

Information and Tools for Directing Flexible Federal Education Funds to Support Trauma-Informed Classrooms and Systems | May 18, 2021

Congress has provided Local Education Agencies with over \$122 billion in the American Rescue Plan Act funds (see below for more information). While LEAs have a large number of immediately pressing needs, they should devote at least a small portion of those funds to implementation of trauma-informed and healing-centered programs to assist the students and staff overcome the increased levels of stress and trauma the Pandemic has caused. This is particularly critical in marginalized and impoverished communities, where levels of stress and trauma are already high.

Studies have shown that following a natural or manmade disaster, children bring the increased stress caused by the disaster to school with them. [According to a September 8, 2017 article in Education Week](#): It is not only the event, but what comes after the event that causes problems for children...”PTS [post-traumatic stress] may manifest largely without parents’ awareness,” found a study by researchers at Boston and Temple Universities. “Observable symptoms of PTS may occur on in situations outside of the home, e.g. school”.

Studies have also shown the greatest impact of the trauma does not occur immediately after students return from school after a disaster, but occurs 18-24 month later, after schools too often have let their guard down. The stress manifests itself in students increasingly acting out in school, disrupting the learning process and leading to teacher burnout.

Fortunately, there are proven resilience-building programs schools can put into place at relatively low cost that build resilience among the students and provide teachers with the tools to effectively manage students who act out their increased stress by disrupting the classroom. These programs have been shown to reduce suspensions, expulsions and drop-out, as well as reducing teacher turnover. One elementary school in a low-income neighborhood that created a trauma-informed culture saw its suspensions decrease in one year from 890 to 19. Another saw a 50% decrease in absenteeism, an 85% decrease in suspensions, and a significant improvement in academic performance, finding that when students are not being controlled by their stress, they are eager and able to learn. Another school, in an indigenous community, saw its teacher turn-over reduced to zero because without students acting out in class and with greater support themselves, teachers were able to do what they entered the profession to do – help students learn.

The Rescue Plan Act funding to LEA’s may be used to implement mental health programs, including trauma-informed programs to address the long-term effects of the Pandemic. While it is just one-time funding, the major costs involved in creating a resilient culture in a school are upfront costs—instilling the culture, getting leadership and faculty buy-in, and training the teachers and counselors. Once those pieces are in place, the annual costs required to sustain the program are minimal.

Investing Rescue Act funds in such programs will have long-term benefits for the school and will equip it to be prepared to address the increased acting-out the schools are going to see in the next year or two as a result of the trauma caused by the Pandemic. The following trauma-informed programs are not in lieu of social-emotional learning (SEL) and positive behavior intervention systems (PBIS) curriculum, but rather add to them. Increased knowledge around neuroscientific principles help improve the implementation of the tools from such programs.

Below is a list of some of the growing number of proven resources for assisting schools implement a trauma-informed culture. Each uses a slightly different approach, but all reach the same goal of making the schools resilient. The following list is not intended to be exhaustive. There are likely many more

qualified institutions providing similar technical assistance to schools that can be found through a web search, though be sure to ask for references.

- o ACE Interface offers the [Master Trainer Education program](#), which is a train the trainer model.
- o The Trauma Resource Institute offers the [Community Resiliency Model](#).
- o The Institute on Trauma and Trauma-Informed Care offers the [Trauma-Informed Organizational Change Manual](#).
- o The Karyn Purvis Institute of Child Development [Trust-Based Relational Intervention](#)
- o Lakeside Global Institute offers a [continuum of trauma-informed training](#).
- o [National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments](#)
- o [National Child Traumatic Stress Network](#)
- o [The Neurosequential Model in Education](#) – Dr. Bruce Perry
- o Starr Commonwealth offers the [Trauma-Informed Resilient Schools](#) model.
- o Trauma Learning and Policy Initiative's [Helping Traumatized Children Learn, Volume 2](#) describes a process that schools can use to become trauma sensitive.
- Increase access to mental health support for students.
 - o Coordinate with local Mental Health Centers to promote suicide prevention supports, including the distribution of materials that include Suicide Helpline numbers and [texting contact](#).
 - o [School-based mental health counseling](#)
- Implement long-term strategies that maximize school-based and community-based resources to support children and families.
 - o [Communities In Schools](#) – school-based coordinator that brings community resources into schools to empower success for all students by removing barriers for students at risk.