational theory</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognize and celebrate short term wins.</li> <li>• Use data as a force to add to the improvement plan.</li> <li>• Ongoing communication of achievements to staff, students and the school community.</li> </ul>

<p>Stage 7 Consolidating Improvement and Producing Still more Changes</p> <p><i>a. Organizational theory</i> <i>b. Leadership strategies</i> <i>c. Communication strategies</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Change systems and structures that do no correlate with the vision.</li> <li>• Reinvigorate the plan with new initiatives.</li> <li>• Practices and policies are revised to ensure alignment.</li> <li>• Feedback will be provided to staff.</li> <li>•</li> </ul>
<p>Stage 8 Institutionalizing New Approaches</p> <p><i>a. Organizational theory</i> <i>b. Leadership strategies</i> <i>c. Communication strategies</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Show the staff, students and school community how their change of mindset, behaviors, and new approaches are having a positive impact and steering change.</li> <li>• Allot time to ensure that change is sustainable by leaving reliable systems in place.</li> <li>• Discuss data and analyze how the year plan steered change for the school academic performance and behavioral data.</li> </ul>

## Appendix G

## TS School Student of Concern Form

Student of Concern Form			
Urgency	Low	Medium	High
<b>Teacher Last Name</b>			
<b>Student First and Last Name</b>			
<b>Concerning Behavior (mark all that apply)</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yelling <input type="checkbox"/> Cussing <input type="checkbox"/> Teacher disrespect <input type="checkbox"/> Refusal <input type="checkbox"/> Left the area (eloped) <input type="checkbox"/> Crying <input type="checkbox"/> Sadness <input type="checkbox"/> Silence <input type="checkbox"/> Aggravation <input type="checkbox"/> Isolation from peers <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of participation <input type="checkbox"/> Anxious <input type="checkbox"/> Physical aggression toward peer <input type="checkbox"/> Physical aggression toward object <input type="checkbox"/> Physical aggression toward self		
<b>Antecedent</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Given direction <input type="checkbox"/> Conflict with peer <input type="checkbox"/> Told no <input type="checkbox"/> Teacher observation <input type="checkbox"/> Transition <input type="checkbox"/> Sensory overload <input type="checkbox"/> Other		
<b>Teacher issued consequence or solution to de-escalate?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Parent contact <input type="checkbox"/> Student redirection <input type="checkbox"/> Loss of privilege <input type="checkbox"/> Sent to buddy classroom <input type="checkbox"/> Utilized cool down space <input type="checkbox"/> Student filled out reflection sheet <input type="checkbox"/> Other		
<b>Date of parent contact</b>			
<b>Did you make contact with the</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No, not yet		



parent?	<input type="checkbox"/> No, I need assistance
<b>Brief description of the incident</b>	
<b>Suggested additional consequence by teacher?</b>	