



Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative (TLPI): Trauma-Sensitive Schools Descriptive Study

Final Report

OCTOBER 2018

MAKING RESEARCH RELEVANT

Wehmah Jones, PhD | Juliette Berg, PhD |
David Osher, PhD (Principal Investigator)

TLPI is a joint program of Massachusetts Advocates for Children and Harvard Law School.

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ABSTRACT

Many school improvement efforts fail because they do not produce lasting changes in school practices or within the school in general. Given that a safe and supportive school climate and culture is linked to positive student outcomes, it is critical that educators understand how to create and sustain such an environment. To help address this need, the Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative (TLPI), a joint program of Massachusetts Advocates for Children and Harvard Law School, developed an inquiry-based process (IBP) for creating trauma-sensitive schools, which was implemented by educators in four elementary and one middle-high school over the course of two school years.

The purpose of this study is to understand and describe how these schools implemented the IBP to create trauma-sensitive, safe and supportive learning environments. Major outcomes observed include positive changes in school climate as evidenced by reports of fewer crises, schools feeling “safer” and “calmer,” decreased office referrals and disciplinary incidents, increased staff communication and cohesion (e.g. more consistent implementation of schoolwide expectations), improved staff and student relationships, and more parent communication and engagement. In addition, the IBP empowered teachers and helped to build shared ownership for school climate and culture change, produced shifts in mindset that led to changes in practice, and over time appeared to become embedded in the culture of the school.

The findings from this study suggest that a process-based whole-school, trauma sensitive approach which sets conditions for educators to use inquiry to identify challenges and solutions through a trauma-sensitive lens, can help change school culture and create conditions for teaching and learning, which should ultimately lead to improved student outcomes. They also suggest that context and readiness are important variables.

Executive Summary

Background and Introduction

School Climate and Culture and School Improvement

For decades, educators and policymakers have grappled with the issue of school improvement—or how to create systemic changes that lead to better and sustained student academic outcomes. A growing body of evidence suggests that school improvement efforts cannot happen without considering the impact of school climate and culture. Research demonstrates that a positive school climate (which includes factors such as safety, a sense of connectedness and belonging, social and emotional competencies, and the physical environment) is associated with positive student outcomes (Kraft, Marinell, & Yee, 2016; Kwong & Davis, 2015). Specifically, a positive school climate is associated with higher student achievement, improved psychological well-being, decreased absenteeism, and lower rates of suspension. It also has been found that improving safety and school climate can help reduce bullying and aggression (Bradshaw, Mitchell, & Leaf, 2010; MacNeil, Prater, & Busch, 2009; Ross & Horner, 2009; Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, & Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2013). In addition, research indicates that the perception of a positive school climate, though beneficial for all students, may be even more useful for students at risk for negative outcomes (Loukas, 2007). The latter finding is particularly important given the prevalence of trauma among students in schools.

The Prevalence and Impact of Trauma

Over the past 2 decades, there has been a growing realization of the prevalence and wide-ranging effects of trauma on health, well-being, and—for students—school success. This included the seminal study on trauma—the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) study—which found that high numbers of adults reported being abused, witnessing domestic violence, or experiencing challenging family experiences during childhood. More than half of the adults stated they had at least one of these kinds of experiences as children (Felitti et al., 1998). The ACE study also highlighted the significant connection between childhood exposure to trauma and negative adult outcomes. Specifically, multiple ACEs (e.g., physical or sexual abuse, unstable living environments, exposure to violence) were associated with social, emotional, and cognitive impairment and high-risk behaviors (Felitti et al., 1998; Felitti & Anda, 2010).

Adverse experiences can be traumatic for many students and puts them at risk for school failure. How a child responds to an adverse event depends on whether his or her internal and/or external resources are adequate for coping (Osher, Cantor, Berg, Rose, & Steyer 2017). When a child's ability to cope is dramatically undermined, a child can have a trauma response.

Recent neurobiological, psychological, and epigenetic studies have demonstrated that a trauma response can diminish concentration, memory, and the organizational and language abilities that children need to succeed in school. For many children, this can lead to problems with academic performance. For example, traumatized children are more likely to fail a grade, score lower on standardized achievement tests, have more receptive and expressive language difficulties, are suspended and expelled more frequently, and are referred more often to special education (Wolpow, Johnson, Hertel, & Kincaid, 2009; Goodman et al., 2011). These children also may experience behavior problems, including self-destructive, self-injurious, and oppositional behavior; difficulty problem solving and managing rules and limits; and low self-esteem. Moreover, children may respond fearfully to people and situations at school and have difficulty forming relationships and setting boundaries. They also are more likely to have trouble self-regulating emotions, behavior, and attention, resulting in responses such as withdrawal, aggression, or inattentiveness (Cole, O'Brien, Gadd, Ristuccia, Wallace, & Gregory, 2005; Cole, Eisner, Gregory, & Ristuccia, 2013; Groves, 2002). In addition, trauma and adversity can cause feelings of disconnection from the school community, undermining student success.

Purpose of the Study

The Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative (TLPI), a joint program of Massachusetts Advocates for Children and Harvard Law School, has worked with schools for more than 10 years to develop an inquiry-based process for developing trauma-sensitive schools (see Figure 1). The process is grounded in organizational change theory (Senge, 2006; Kotter, 1996), and is set forth in its book, *Helping Traumatized Children Learn, Volume 2: Creating and Advocating for Trauma-Sensitive Schools* (Cole et al., 2013).

TLPI defines a trauma-sensitive school as one in which all students feel safe, welcomed, and supported, and where addressing trauma's impact on learning on a schoolwide basis is at the center of the educational mission (Cole et al., 2013). In many schools, this requires a transformation in the culture, values, and operating norms of the school. According to TLPI, a trauma-sensitive school embodies the following attributes:

WHAT IS A TRAUMA-SENSITIVE SCHOOL?

“A trauma-sensitive school is one in which all students feel safe, welcomed, and supported, and where addressing trauma’s impact on learning on a school-wide basis is at the center of its educational mission. It is a place where an ongoing, inquiry-based process allows for the necessary teamwork, coordination, creativity, and sharing of responsibility for all students, and where continuous learning is for educators as well as students.”

—Helping Traumatized Children Learn, Volume 2 (2013)

- Leadership and staff **share an understanding** of trauma’s impacts on learning and the need for a school-wide approach.
- The school supports **all students to feel safe** physically, socially, emotionally, and academically.
- The school **addresses student needs in holistic ways**, taking into account their relationships, self-regulation, academic competence, and physical and emotional well-being.
- The school **explicitly connects students to the school community** and provides multiple opportunities to practice newly developing skills.
- The school **embraces teamwork**, and staff share responsibility for all students.
- Leadership and staff **anticipate and adapt** to the ever-changing needs of students.

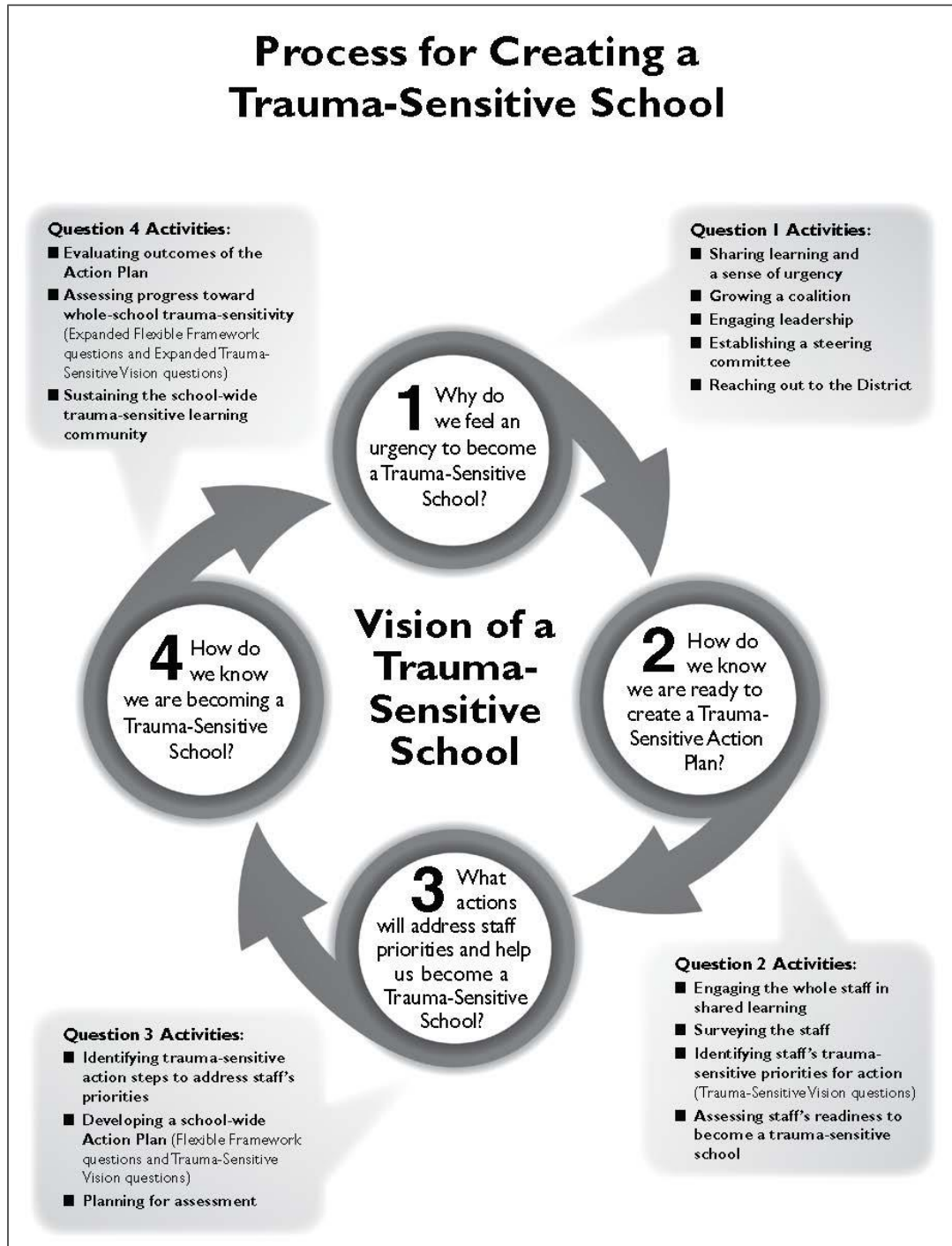
Given the pervasiveness of trauma and the growing understanding of its impact on students’ physical, social, and emotional well-being, it is critical that we understand how to create trauma-sensitive learning environments. TLPI has partnered with the American Institutes for Research (AIR) to conduct a 2-year, descriptive research study of the inquiry-based process. The purpose of this study is to understand whether and how the TLPI inquiry-based process is useful in supporting educators in transforming the culture in their schools to become trauma sensitive. TLPI hypothesizes that its inputs—which include the inquiry-based process, tools in the form of questions developed by TLPI, and the use of a designated knowledgeable facilitator as a thought partner or “sounding board¹”—will assist educators in producing shifts in thinking and a deepening understanding of trauma’s impacts on learning that, in turn, will lead to changes in practice that embed trauma sensitivity as a regular part of the way the school is run. The study is being conducted with five schools and documents the journey that these schools take (over a period of 2 years) in their endeavor to become trauma-sensitive learning environments. This study addresses key findings related to (1) readiness, (2) implementation of the inquiry-based process, (3) outcomes experienced as a result of this work, and (4) sustainability, and addresses the following research questions:

¹ In this study, the role of the sounding board was filled by TLPI staff. For further discussion and ideas about who might fill this role, please see *Creating and Advocating for Trauma-Sensitive Schools: Safe, Supportive School Environments That Benefit All Children (Helping Traumatized Children Learn, Vol. 2)*. (2013). Boston, MA: Massachusetts Advocates for Children, p.40.

1. What core contextual and readiness components are in place to support educators' ability to address trauma's impact on learning at the beginning of a school's involvement in the inquiry-based process?
2. Is the inquiry-based process helpful, easy to follow, and effective in developing a trauma-sensitive, whole-school action plan that contains measurable outcomes and addresses staff priorities?
3. To what extent does the action plan move schools closer to becoming trauma sensitive (as defined by the trauma-sensitive attributes)? In what ways? Were there unintended outcomes, both positive and negative?
4. What factors are important to have in place to sustain school action plans? What are the greatest challenges that key stakeholders identify in sustaining their action plan?

Findings draw on data from the following sources: interviews and focus groups with school staff, project documents generated by TLPI (e.g., school applications, TLPI meeting notes and school reports), school-generated products (e.g., action plans, meeting minutes, tools), a staff survey, and video footage gathered from some schools that describe their journey to becoming trauma-sensitive learning environments.

Figure 1. TLPI’s Inquiry-Based Process for Creating a Trauma-Sensitive School²



² This depiction of the model was adapted from TLPI’s book *Creating and Advocating for Trauma-Sensitive Schools: Safe, Supportive School Environments That Benefit All Children (Helping Traumatized Children Learn, Vol. 2)*. (2013). Boston, MA: Massachusetts Advocates for Children, p.32.

Conclusions

School Readiness

- To successfully move through the process, the following six readiness indicators needed to be in place for the process to proceed as planned: a general understanding of the inquiry-based process and the need for a whole school approach to bring about schoolwide trauma sensitivity, a sense of urgency and motivation, elements of the school's climate and culture that might support or be a barrier to implementation, a dedicated time to meet, alignment with other initiatives, and leadership commitment. When one or more of these indicators was missing, the school either had a difficult time generating the momentum needed to move forward or well-intentioned efforts were undermined, making it difficult to remain focused on trauma-sensitivity and action plan activities.
- Readiness is a developmental and dynamic process that evolves over time. The sounding board/thought partner needs to be flexible enough to adapt to where schools are in terms of their level of readiness at each stage of the process, particularly with regard to their motivation and organizational capacity (e.g., fiscal and human resources). Taking a flexible approach to their work with schools allowed the sounding board to offer support when needed, reinforced their positive relationship with the school, and put the school in a better position to get back on track.
- Although there are no initial demands for material resources to implement the inquiry-based process, schools needed to have the resources to meet the basic educational needs of students (e.g., sufficient teachers and support staff). Not having these basic resources interfered with a school's ability to prioritize this work.

Implementation and benefits of the Inquiry-Based Process

- School leadership commitment was essential for successful implementation. This commitment was demonstrated in several ways including: establishing a steering committee, providing the time for staff to develop a shared understanding of trauma-sensitivity, allocating the necessary time and infrastructure for staff to engage in the inquiry-based process, reallocating resources to support the implementation of the school's action plan, ongoing engagement with the sounding board and steering committee, and being responsive to staff professional development needs related to this work. Evidence of leadership commitment was further supported by staff who described school leaders as being very involved and invested in creating trauma-sensitive schools.

- The inquiry-based process tolerates variability (e.g., size and composition of the steering committee, resources, action plans) and can be aligned with existing initiatives. However, the process must be given equal priority to gain traction. This means having a dedicated steering committee, time to focus on the work, and developing a trauma-sensitive action plan. When this work was viewed as secondary to another initiative or as a strategy that could simply be integrated into existing activities without first allowing staff to engage in collaborative inquiry, subsequent activities seemed fragmented and sometimes disconnected from the goal of whole-school change.
- Working as a team to identify action steps that are directly related to the school's urgent priorities builds staff's ownership of the changes and was found to be a necessary part of the process. When this step was not included strategies were implemented, but there was no common thread to the work.
- The role of the sounding board is critical to helping schools develop an understanding of the impact of trauma on teaching and learning, and take ownership of the work. It also brought a level of accountability that helped schools continue moving forward, even when faced with challenges or competing priorities. Participants identified several key attributes that helped to foster a positive and collaborative relationship with the sounding board and were most beneficial in their efforts to becoming a trauma-sensitive school. These attributes were trust, knowledge and experience, strong facilitation skills, and flexibility.
- Initially some staff struggled with the inquiry-based process and what trauma-sensitivity would look like at their schools, and they wanted more direction from the sounding board. Once staff understood that the sounding board's role was to support their use of the inquiry-based process and accepted that the sounding board would not tell them what their priorities should be or how to address them, the facilitation process led to a greater sense of empowerment within the school, and the sounding board observed discussions that resulted in creative problem solving. Steering committee meetings were well attended, indicating a commitment to and ownership of the school's work to become trauma-sensitive.
- The inquiry-based process provided a structure for educators to talk to each other about their practice. By answering the Trauma-Sensitive Vision Questions, staff could articulate why particular practices were or were not trauma sensitive. The questions helped staff stay on course to address issues consistent with the norms and values of a trauma-sensitive school. The sounding board noted that these discussions also seemed to promote increased motivation and continuous momentum building among staff to make changes that were sometimes difficult, and that engaging in often difficult conversations to discern the

underlying tension about what needed to change and why deepened staff’s understanding of trauma-sensitive values.

- Building community within the school was a common priority across schools. Although each school took a different approach, creating a safe and supportive community for adults appeared to be critical to creating a safe and supportive learning community for students. It was noted that educators coming together to create consistent approaches to address the needs of students also was connected to creating a sense of community in a school.

Outcomes³

- The inquiry-based process’s bottom-up approach empowered teachers and helped to build shared ownership for school climate and culture change. For example, school staff reported an increase in teacher voice, and teacher leaders emerged as staff worked to come up with creative solutions to their school’s urgent needs.
- Implementing the inquiry-based process produced shifts in mindset that led to changes in practice. For example, over the course of the year, dialogue on discipline and student support shifted away from managing behavior or punishment and toward helping students develop social and self-regulation skills. This included adopting more positive approaches to discipline (e.g., restorative practices, teaching social and self-regulation skills), increased support for students with high levels of need, restructuring recess, and revising the homework policy.
- Many of the reported outcomes suggest that the schools were beginning to change their climate and cultures in a relatively short period of time. Specifically, staff reported positive changes in student behavior as evidenced by: reports of fewer crises, the school feeling “safer” and “calmer,” decreased office referrals and fewer disciplinary incidents. In addition, staff described improvements in relationships, including increased staff cohesion –as evidenced by improved communication and support among staff, staff being more supportive of each other, and more consistent implementation of schoolwide expectations – and better student-staff and student-student relationships. There were also reports of increased student and parent engagement.

³ Findings in the Outcomes and Sustainability sections reflect data from the three schools that engaged in the inquiry-based process for the full 2 years of the study. The fourth school was not able to continue the inquiry-based process as planned after the first year due to decreases in staff capacity and a need to shift focus to address a state mandate. At the fifth school, competing initiatives left insufficient time for the school to fully engage in the inquiry-based process during the first year of implementation. This school restarted the process in Year 2 with a dedicated steering committee and time to focus on their trauma-sensitive goals.

- Teachers were given the opportunity to be reflective practitioners. The inquiry-based process is designed to encourage active reflection and thoughtful inquiry regarding ways to create a trauma-sensitive learning environment. Although reflection has usually been described within the context of teaching, there is less evidence on the use of reflective practice to address issues related to school climate and culture. Findings from this study suggest that offering the opportunity to reflect is key. This gave staff the time to think critically about and grapple with the issues that were facing their schools, including how to deploy resources to carry out their action plan. The TLPI sounding board noted that, in addition to reflecting on identified priorities/urgencies, the process laid the foundation for broad-based discussions among educators on fairness, equity and academic excellence for all.

Sustainability

- Trauma-sensitive thinking and practices were becoming embedded in the culture of the school, as schools engaged in activities that helped to solidify their identity as trauma-sensitive/safe and supportive learning environments in the school and community.
- Staff developed tools that operationalized what it means to be a trauma-sensitive school, to continue to build a schoolwide, shared understanding of this work. This process happened organically.
- By the end of the study, the schools had taken full ownership of the inquiry-based process. They followed through with their action plan activities during Year 1 and Year 2, and used lessons learned to revise and improve upon their initial efforts. A potential challenge to sustainability is ensuring that schools can continue to set aside the time for steering committee meetings, especially if competing priorities surface in the future. However, all three schools reported that they would continue this work beyond the study period and had already made plans to do so.

Implications

Many school improvement efforts fail because they do not produce lasting changes in school practices and within the school in general. Given that a safe and supportive school climate and culture is linked to positive student outcomes, it is critical that educators understand how to create and sustain such an environment. The findings from this study suggest that the focus on a whole-school, trauma-sensitive approach, which enables educators to view challenges and solutions through a trauma-sensitive lens, can help to create optimal conditions for teaching and learning, which should ultimately lead to improved student outcomes. Within a relatively

short period of time, schools that were actively engaged in the process implemented action plans that directly addressed their self-identified priorities. The evidence suggests that, because of these actions, the culture is changing at the schools. Findings also point to the following implications or considerations for educators, researchers, and policymakers:

- It is important to leverage the expertise of educators and consider the value in allowing schools to grapple with their challenges and come up with their own solutions. This means moving beyond the usual push for local ownership and providing the time and space for reflective discussions to occur, particularly around school climate and culture.
- Stakeholders need to think more creatively about how best to measure climate and culture change. The use of more conventional variables (i.e., attendance, discipline data) may not fully tell the story of what is happening in a school. These measures also might restrict educators' ability to identify more creative solutions. Therefore, the research on school climate and culture may benefit from an emphasis on more qualitative variables, such as shifts in staff values and mindsets, improvements in relationships, and changes in staff behaviors.
- There is a need to reconsider implementation and evaluation timelines for school improvement efforts, and to make adjustments as needed, based on the real-time circumstances of the school. The inquiry-based process is flexible regarding timing. Each of the schools moved through the process at its own pace, but by the end of the two years, the three schools which had engaged in the inquiry-based process for the full 2 years of the study had accomplished the tasks put forth in their action plans and had begun to experience positive change. All of this was done without having strict implementation timelines, but with the guidance of the sounding board. When the fourth school had to shift its focus toward state mandates that emerged during the study, the Steering Committee continued to use the sounding board as a source of support. In addition, the fifth school restarted the effort during the second year with a new strategy and dedicated steering committee and time to focus on implementation that allowed them to make more progress towards their trauma-sensitive goals.
- There also is a need to rethink the types of professional development and technical assistance that are offered to advance school improvement efforts. The role of the sounding board was critical to the process. The sounding board served as a facilitator of the change process—rather than a coach—and the support was ongoing, responsive, and promoted staff empowerment. Moving forward, stakeholders should consider what types of support are most useful for schools, as well as the frequency and intensity of the support provided.

Introduction

School Climate and Culture and School Improvement

For decades educators and policymakers have grappled with the issue of school improvement—or how to create systemic changes that lead to better and sustained student academic outcomes. A growing body of evidence suggests that school improvement efforts cannot happen without considering the impact of school climate and culture. Research demonstrates that a positive school climate (which includes factors such as safety, a sense of connectedness and belonging, social and emotional competencies, and the physical environment) is associated with positive student outcomes. Specifically, a positive school climate is associated with higher student achievement, improved psychological well-being, decreased absenteeism, and lower rates of suspension. It also has been found that improving safety and school climate can help reduce bullying and aggression (Bradshaw, Mitchell, & Leaf, 2010; MacNeil, Prater, & Busch, 2009; Ross & Horner, 2009; Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, & Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2013). In addition, research indicates that the perception of a positive school climate, though beneficial for all students, may be even more useful for students at risk for negative outcomes. (Loukas, 2007). The latter finding is particularly important for students who have experienced a traumatic event.

The Prevalence and Impact of Trauma

Over the past 2 decades, there has been a growing realization of the prevalence and wide-ranging effects of trauma on health, well-being, and—for students—school success. This included the seminal study on trauma—the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) study—which found that high numbers of adults reported being abused, witnessing domestic violence, or experiencing challenging family experiences during childhood. More than half of the adults stated they had at least one of these kinds of experiences as children (Felitti et al., 1998). The ACE study also highlighted the significant connection between childhood exposure to trauma and negative adult outcomes. Specifically, multiple ACEs (e.g., physical or sexual abuse, unstable living environments, exposure to violence) were associated with social, emotional, and cognitive impairment and high-risk behaviors (Felitti et al., 1998; Felitti & Anda, 2010).

Adverse experiences can be traumatic for many students and puts them at risk for school failure. How a child responds to an adverse event depends on whether his or her internal and/or external resources are adequate for coping (Osher, Cantor, Berg, Rose, & Steyer, 2017). When a child's ability to cope is dramatically undermined, a child can have a trauma response. Recent neurobiological, psychological, and epigenetic studies have demonstrated that a trauma response can diminish concentration, memory, and the organizational and language abilities that children need to succeed in school. For many children, this can lead to problems with academic performance. For example, traumatized children are more likely to fail a grade, score

lower on standardized achievement tests, have more receptive and expressive language difficulties, are suspended and expelled more frequently, and referred more often to special education (Wolpow, Johnson, Hertel, & Kincaid, 2009; Goodman et al., 2011). These children also may experience behavior problems (e.g., including self-destructive, self-injurious, and oppositional behavior; difficulty problem solving and managing rules and limits) and low self-esteem. Moreover, children may respond fearfully to people and situations at school, and have difficulty forming relationships and setting boundaries. They also are more likely to have trouble self-regulating emotions, behavior, and attention, resulting in responses such as withdrawal, aggression, or inattentiveness (Cole, O'Brien, Gadd, Ristuccia, Wallace, & Gregory, 2005; Cole, Eisner, Gregory, & Ristuccia, 2013; Groves, 2002). In addition, trauma and adversity can cause feelings of disconnection from the school community, undermining student success.

Trauma-Sensitivity as a Strategy for Improving School Climate and Culture and Supporting Students Exposed to Trauma

Given the prevalence of trauma and the impact on learning, schools are paying more attention and looking at ways to address the needs of trauma-exposed children. One strategy that schools have employed is the provision of school-based (group or individual), trauma-specific clinical interventions. However, research indicates that traumatized children need environments that address their holistic needs for safety, relationships, connectedness, and skill building related to self-regulation, academics, and more. This recognition, coupled with the understanding of the critical role that a positive school climate and culture play in promoting student success, underscore the importance of taking a broader, more systems-level approach that can create an optimal learning environment for all students, particularly those who have experienced trauma. A whole-school approach can better ensure that available services are integrated into the school in a way that meets individual student needs. Several initiatives have arisen that are leading the way in developing and promoting system-level approaches to addressing trauma in schools and other settings. In schools, this includes creating a positive climate and culture where students feel safe, are supported, and can thrive and succeed. To help address this need, the Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative (TLPI) has worked with schools for more than 10 years to develop an inquiry-based process, for developing trauma-sensitive schools. The process is grounded in organizational change theory (Senge, 2006; Kotter, 1996) and is set forth in the book, *Helping Traumatized Children Learn, Volume 2: Creating and Advocating for Trauma-Sensitive Schools* (Cole et al., 2013). It is designed to interrupt health risk behaviors, build protective factors, and foster child and youth well-being through schoolwide climate and culture change. TLPI defines a trauma-sensitive school as one in which all students feel safe, welcomed, and supported, and where addressing trauma's impact on learning on a schoolwide basis is at the center of the educational mission (Cole et al., 2013). In

many schools, this requires a transformation in the culture, values, and operating norms of the school.

Purpose of the Study

The pervasiveness of trauma, and the growing understanding of its impact on students' physical, social, and emotional well-being, points to a need to better understand how to create trauma-sensitive learning environments. According to TLPI, a trauma-sensitive school embodies the following attributes:

- Leadership and staff **share an understanding** of trauma's impacts on learning and the need for a schoolwide approach.
- The school supports **all students to feel safe** physically, socially, emotionally, and academically.
- The school **addresses student needs in holistic ways**, taking into account their relationships, self-regulation, academic competence, and physical and emotional well-being.
- The school **explicitly connects students to the school community** and provides multiple opportunities to practice newly developing skills.
- The school **embraces teamwork**, and staff share responsibility for all students.
- Leadership and staff **anticipate and adapt** to the ever-changing needs of students.

TLPI has partnered with the American Institutes for Research (AIR) to conduct a 2-year, descriptive research study of the inquiry-based process. The purpose of this study is to understand whether and how the TLPI inquiry-based process is useful in supporting educators in transforming the culture in their schools to become trauma sensitive. TLPI hypothesizes that its inputs—which include the inquiry-based process, tools in the form of questions developed by TLPI, and the use of a designated knowledgeable facilitator as a “sounding board”—will assist educators in producing shifts in thinking and a deepening understanding of trauma's impacts on learning that, in turn, will lead to changes in practice that embed trauma sensitivity as a regular part of the way the school is run. This study was conducted with five schools. It takes an in-depth look at the journey that these schools took (over a period of 2 years) to

WHAT IS A TRAUMA-SENSITIVE SCHOOL?

“A trauma-sensitive school is one in which all students feel safe, welcomed, and supported, and where addressing trauma's impact on learning on a school-wide basis is at the center of its educational mission. It is a place where an ongoing, inquiry-based process allows for the necessary teamwork, coordination, creativity, and sharing of responsibility for all students, and where continuous learning is for educators as well as students.”

— *Helping Traumatized Children Learn, Volume 2 (2013)*

become trauma-sensitive, safe and supportive learning environments using the inquiry-based process. The study addresses key findings related to (1) readiness, (2) implementation of the inquiry-based process, (3) outcomes experienced as a result of this work, and (4) sustainability.

Overview of the Report

The findings from this study reveal what is possible when schools are equipped with the appropriate tools and resources and are given the autonomy to take charge of their school improvement process by identifying the issues that are most pressing to them and crafting their own solutions to address these issues. With the inquiry-based process as a guide, ongoing support from the sounding board, and the conditions for readiness in place (e.g., administrator support, motivation), three of the five schools engaged in the process for the full 2 years of the study, and created action plans with trauma-sensitive approaches that met the needs their students and staff.⁴ These schools experienced positive changes in their school climate and culture. It can be speculated that, if sustained, these changes could ultimately lead to more longstanding culture change and better student outcomes for all. Early evidence of sustainability was apparent as these schools took concrete steps to continue their work beyond the 2-year study period. In addition, the inquiry-based process also built the schools' capacity to address new challenges moving forward, as they now have a process that allows them to anticipate changes (internal and external) and to adapt to these changes in a way that maintains a safe and supportive learning environment.

The study also points to the importance of readiness and demonstrated that even a well-developed initiative or process cannot make up for severe resource deficits or limited time commitment. Two of the five schools experienced challenges that made it difficult to fully engage in the process during the 2-year study period. The experiences of these schools offered valuable lessons learned regarding the conditions that need to be in place for schools to successfully follow and benefit from the process.

This report starts out with a description of TLPI's inquiry-based process and theory of change. This is followed by the study methodology, a brief profile of each of the schools, and the key findings. Findings are organized by research question and focus on four areas: readiness, implementation, outcomes, and sustainability. We end with conclusions and the implications of this work.

⁴ The fourth school was not able to continue the inquiry-based process as planned after the first year due to decreases in staff capacity. At the fifth school, competing initiatives left insufficient time for the school to fully engage in the inquiry-based process during the first year of implementation. This school restarted the process in Year 2.

Description of TLPI's Inputs

In the present study, TLPI provided a set of “inputs” to five demonstration schools in which educators desired to create trauma-sensitive schools. These inputs are (1) the inquiry-based process, (2) the Trauma-Sensitive Vision Questions and Flexible Framework Questions, and (3) the sounding board (TLPI facilitator). Each input is described briefly in the section that follows.

Input 1: The Inquiry-Based Process for Creating a Trauma-Sensitive School

TLPI's inquiry-based process is a translation of key theoretical insights from organizational change literature, adapted to help educators answer the following question: “How can I make my school trauma sensitive?” The process relies on several core concepts, including learning together, coalition building, identifying priorities, action planning, and evaluation. The process is iterative and ongoing, and is organized according to four essential questions designed to “stimulate the deep thinking and collaboration needed to empower building leaders to better address the unique needs of their own students and staff” (Cole et al., 2013; see Figure 1). The goal of the process is for schools to become trauma-sensitive learning communities in which new ideas and expansive thinking are nurtured, and where synergy and teamwork make it possible for complex issues to be explored.

Unlike some education programs that emphasize fidelity to a pre-established template, TLPI's inquiry-based process is not about providing educators with predetermined “answers.” Rather, it is about supporting educators as they ask and think through questions that guide a journey toward sustainable changes in school culture. TLPI developed these questions based on the work of theorists who suggest how organizations achieve successful transformations (Senge, 2006; Preskill and Torres, 1999). The demonstration schools in this study were invited to apply the underlying principles embodied in the process in a way that fit the context of their schools and the needs of their students and staff. The study will, therefore, not seek to learn whether each school implemented the process in a lockstep way but, rather, whether the process (and the other inputs described next) helped educators make decisions and take actions consistent with the underlying organizational change principles. That said, this study also examines how much variability the inquiry-based process can accommodate.

Essential Questions of the Inquiry-Based Process

The inquiry-based process consists of four essential questions and related activities (see Figure 1).

Question 1: Why do we feel an urgency to become a trauma-sensitive school?

The literature suggests that the effort to become trauma sensitive—or to undertake any sustainable change in an organization’s culture—must be fueled by a strong sense of motivation (Dymnicki, Wandersman, Osher, Grigorescu, & Huang, 2014; Kotter, 1996). The purpose of this first question (and its associated activities) is to assist educators in converting the sense of urgency that individual staff members may feel about becoming a trauma-sensitive school into a foundation for getting the whole staff invested. The goal is for educators to form a small but growing coalition (or steering committee) that includes school leaders and is able to clearly articulate why addressing the impacts of trauma on learning will help to achieve the staff’s major priorities for the school and its students. It is critical that the steering committee engage deeply with this question in preparation for introducing trauma sensitivity to the whole staff in a thoughtful and effective way.

Question 2: How do we know we are ready to create a trauma-sensitive action plan?

After providing opportunities for the whole staff to engage in shared learning about the prevalence and impact of trauma, and what it means to become a trauma-sensitive school, the principal and steering committee take the temperature of the staff. Do a critical number of staff share the steering committee’s sense of urgency? Is there a shared understanding of trauma and its impacts? Are enough staff committed to the vision of becoming a trauma-sensitive school? In determining whether staff members are ready to engage in implementing an action plan, leaders also assess whether staff have identified and coalesced around short-term, achievable priorities that will lead the school toward trauma sensitivity.

Question 3: What actions will address staff priorities and help us become a trauma-sensitive school?

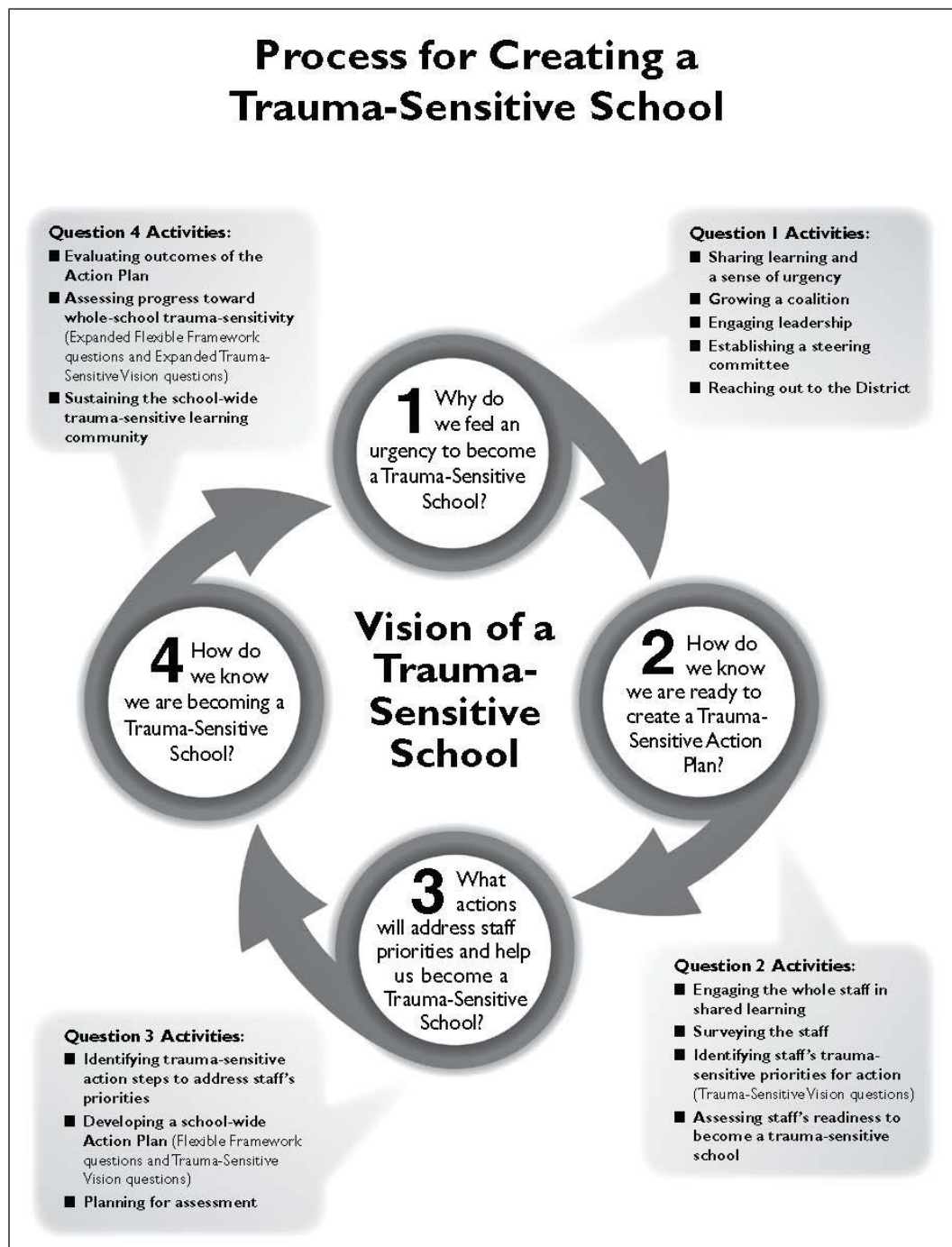
The steering committee translates all of the staff’s thinking, ideas, and conversations into a plan for concrete action. It determines which staff priorities should be addressed first, and brainstorms a set of actions for each priority that will help the school become more trauma sensitive. TLPI has developed two tools that the steering committee can use as it takes steps toward whole-school trauma sensitivity: the Trauma-Sensitive Vision Questions and the Flexible Framework Questions (see Table 1). The steering committee also develops a plan to assess the effectiveness of implementation. To continue to promote staff buy-in and ownership, the

action plan is presented to the whole staff for feedback, so that the school is informed and ready to take action.

Question 4: How do we know whether we are becoming a trauma-sensitive school?

Answering this question begins with the steering committee's assessment of the effectiveness of the school's action plan. From there, the steering committee begins to assess the broader culture change that it has hypothesized will begin to take place in the school. The steering committee is encouraged to consider two types of data when developing its action plan: qualitative changes in school practices and the behaviors of staff and students, which can be documented and tracked over time, and student and school outcome data that reflect the school's overall climate and culture (e.g., attendance, office referrals, and other student discipline measures; academic achievement; family engagement). It is helpful to share these data with all staff to celebrate gains and generate buy-in among those who initially might not have been on board. Based on this assessment, the steering committee can refine its action plan or identify new priorities as it reengages in the planning process all over again.

Figure 1. TLPI’s Inquiry-Based Process for Creating a Trauma-Sensitive School⁵



⁵ This depiction of the model is from TLPI’s book, *Creating and Advocating for Trauma-Sensitive Schools: Safe, Supportive School Environments That Benefit All Children (Helping Traumatized Children Learn, Vol. 2)*. (2013). Boston, MA: Massachusetts Advocates for Children, p.32.

Input 2: The Flexible Framework and Trauma-Sensitive Vision Questions

TLPI has developed two key tools to facilitate educators' use of its inquiry-based process and help steering committees ensure that action plans are pointed in the direction of whole-school trauma sensitivity. Figure 1 indicates points in the inquiry-based process at which educators might find each tool particularly useful.

Flexible Framework Questions. These questions are designed to support whole-school culture change by helping educators “cover the bases” and ensure that trauma sensitivity is infused into each aspect of the school. The questions inquire about six familiar and important school operations that educators should keep in mind as they implement trauma sensitivity on a schoolwide basis.⁶ The idea is to ensure that every critical area of operations is taken into consideration when generating ideas, considering actions, and tailoring solutions to fit the school's community and the prioritized needs of its students. The questions also are designed to help identify institutional barriers and strengths that may become relevant as the school works to achieve its intended goals.

Trauma-Sensitive Vision Questions. These questions are based on the six attributes of a trauma-sensitive school. They are designed to encourage active reflection and thoughtful inquiry of ways to achieve the vision of a trauma-sensitive school. These questions also serve as a reminder to keep this vision at the forefront as schools identify priorities and plan, implement, and evaluate their action plans. (Both sets of questions are included in Table 1.)

⁶ The six familiar school operations that comprise the Flexible Framework and the questions based on this framework originally were developed from a combination of input from experienced school administrators and insights from organizational change theory. After its publication in *Helping Traumatized Children Learn, Volume 1*, the Flexible Framework has been used and refined by dozens of schools in Massachusetts, has been incorporated into multiple statewide laws and policies (see Chapter 3 in *Helping Traumatized Children Learn, Volume 2*), and is now enshrined as a statewide framework with the passage of the Safe and Supportive Schools Framework statute in Massachusetts in 2014.

Table 1. TLPI Tools: Flexible Framework Questions and Trauma-Sensitive Vision Questions

WHOLE SCHOOL	TRAUMA SENSITIVE
Flexible Framework Questions	Trauma-Sensitive Vision Questions
<p>Purpose: Help educators infuse trauma sensitivity into each aspect of school operations.</p>	<p>Purpose: Help educators keep the attributes of trauma sensitivity in clear view as they identify priorities, and then plan and implement their actions.</p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What role does school and/or district leadership play in implementation? 2. What professional development is necessary for implementation? 3. What resources, supports, or services need to be in place for students, families, and/or staff? 4. What classroom strategies—both academic and nonacademic—support implementation? 5. What policies, procedures, or protocols do we need to review, revise, and/or develop? 6. What do we need to do to ensure that families are active partners in helping with implementation? 	<p>How will addressing a given priority or taking a specific action:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Deepen our shared understanding of trauma’s impacts on learning and the need for a schoolwide approach? 2. Help the school effectively support all students to feel safe—physically, socially, emotionally, and academically? 3. Address students’ needs in holistic ways, taking into account their relationships, self-regulation, academic competence, and physical and emotional well-being? 4. Explicitly connect students to the school community and provide them with multiple opportunities to practice newly developing skills throughout the school? 5. Support staff’s capacity to work together as a team with a sense of shared responsibility for every student? 6. Help the school anticipate and adapt to the ever-changing needs of students and the surrounding community?

Input 3: A Sounding Board

The third TLPI input offered to the demonstration schools is the support of a facilitator to serve as a thinking partner or “sounding board.” The purpose is to provide the school principal and steering committee with regular opportunities for reflection, support, feedback, problem solving, brainstorming, and planning. (See Appendix A for a description of the facilitation package.) The sounding board also offers school leaders an opportunity to step back and look at the big picture, addressing any barriers or challenges as they emerge. In addition, the sounding board provides guidance by posing reflective questions, such as “How do you think it’s going?”

and “Where do you want to take this now?” The presence of the sounding board also helps keep the effort to become trauma sensitive on the front burner.

Although the inquiry-based process is not a program to be implemented with checklist fidelity, TLPI did provide a facilitation package to each demonstration school that outlined in general terms the steps associated with engaging in the process and the amount of time anticipated for the sounding board to spend with the steering committees as they completed the various steps. The 2-year facilitation package was presented as a jumping-off point, a set of general guidelines to assist with planning, but was not intended as a rigid template to be strictly followed. It included three general phases: (1) an initial planning phase at the beginning of Year 1, (2) an initial implementation and evaluation phase, which began midway through Year 1, and (3) ongoing implementation and evaluation in Year 2. Taking the cue from the schools in terms of what would work best regarding frequency and duration of meetings, the facilitation schedule was adapted and each school developed its own schedule for steering committee meetings, which the sounding board attended regularly. In fact, TLPI overestimated the number of monthly meetings required and the amount of time the sounding board would spend with steering committees. The range of hours the sounding board spent on-site for Steering Committee meetings ranged from 16-25 hours in year 1 and 4-12 hours in Year 2 (See Appendix D for the amount of time the sounding board spent in each school).

In addition to the consultation that occurred during the year, TLPI held two cross-school retreats that brought together educators from all the schools’ steering committees to hear about the work being done at individual schools and to share ideas. These retreats were well received by educators.

Theory of Change

TLPI hypothesizes that educators can transform the culture of their school by engaging in a staff-driven process of inquiry that focuses on identifying local priorities and needs and generating locally tailored solutions. According to its theory of change, as educators engage in a dynamic process of inquiry (using tools that encourage a focus on the six trauma-sensitive attributes and key school operations), they will develop a deep understanding of trauma’s impact on learning and experience shifts in thinking. These shifts in thinking will lead to changes in practices that embed trauma sensitivity into a school’s daily operations. The move to trauma-sensitive practices will, in turn, lead to improved school climate and culture outcomes (e.g., improved student behavior, fewer discipline referrals) and, ultimately, increased student achievement.

This hypothesis is based on the following underlying assumptions, which TLPI elicited from research on organizational change, trauma theory, and the professional experience and wisdom of multiple education leaders:

- When educators have a better understanding of the impact of traumatic experiences and are given the requisite time and support, they can create safe and supportive trauma-sensitive schools.
- When educators are empowered to identify the priorities they feel are most urgent and the kinds of outcome measures (both quantitative and qualitative) that will provide meaningful sources of evidence for their decision making, they often feel a greater sense of investment and therefore are effective in efforts to improve their schools.
- When educators engage in action planning organized by their basic operational functions, they can identify the strikingly similar actions that cut across multiple initiatives associated with creating safe, healthy, and supportive environments. This allows them to integrate multiple initiatives, thereby increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of their efforts.
- By engaging in a process of continually reflecting, assessing progress, and adjusting their actions, educators can develop a foundation of integrated learning and experience. This leads to increased motivation and a deepened understanding of this work, propelling their schools to foster effective and sustainable actions.
- The resulting trauma-sensitive learning community will benefit all students, regardless of whether they have had overwhelming life experiences.

Context and Research Questions

Study Questions

This study was intended to help understand what transformation looks like as schools undertake TLPI's inquiry-based process to become trauma sensitive. It addressed the following overarching research questions related to school and district readiness, implementation, and outcomes and sustainability.

School Readiness

Research Question 1. What core contextual and readiness components are in place to support educators' ability to address trauma's impact on learning at the beginning of a school's involvement in the inquiry-based process?

Implementation

Research Question 2. Is the inquiry-based process helpful, easy to follow, and effective in developing a trauma-sensitive, whole-school action plan that contains measurable outcomes and addresses staff priorities?

Outcomes

Research Question 3. To what extent does the action plan move schools closer to becoming trauma-sensitive (as defined by the trauma-sensitive attributes)? In what ways? Were there unintended outcomes, both positive and negative?

Sustainability

Research Question 4. What factors are important to have in place to sustain school action plans? What are the greatest challenges that key stakeholders identify in sustaining their action plan?

Methodology

Recruitment

TLPI recruited five demonstration schools. Recruitment began with TLPI identifying and reaching out to 35 schools that had already expressed an interest in becoming trauma sensitive. TLPI then initiated a selection process by sending out a recruitment letter that informed potential participants about the goals of the study, as well as a brief application designed to gain a sense of the schools' interests, goals, and needs related to trauma sensitivity. To help schools make an informed decision about participating in the study, the application packet also included a description of the consultation package offered by TLPI. Of the 35 schools that were recruited, 15 indicated an interest in the study and applied to participate. TLPI reviewed each application and assessed each school's readiness to engage in a whole-school transformation process, using a conceptualization of readiness that was informed by the literature. TLPI selected eight schools as potential partners and conducted interviews with a small team from each school. The primary focus of the interviews was to further assess each school's readiness to engage in a whole-school transformation process, based on six readiness indicators (understanding, urgency and motivation, supports and barriers to implementation, time, other initiatives, and leadership commitment). Following the interviews, TLPI prepared readiness reports for each potential school and selected five demonstration schools based on its review of these data.

Data Collection Sources and Methods

The data presented in this report reflect project activities undertaken by TLPI and the demonstration schools, between April 2015 (when TLPI started the application process) and September 2017. The following data sources were used for this report.

Project documents: Project documents generated for this study include the initial application, notes from the readiness assessment conducted by TPLI, TLPI meeting synthesis notes, and TLPI school reports.

Interviews and focus groups: During site visits to each school AIR conducted interviews and focus groups with school leaders, steering committee members, and staff at the five demonstration schools. The interviews and focus groups were designed to gain an understanding of how school staff experienced the inquiry-based process and to obtain contextual information about implementation during the study. Interviews were conducted with school leaders, and focus groups were conducted with the school's steering committee and staff who were not part of the steering committee. These sessions lasted from 30 minutes to 1 hour and were recorded with participants' permission. The recordings were transcribed to ensure the accuracy of the information collected. In addition to the site visits, TLPI facilitators conducted follow-up interviews with school leaders at the beginning of the 2016–17 and 2017–18 school years. During these interviews, school leaders were given the opportunity to reflect on their trauma-sensitive work.

Staff survey: A staff survey was developed to assess the extent to which school staff felt that their school was beginning to exhibit the six attributes of trauma sensitivity.⁷ All of the demonstration schools participated in the survey.

School-generated resources: We examined school artifacts that included school action plans, meeting minutes, and tools to support the understanding of trauma sensitivity.

Video footage: TLPI gathered video footage of staff, from some schools, describing their journey to becoming trauma-sensitive learning environments

⁷ These attributes are (1) leadership and staff **share an understanding** of trauma's impacts on learning and the need for a schoolwide approach; (2) the school supports **all students to feel safe** physically, socially, emotionally, and academically; (3) the school **addresses student needs in holistic ways**, taking into their account their relationships, self-regulation, academic competence, and physical and emotional well-being; (4) the school **explicitly connects students to the school community** and provides multiple opportunities to practice newly developing skills; (5) the school **embraces teamwork**, and staff share responsibility for all students; and (6) leadership and staff **anticipate and adapt** to the ever-changing needs of students.

Data Analysis

Data from focus groups and interviews were recorded and transcribed for accuracy. These data, along with the project documents, were coded using a coding scheme that aligned with the research questions and interview protocols. Data were coded by two coders using NVivo qualitative software. Coders were trained on and used a structured coding protocol to ensure coding consistency. Once coded, data were examined for key themes and patterns of responses within and across schools.

Study Limitations

This study is descriptive. As a result, it does not allow us to make causal conclusions about the impact of the inquiry-based process on short- and long-term outcomes. However, it does permit us to identify areas of progress as they relate to schools' action plans and to generate hypotheses regarding the connection between the inquiry-based process and outcomes.

Participating Schools

This section describes the five demonstration schools. It begins by presenting enrollment and demographic data, followed by a brief description of the context for each school (see Tables 2 and 3).

Table 2. Participating Schools, by Grade Level and Enrollment

School	Grade Level	Enrollment
School A	K–5	900+
School B	K–5	350+
School C	6–12	400+
School D	PK–4	800+
School E	K–5	450+

Source: Massachusetts Department of Education, 2015–16 School and District Profiles. Available at <http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/>

The demonstration schools were diverse in terms of student demographics and student achievement (see Table 3).

Table 3. Student Demographic Categories, by Percentage and School Accountability and Assistance Levels (2015–16 School Year)

Category	School A	School B	School C	School D	School E
African-American	35.6%	6%	10.2%	2.9%	4.6%
Latino	44.8%	6.8%	35.7%	23.2%	0.7%
White	13.7%	83.5%	48.6%	65.4%	85.4%
Asian	0.3%	1.0%	5.5%	1.5%	7.4%
Native American	0.8%	0%	0.0%	0.3%	0.0%
Multirace, Non-Hispanic/Latino	4.8%	2.8%	0.0%	6.4%	1.7%
Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander	0.0%	0%	0.0%	0.1%	0.2%
Free or Reduced-Price Lunch Eligibility ⁸	85%	37%	40%	60%	13%
Students With Disabilities	11.7%	22.8	17.9%	16.3%	12.0%
English Language Learners	32.1%	0.0%	3.8%	7.5%	3.54%
Average Class Size	20	16	18	24.1	20.4
Accountability and Assistance Level ⁹	3	2	1	3	2

Source: Massachusetts Department of Education, 2015–16 School and District Profiles. Available at <http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/>

Individual School Profiles

The following school profiles reflect the context of the schools at the beginning of the study (i.e., the 2015–16 school year)

School A: This school serves more than 900 students in Grades K–5 and has 55 professional staff. In September 2015, a new leadership team was put in place.

The application to become a demonstration school stated that School A is seen as a “school of programs,” and that there is a limited sense of unity among the staff as “School A staff teaching School A students.” The school described itself in its application as a “large urban elementary

⁸ The data on Free or Reduced-Price Lunch Eligibility reflects the metric that was being used at the start of the study. The state is now using a new metric—Economically Disadvantaged.

⁹ All Massachusetts schools and districts with sufficient data are classified into one of five accountability and assistance levels (1–5), with the highest performing in Level 1 and lowest performing in Level 5.

school ... with a complex learning community.” In addition to general education classrooms, it offers five specialized programs, including a dual language program and a classroom for emotionally impaired students. School leaders indicated that combining staff from two different schools and providing so many district-based programs when the school first opened resulted in staff typically seeing themselves as tied to the program in which they work.

School B: This school is located in a large town. It serves more than 400 students in Grades K–5, has 35 professional staff, and includes a substantially separate program for students needing significant special education supports. In its application, the school described the struggles it has faced because of the town’s increased socio-economic needs and the addition of the substantially separate program. The school currently has approximately 25 students in the substantially separate program, which accesses the entire school environment through many inclusive practices. School B staff have been working on developing inclusive practices over the past 10 years.

School C: This school serves a little over 400 students in Grades 6–12 through a lower school (Grades 6–8) and an upper school (Grades 9–12) model. The school serves students from the city, along with students from surrounding communities. There are 43 professional staff.

School C serves a diverse population, with a college preparatory program for students in Grades 6 through 12. The school’s enrollment has increased significantly since it was opened and is expected to continue to increase over the next 5 years. School leaders stated in their post-application interview with TLPI that their primary reason for participating in the study was to find a way to retain all their students through graduation. They are not satisfied if any student leaves their school. The school also has been working to decrease its “discipline events.”

School D: The school was originally designated PK–2, but in the first year of the demonstration project, it moved into a new building and added Grades 3 and 4 (which had previously been part of the middle school). Twenty-five new staff from Grades 3 and 4 joined from the middle school, where there was a very different culture regarding student expectations and a focus on a behaviorist approach. The school now has 45 professional staff and serves over 850 students—a number that increased substantially during the school year. According to school leaders, many of the new students presented with high needs, as their families moved to town seeking better services than they were receiving in specialized classrooms in neighboring school districts. However, no additional resources were available, even with this increased demand. The 2015–16 school year started out understaffed because of budget constraints, and the increases in student numbers were not accompanied by staff increases. As a result, all the classroom sizes are quite large (numbering close to 28–30 students per classroom), and there are no instructional assistants available due to budget cuts. In fact, the resources available to

support School D were the thinnest resource set of any of the demonstration schools in the study.

In the application, School D described its town as “a small community with big city problems.” Those problems include poverty, abuse, neglect, homelessness, opioid abuse, and hunger. According to school leaders, the school has a transient population, where students are leaving, and new students are joining the school throughout the school year. These students generally require specialized programs to close learning gaps and ensure future success in school.

School E: This school serves a little over 400 students in Grades K–5 and has 31 professional staff. It also offers the Student Support Program, which provides special education supports through pullout and inclusion services for elementary students from across the district with social, emotional, and behavioral disabilities.

The school’s application noted the following: “The district has identified that the most common characteristics of students needing the high level of support provided through the Student Support Program...have trauma histories.” School E presently uses a building leadership team model. This team meets twice a month to build the foundation of a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS), with positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) for all students. The leadership team includes representation from all grade levels, general education, special education, a school psychologist, the principal, the assistant principal, and a paraprofessional, and hopes also to include a parent representative. The school selected this team of educators to lead the effort in the school.

Key Findings

Key Findings: Readiness

Research Question 1. What core contextual and readiness components are in place to support educators' ability to address trauma's impact on learning at the beginning of a school's involvement in the inquiry-based process?

Implementation science suggests that the conditions that exist when an organization decides to implement a new program or reform effort are malleable and key to success and sustainability. An important precursor is that an organization is “ready” for change. Readiness refers to “the extent to which an organization is both willing and able to implement a particular practice” (Dymnicki et al., 2014). Readiness (or lack thereof) influences the extent to which a new program or practice will take hold and be sustained (Elias et al., 2003; Osher, 2018). Even the best interventions risk failure or poor implementation fidelity in schools that are not ready for implementation. Lack of readiness may also undermine school improvement efforts.

After reviewing applications from a number of schools, TLPI selected 8 for on-site interviews. These interviews provided the opportunity for TLPI to conduct a readiness assessment with a small team of staff at each school (see Appendix B). The composition of the teams varied (e.g., teachers, a district leader, support staff), but all teams included school administrators. This assessment was informed by the R = MC² heuristic, where R = **R**eadiness; M = **M**otivation, or the willingness to adopt a new practice and the perceived incentives and disincentives of participating in the study; and C² = **C**apacities - *General Organizational C*apacities to implement the inquiry-based process, given the existing culture and climate; and *Intervention-Specific C*apacities, or the human, fiscal, and technical capacity to support implementation (Dymnicki et al., 2014). Schools were rated *Yes*, *Partial*, or *No* for the following indicators (see Table 4):

1. **Understanding** the inquiry-based process and how it could be used to bring about schoolwide trauma sensitivity
2. **A sense of urgency and motivation** to become a trauma-sensitive school
3. Elements of the school’s climate and culture that might **support or pose barriers to implementation**¹⁰
4. The extent to which schools had the **time** to meet or were committed to setting aside the time to fully engage in the process
5. The extent to which **other initiatives** were aligned with or would compete with this work¹¹
6. **Leadership** commitment

Table 4 provides an overview of the findings of the readiness assessment for each school. It is followed by a summary of how readiness evolved at the schools.

Table 4. Assessment of School Readiness at the Beginning of Years 1 and 2

School	Year	Motivation		Organizational Capacity			
		Understanding	Urgency and Motivation	Supports	Time	Alignment w/Other Initiatives	Leadership
School A	Y1	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Y2	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
School B	Y1	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Y2	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
School C	Y1	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Y2	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
School D	Y1	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Y2	Yes	Yes	Partial	Partial	Partial	Yes
School E	Y1	Partial	Yes	Yes	Partial	Yes	Partial
	Y2	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

¹⁰ A “yes” indicates that those elements might support implementation and not pose barriers

¹¹ A “yes” indicates that existing initiatives are aligned with this work and are not competing

Box 1 presents the key findings regarding readiness. These findings are consistent with the literature on readiness.

Box 1. Key Findings on Readiness

- Although schools varied in terms of the path they took (e.g., size and composition of the steering committee, resources, action plans), all six readiness indicators—understanding, urgency and motivation, supports and barriers to implementation, time, alignment with other initiatives, and leadership commitment— needed to be in place for the inquiry-based process to proceed as planned.
- Readiness proved to be a developmental and dynamic process that evolved over time. At two schools, the level of readiness changed significantly during the study (i.e., there was an increase or decrease in readiness on one or more indicators), particularly their organizational capacity to implement the process.
- Although there are no initial demands for material resources to implement the inquiry-based process, schools need to have the resources to meet the basic educational needs of students (e.g., sufficient teachers and support staff). Not having these basic resources interferes with a school’s ability to prioritize this work.

Although schools varied in terms of the path they took (e.g., size and composition of the steering committee, identified urgencies, action steps), all six readiness indicators needed to be in place for the inquiry-based process to proceed as planned. Regardless of potentially challenging contextual factors (e.g., staff reluctance, limited resources, a new leadership team), the six readiness indicators (understanding, urgency and motivation, supports and barriers, time, alignment with other initiatives, and leadership) needed to be in place for the process to proceed effectively. At the start of the study, all but one school demonstrated full readiness to implement the inquiry-based process (see Table 4). At these schools, administrators and staff were familiar with the process, through prior training or consultation with TLPI, and understood that this was a whole-school approach. These schools also demonstrated strong leadership commitment and were dedicated to allocating the necessary time to carry out this work. Although all of the schools were involved in other initiatives (e.g., PBIS, social-emotional learning [SEL], response to intervention [RTI]), participation in these initiatives was not initially seen as a barrier to implementation because the work was viewed as being aligned with these programs. For example, a participant at one school reported: *“I think we’ve probably made a very conscious effort with this new initiative to make it aligned with our PBIS that was already in place.”* Another noted, *“...some of the work that we had been doing really aligned nicely with getting on board with [the inquiry-based process].”*

Readiness proved to be a developmental and dynamic process that evolved over time. At two schools, the level of readiness changed during the study (i.e., there was an increase or decrease in readiness on one or more indicators). These changes had a significant impact on their engagement with the process.

School D: From Ready to Partially Ready: School D started the study understaffed due to budget constraints; in fact, its resources were the thinnest of all the demonstration schools. However, all readiness indicators were in place. The principal was committed and had a solid understanding of this work, there was a strong sense of urgency to build staff cohesion and staff capacity to support students' social and emotional needs (the school was originally PK–2 but during the first year of the demonstration project it moved to a new building and added Grades 3–4), leadership agreed to set aside the time for the steering committee to meet, and this work was aligned with their other initiatives (e.g., PBIS). The school successfully used the process to develop and begin implementing an action plan. However, by the end of the first year, the resource deficits began to take a toll on staff. These budget and resource constraints persisted into Year 2 and were primarily the result of a growing student population, which resulted in larger class sizes (close to 28–30 students per classroom). This was coupled with a decrease in instructional assistance from paraprofessionals. Thus, School D found itself in a position where the depletion of resources, particularly those designed to support students with high levels of need, coincided with an increase in the number of these students.

In addition, a competing priority was introduced during Year 2, which had significant implications for the school's readiness. Specifically, the school was identified by the state's Department of Education as being in danger of being designated a turnaround school, and therefore in need of intervention. This status required staff to devote their already limited time and focus to planning how to address this issue. Thus, although the readiness factors related to urgency and motivation, and commitment on the part of leadership remained unchanged, readiness factors related to the school's organizational capacity – supports and barriers to implementation, other initiatives, and time –suffered a setback, and the focus on their action plan activities took a back seat to more immediate needs.

School E: From Partially Ready to Ready: At the start of the study, School E demonstrated partial readiness on three key indicators: (1) understanding—unlike the other schools, the leadership at School E did not have previous training or exposure to TLPI's whole-school approach to trauma sensitivity; (2) time—uncertainty about the amount of time that would be available to do this work due to the focus on another initiative (MTSS); and (3) motivation—at School E, the application process was initiated and completed by a district administrator on behalf of the school. Leaders at School E were not the primary drivers of this work, which made it more challenging to assess their motivation to participate in the study. However, the

presence of some readiness indicators suggested to TLPI that the school could successfully use the inquiry-based process to move toward trauma sensitivity. First, there was a sense of urgency and motivation from the school leadership team who believed that this work could help advance their school improvement goals. Next, the school's culture and climate already involved a focus on the whole child and there was district and school support for creating a safe and supportive learning environment. Finally, the MTSS work was aligned with the school's goals of creating a trauma-sensitive school. Although TLPI had some initial concerns about the amount of time that would be allocated to the inquiry-based process, the decision to move forward was based on the understanding that the work would be integrated such that both the work toward trauma sensitivity and MTSS could be addressed during the one meeting time allocated to both initiatives. Over time, the limitations associated with the readiness indicators of understanding and organizational capacity (i.e., time) proved difficult to overcome, and the process did not gain momentum at this school during the first year.

During Year 2, School E experienced a change in leadership. The new principal expressed an interest in this work and the process started over. A new readiness assessment revealed that the school was in a better position to move forward. The principal demonstrated a solid understanding of the need for a whole-school approach and was committed to this work as evidenced by the allocation of time for a steering committee to meet, that was focused solely on trauma sensitivity. By the end of the study period, the school had developed new action steps and was on its way to implementing these actions to create a more safe and supportive environment. These findings underscore the importance of leadership's understanding of the process as a tool for whole-school change and commitment to this work, as well as the need for the inquiry-based process to have its own time and space.

School A, School B, and School C: Increased Readiness: Each of the remaining three schools started the study with all six readiness indicators in place. At these schools, all of the leaders were familiar with TLPI's work, and this familiarity helped to solidify their commitment to implementing the inquiry-based process. Their school teams were described as *"very much on board," "highly engaged,"* and *"ready to do whatever it takes."* These schools also experienced changes in some of the indicators over time. Specifically, there was a deepening in the understanding of what it means to be trauma-sensitive. This started with TLPI's initial presentation of the impact of trauma on learning, which set the foundation for creating a shared understanding about trauma sensitivity. The shared understanding also developed as the work in each school moved beyond the leadership and the steering committee and was communicated and adopted schoolwide (to varying degrees) as the study progressed.

During Year 2, as these 3 schools began to implement their action plans and experience success, there also was an increase in staff motivation, buy-in, and engagement. This was

apparent as staff began to take more ownership of the work and the need for the sounding board decreased.

Key Findings: Implementation

Research Question 2. Is the inquiry-based process helpful, easy to follow, and effective in developing a trauma-sensitive, whole-school action plan that contains measurable outcomes and addresses staff priorities?

An important goal of this study was to understand the school's experiences implementing the inquiry-based process. In this section we describe essential factors that supported implementation of the process, the usefulness of the tools, and the role of the TLPI sounding board. These findings (provided in Box 2) provide key insights for TLPI and schools interested in using the process to become trauma sensitive and reflect lessons learned from the schools as they worked through the process.

Box 2. Key Implementation Findings—Essential Factors for Implementation

Each of the schools progressed through the inquiry-based process at their own pace. These schools administered post-training surveys and used the data to identify schoolwide priorities that were agreed upon by staff. They also developed and implemented trauma-sensitive action plans that included actionable and achievable action steps (see Appendix C). Essential factors that supported implementation included:

- **Readiness** (described in the preceding section)
- **A strong commitment from school leadership:** School leaders demonstrated commitment by providing ongoing support, and the necessary time, infrastructure, and resources for staff to engage in the inquiry-based process.
- **Building a shared understanding of trauma sensitivity:** All schools began the process with a presentation on the impact of trauma on learning, behavior and relationships at school, and the need for trauma sensitive schools. This initial professional development proved critical in helping schools to develop a shared understanding of the impact of trauma on teaching and learning and the need for a whole school approach.
- **The inquiry-based process requires its own time and space:** The inquiry-based process must be given equal priority as other initiatives, especially in the beginning stages, for it to gain traction in the school and address the four Essential Questions of the inquiry-based process.
- **Having a trauma-sensitive steering committee is critical:** A key way in which schools prioritized this work was through their trauma-sensitive steering committee. It was found that for the committee to be successful, it had to have the explicit role of leading the school’s trauma-sensitive efforts with members who are motivated to lead the change process.
- **Flexibility:** The process is flexible enough to adapt to the unique context and needs of each school.
- **Teacher involvement:** The process is more efficient when general education teachers (if not on the steering committee) are engaged in developing the action plan.
- **Early successes:** As part of the action planning phase, staff were encouraged to identify action steps that were manageable and targeted the “low hanging fruit.” As a result, staff experienced immediate benefits of some of their actions. Experiencing positive outcomes helped to build confidence, buy-in, and engagement, which assisted in moving the work forward.

Essential factors that support successful implementation of the inquiry-based process

Three schools successfully worked through the essential questions outlined in the inquiry-based process and were fully engaged in the process throughout the entire study period. At the remaining two schools, implementation did not occur as planned, primarily due to challenges related to organizational capacity as described in the earlier section. The changing dynamics at these two schools mirrored what generally happens when educators are faced with internal and external pressures. Taken together, the successes and challenges experienced at the schools presented a unique learning opportunity to gain critical insights into the conditions that are essential to enable schools to move toward trauma sensitivity using the inquiry-based process. The conditions were (1) readiness (described in the previous section), (2) a strong commitment from school leadership, (3) building a shared understanding of trauma sensitivity, (4) giving the inquiry-based process its own time and space, (5) establishing a trauma-sensitive steering committee, (6) flexibility, (7) teacher involvement in the steering committee, and (8) early successes.

A strong commitment from school leadership. Leadership commitment was essential for successful implementation. Although their motivation for implementing the inquiry-based process varied, common across all schools was the belief that school climate and culture affect student learning, resulting in a strong sense of urgency around improving the culture at their school. For example, one leader reported:

“As we got ready to come together, it was clear to me that the culture of the school was really the most important thing that I needed to have the minute we walked in the door when we all came here . . . And so, what this opportunity did for me, is give me that vehicle to work on the culture. We did some work last year, getting ready for the transition. But working with [the sounding board] on the Flexible Framework this year really is what pulled us together.”

Similarly, another school leader stated:

“So I think all of us kind of had some exposure to [trauma-sensitivity] and knew that this was something that we really felt could impact the culture and climate at [the school]. We didn’t have too much information coming in, but knew that that was going to be our number one focus for this year.”

School leaders were also motivated by the following: using the process to integrate various initiatives and ideas around student behavior management, developing more positive student–staff relationships, and establishing shared norms and consistent classroom management practices.

School leaders demonstrated this commitment in a number of ways including: establishing a steering committee, providing the time for staff to develop a shared understanding of trauma-sensitivity, allocating the necessary time and infrastructure for staff to engage in the inquiry-based process, reallocating resources to support the implementation of the school's action plan, ongoing engagement with the sounding board and steering committee, and being responsive to staff professional development needs. Staff comments also provided additional evidence of school leadership commitment to the process. For example, a participant at one school reported: *"I think [school administrators] completely put their whole hearts into [the school's efforts to become trauma sensitive] and have done everything that they can to support and to make it work."* A participant at another school noted, *"It's been really motivating to me to know that we have the support of administration. They want to do this, and they listen when we have trouble with it, so that's been really good."* In addition, school leaders were described as *"very involved"*, *"very supportive"* and *"invested"* in creating trauma sensitive schools.

Building a shared understanding of trauma sensitivity. All schools began the study by attending a presentation on trauma and trauma sensitivity. This presentation covered (among other elements) the prevalence of trauma, the ways in which trauma affects the brain, the various ways in which exposure to traumatic events might show up in students' behavior, relationships, or academic performance, the rationale for creating whole school trauma-sensitive learning environments, and the attributes that characterize a trauma-sensitive school. The gains in knowledge and reflection sparked by the initial, schoolwide professional development presentation played a key role in helping staff develop a shared understanding of the impact of trauma on teaching and learning. As is common with the change process, staff understanding emerged on different timelines and in different ways. However, staff across schools consistently commented on the value of this presentation. For example, it was reported that the presentation *"made a huge impact on a lot of people"* and was *"very eye-opening."* In addition, one participant reported: *"I think it's a good refresher for those of us that had already seen it or had taken the course. I think it's really nice to have everybody starting on the same page thinking about this before the school year starts."*

The information from the presentation also resonated with some staff to such an extent that they made immediate connections between the information and examples presented and their own work with specific students. Staff left with concrete takeaways regarding changes they would make in their classrooms. According to one participant, *"I thought I knew already about trauma, and I could envision how it might impact students. But I thought [the TLPI facilitator] had so much more information and more concrete things that I think about every day in the classroom and strategies that I could implement and did implement as a result of that training."*

This presentation also proved useful for those staff who had already heard it or had taken a course through the Lesley Institute for Trauma Sensitivity (LIFTS)¹² program (offered through their school district). These staff reported learning new things, and that the training served as a reminder of how challenging it is for some students to learn when they are under stress. It also helped them think about ways to improve interactions with their students.

The inquiry-based process requires its own time and space. The inquiry-based process must be given equal priority with other initiatives to gain traction, especially in the beginning stages. This meant having a dedicated time to focus on the work and developing a trauma-sensitive action plan. When these critical components were not in place, it was difficult to fully engage in the process. In addition, when this work was viewed as secondary to another initiative or as a strategy that could simply be integrated into existing activities without first allowing staff to engage in collaborative inquiry, subsequent activities seemed fragmented and sometimes disconnected from the goal of whole-school change (see Box 3). Another way in which the process must be given priority is through the development of a trauma-sensitive action plan.

A trauma-sensitive steering committee is critical. An integral part of the inquiry-based process is the establishment of a school steering committee. Whether schools elected to use an existing team/committee or establish a new one did not influence implementation. However, the function of the steering committee was important. Specifically, the committee's role and identity had to focus on trauma sensitivity, with members that were motivated to lead the process of change.¹³ At all of the schools, the committee was the driving force behind this work. As designed, the frequency of in-person meetings with the sounding board decreased over time, and the steering committees took ownership and continued to lead the work (see Appendix D for a description of the makeup of the school steering committees).

¹² These courses offered through LIFTS utilize TLPI's publications. This partnership between TLPI and Lesley University provides educators with complementary learning opportunities.

¹³ There were some variations among the schools' steering committees. Four of the five schools assembled a steering committee with the explicit purpose of leading the schools' efforts to become trauma sensitive in Year 1. At one of those schools, the leadership team took on the role of the steering committee, dedicating one leadership team meeting a month to this work, thus solidifying their identity as the trauma-sensitive steering committee. In Year 2, the fifth school, which had not created a steering committee that was focused solely on trauma-sensitivity in Year 1, created a new steering committee dedicated to developing a trauma-sensitive school.

Box 3. Allocating time and space: The inquiry-based process requires its own time and space (School E)

During Year 1, School E planned to bring together its already-established, grant-funded MTSS initiative with the trauma-sensitive steering committee work. The plan was designed to integrate the two teams—the MTSS and trauma-sensitive steering committee—into one committee. Staff completed the post-training trauma-sensitive survey and identified three priorities that staff wanted to address to become trauma sensitive. However, having been established as the MTSS committee, the MTSS team did not have an identity as a trauma-sensitive steering committee, and team members lacked the element of choice given that they did not “choose” to join the team (as was the case at the other schools). The MTSS meeting format was highly prescribed, with specific meeting protocols, time limits, roles, and so on, all related to moving the MTSS work forward, leaving little time for the flexibility needed to support the inquiry-based process. Thus, there were few opportunities to weave in discussions and work related to trauma sensitivity. Rather than making a separate action plan, the school had hoped to infuse trauma sensitivity into an existing school improvement plan. Without a separate action plan linked to identified priorities, it was difficult for the trauma-sensitive work to flourish. **This experience highlighted the need for separate time and space for the inquiry-based process to take root and be integrated into other initiatives.**

Using these important lessons learned, the sounding board worked with the school to restart the process during Year 2. The school resurveyed the staff and used these data to identify priorities (one from the previous year and a new priority). The school also established a new team that was designated as the trauma-sensitive steering committee. This team had the time to develop an action plan and brainstorm specific strategies. With these key components in place and the time dedicated to working on these goals, the team put its plan into action.

The process is flexible enough to adapt to the unique context and needs of each school. The inquiry-based process is a bottom-up approach that tolerates variability, allowing schools to adapt it to their own circumstances. Initially, this flexibility created ambivalence among some staff who were used to working with more structured initiatives or interventions. As schools worked through the process, it evolved over time into something with which they were comfortable. They could work at their own pace, with each school starting at a different time of the school year and implementing various elements of its action plan. This flexibility was seen at School A where the school chose to start its activities later in the school year but still made significant progress by the end of Year 1 (see Box 4). In addition, flexibility was required of the sounding board. For example, at School E, where there was little to no time available for staff to

work through the inquiry-based process and no trauma-sensitive steering committee to lead these efforts, the sounding board had to modify its approach. Its consultation went beyond work with the steering committee and included the following: meeting with the principal and district administrator to discuss time challenges and advocate for additional funding to support the extra time needed to do this work, meeting with the principal to further support her understanding of the inquiry-based process, and attending staff meetings. These efforts aimed to help move the school to a place where it would be better able to engage in the process. In addition, at School D, which was resource challenged, the sounding board's work involved supporting school leadership's efforts to advocate for their needs with the district.

Box 4. Flexibility: Going Slow to Go Fast (School A)

At School A, which implemented the inquiry-based process for the full 2 years, the work started later in the fall. The school had a brand-new leadership team that needed some time to get grounded and acclimated to the school before starting the process. The initial training was offered at the end of October (2015), and the first steering committee meeting was held mid-November. Despite this "late" start, once the school got started, it gained momentum, developed an action plan, and quickly moved into the implementation phase. By the end of Year 1, the school had accomplished almost all of the tasks in its action plan and even developed a brief staff survey to assess its efforts.

The process is based on having classroom teachers on the Steering Committee; if not possible, then these teachers should be involved in action planning. All schools had a designated group of staff who were identified as the trauma-sensitive steering committee. Each school determined the size and composition of its committee, and committees ranged in size from four to 14 members. At four of the five schools, the steering committee either represented a diverse cross-section of the school or consisted of members who worked directly with a broad group of staff and were aware of what was going on in the classrooms (see Appendix D. Composition of School Steering Committees). This meant including teachers from different grade levels, support staff (e.g., school psychologist, specialists, adjustment counselor), and school leadership. In one school, this also meant including a member of the vocal minority who was less supportive of this work. The fifth school did not have any classroom teachers represented on the steering committee. For this reason, leadership at this school made the decision to have all staff involved in developing the action plan to ensure teacher buy-in and ownership. The work seemed to move at a faster pace once teachers were involved. One school leader reported, *"The biggest takeaway to this that has been really powerful—and we had some fits and starts in the beginning—is just how much it needs to come from [teachers] to each other."* For most schools, the opportunity for this level of teacher

involvement was new and, as expected with any change, was sometimes uncomfortable and did not always go as smoothly as intended; however, schools were able to move past the initial challenges. As one participant pointed out, *“[During Year 1] we arrived at [an action step] that we really loved but it was a much more fraught kind of process. And this year, we were able to have people to go with what their interest areas are and then really sell it. It was a really fun process to be involved in and watch. So I feel like next year, we might be in that place too where the process happens more organically and people are really invested with it.”*

Early successes promoted engagement: As part of the action planning phase, staff were encouraged to identify action steps that were manageable and targeted the “low hanging fruit.” As a result, they experienced immediate benefits of some of their actions. Experiencing positive outcomes helped to build confidence, buy-in, and engagement, which helped to keep the work moving forward. For example, one participant reported, *“I think a part of that confidence is because we’ve seen things change. We have seen our plans kind of come to fruition and that’s been really exciting. I think that motivates us as a steering committee to say, okay, so what are we going to do next? We are able to get things done. And that feels really exciting.”* As designed, the level of sounding board support decreased over time: as one participant noted, *“I think we just aren’t relying on [TLPI] as heavily because we understand [the process]. We’re seeing changes.”*

Benefits of the Inquiry-Based Process and Tools

The inquiry-based process provided specific tools that schools could use to guide their journey to becoming trauma sensitive. This included the four Essential Questions of the inquiry-based process, which helped the school work through each phase of the process; the Flexible Framework Questions, which helped educators infuse trauma sensitivity into each aspect of school operations; and the Trauma-Sensitive Vision Questions, which helped educators keep the attributes of trauma sensitivity in mind as they identified priorities, and then planned and implemented their actions. The inquiry-based process proved useful in supporting schools in their journey to becoming trauma-sensitive schools and in setting the foundation for whole-school climate and culture change. Box 5 describes the reported benefits of the process and related tools.

Box 5. Key Implementation Findings—Benefits of the TLPI Inquiry-Based Process and Tools

- The process offered tools and a structure that helped schools take a more cohesive approach to school improvement, unlike previous efforts, which were described as fragmented.
- The tools were helpful and easy to use. Schools revisited the Trauma-Sensitive Vision Questions as needed to ensure that their actions were in line with the norms and values of a trauma-sensitive school.
- The process provided the structure for important conversations and reflection and gave permission for educators to think creatively about how to solve their problems.
- Participants at four of the five schools reported that the process helped to empower teachers. This was attributed to the bottom-up approach in which teachers were encouraged to think creatively about how to solve their school’s challenges and affect culture change.

The process offered tools and a structure that helped schools take a more cohesive approach to their school improvement efforts. As with many schools, the schools in this study had been engaged in an ongoing process of continuous improvement to support their students and promote academic achievement. As a result, school leaders had already bought into the notion that developing safe and supportive learning environments would contribute to achieving their goals. However, staff acknowledged that, in the past, these efforts were somewhat fragmented. Participants indicated that the inquiry-based process offered a cohesive strategy for their school improvement efforts by outlining a clear but flexible structure for them to follow. For example, one participant reported, *“If we didn't have an initiative where we had to create a plan and execute a plan, then it probably wouldn't have happened”* A participant at another school stated, *“This school has always tried to get at that whole student. It's nice that now we have this set way to do it. We have this protocol to use. As I said before, we tried different things and things would kind of fall by the wayside. But now, I think because we're in this program [with TLPI], things aren't allowed to fall by the wayside.”* In addition, another participant noted that the process was *“building on existing efforts, but it's a much more consistent and cohesive push.”*

The tools were helpful and easy to use. During Year 1, the Flexible Framework Questions and Trauma-Sensitive Vision Questions were used to guide decision making during each school’s action-planning process to ensure that the selected activities reflected the attributes of a trauma-sensitive school. For example, staff at one school reported that they were able to eliminate certain action steps after using the Trauma-Sensitive Vision Questions. At another school, the steering committee used the Trauma-Sensitive Vision Questions to help decide whether to continue using the existing classroom behavior management system or implement a

new one. In this case, the old system was examined against the six attributes of a trauma-sensitive school. One participant commented: *“We kept going back to [the Flexible Framework Questions and Trauma-Sensitive Vision Questions] in the beginning when we were setting the agenda and trying to make sure the action plan reflected a lot of those questions.”*

During the second year, three schools revisited the tools on an as-needed basis. Two of these schools continued to implement their original action plans and therefore did not need to return to the framework or vision questions. A participant at one of these schools indicated that the team had *“internalized”* the questions and always had them in mind when making decisions. A third school regularly revisited the vision questions. At this school staff continued to develop action plan activities, and teacher teams used the vision questions to identify action steps and advocate for their proposed projects. One participant noted, *“I think anytime that we're proposing a new action step, we revisit those questions and make sure that it's for the purpose of establishing a trauma-sensitive school that is safe and supportive for everybody.”*

The process provided the structure for important conversations and reflection and gave permission for schools to think creatively about how to solve their problems. The inquiry-based process provided the space and a structure for educators to talk to each other about their practice. By answering the Trauma-Sensitive Vision Questions, staff could articulate why particular practices were or were not trauma sensitive. The questions helped staff stay on course to address issues in line with the norms and values of a trauma-sensitive school. The TLPI sounding board noted that these discussions also seemed to lead to increased motivation and continuous momentum building among staff to make changes that were sometimes difficult, and that staff could engage in difficult conversations to discern the underlying tension about what needed to change and why. One participant described this experience, stating, *“It feels like a healthy dialogue to be able to say, well, I actually disagree with that and here's why. Again, those who disagree are a lot more focused on going back to why we have to do this.”*

The process also gave staff permission to think creatively about how to solve the challenges at their school. For example, one participant reported, *“I feel like doing this work has given us a little bit more of a backbone. I think even though a number of the staff members had this knowledge before, having a whole school effort and knowing that the district is supporting this study, if we open our minds a little bit more, look at this a little bit more deeply, and collaborate with other districts who are doing the same thing, then we'll come up with different ideas. And I think some of us have had creative ideas but maybe met resistance with them or felt like, am I allowed to do this?”*

The process empowered teachers and built shared ownership for school climate and culture change. The inquiry-based process was driven by a bottom-up approach in which schools took

charge for bringing about desired climate and cultural change. At four of the five schools, staff reported that the process led to teachers feeling more empowered, as evidenced by the emergence of teacher leaders who stepped forward to do this work. For example, an administrator at one school reported, *“A lot of teacher leaders have emerged, especially the ones who have taken the Lesley course. They were talking in a way that really highlighted how they integrated these practices into their teaching, into their classrooms.”* Evidence of teacher empowerment also was observed by staff in the conversations they had with each other. According to one participant, *“I think I’ve seen a greater sense of voice or empowerment from staff to be able to speak up in these meetings and reframe for each other.”* This level of participation and collaboration related to schoolwide decision making is uncommon in many schools. As such, allowing teachers to take the lead on this important task proved to be a positive learning experience for school leaders. For example, one school leader reported, *“What really stood out to me about this process was when they had this opportunity to brainstorm and come up with something, [teachers] were energized, they were excited. It’s like the best meetings that we’ve had. I think because they have created it, then there’s that ownership.”* Similarly, an administrator at another school stated, *“[The inquiry-based process] just gave a nice opportunity to recognize [teachers] and see some of their strengths, see them shine in a different way. It’s still striking that amount of energy that comes out of this when teachers are really given the opportunity to be creative. That’s exciting.”* Finally, another participant noted that the use of the tools helped to promote a bottom-up approach, where administrators were not the ones responsible for accepting or rejecting ideas. Instead, staff had to engage in a dialogue with each other, and use the vision questions, to determine whether an action was trauma sensitive. According to one administrator, *“The leadership relied on [the vision questions] so that the teachers could go through the process, and they’re the ones checking themselves rather than a top-down approach where we’re the ones judging whether or not something is trauma sensitive. So [teachers] were sort of forced to engage in this dialogue with each other and themselves. It was really helpful that way.”*

The Sounding Board

By design, the sounding board (i.e., a designated knowledgeable facilitator or thought partner) is an essential part of the inquiry-based process. The sounding board was critical in helping steering committees to stay focused, generate new ideas, and make progress toward the development and implementation of their action plans. The sounding board did this by supporting the schools in using the inquiry-based process, giving them permission to take time to discuss and grapple with their understanding of trauma-sensitive values and what this looks like in their school, and reminding them about the inquiry-based process tools (i.e., Trauma-Sensitive Vision Questions and Flexible Framework Questions). Findings from this study produced a more nuanced recognition of the critical role that the sounding board plays in

supporting steering committees, school leaders, and, in some cases, staff who are not on the committee. Box 6 presents the findings that emerged regarding the role of the sounding board.

Box 6. Key Implementation Findings—The Sounding Board

- The sounding board’s facilitation schedule with the schools was based on a developmental approach. By design, there were more frequent meetings scheduled with the sounding board during the first several months of the study. These meetings decreased in frequency during the second part of Year 1 and during Year 2 (see Appendix D). Over time, the steering committees’ capacity to implement the inquiry-based process increased, fostering a sense of ownership and confidence.
- The sounding board’s facilitation style proved critical to the success of this process. Participants identified several key attributes that helped to foster a positive and collaborative relationship with the sounding board, which were most beneficial in their efforts to becoming a trauma-sensitive school. These attributes were trust, knowledge and experience, strong facilitation skills, and flexibility.
- The sounding board, by continually supporting the school in using the inquiry-based process, played a critical role in fostering ownership among the steering committees, helping them to stay focused and generate new ideas, and supporting their progress through each part of the process.

The sounding board took a developmental approach in its work with the schools. At the start of the study, meetings were more frequent during the first several months of the study, decreasing in frequency during the second part of Year 1 and during Year 2, when each steering committee determined its own schedule/frequency of meetings. Over time, the steering committees’ capacity to implement the process increased, which fostered a sense of ownership and confidence. This capacity building was evidenced by the schools’ ability to maintain the momentum attained during Year 1, build on their efforts, and continue implementing their action plans during Year 2. This growth was attributed in part to the flexibility of the process and the fact that having a sounding board brought a level of accountability that encouraged schools to keep moving forward. As schools began working on their action plans and seeing results, their needs and relationship with the sounding board evolved. For example, during Year 2, one participant reported, *“I feel like last year, we were kind of like, ‘Help us, help us, please tell us what to do.’ This year, we’re taking more of an initiative to do a lot on our own.”* Similarly, a participant at another school stated, *“We don’t have nearly as much contact with [the Sounding Board] because I think we’ve grown a bit more comfortable and confident in our ability to train staff and to follow through on plans.”* Even where there were fewer meetings at some of the schools during the second year, schools appreciated having the access to the sounding board. According to one

participant, *“I think it’s still nice to have [access to the Sounding Board] It’s the idea of someone watching over you so you know that you’re still on the right track.”*

The sounding board’s facilitation style proved critical to the success of this process.

Participants identified several key attributes of the sounding board that helped to foster a positive and collaborative relationship and were most beneficial in their efforts to becoming a trauma-sensitive school. These attributes can be summed up by the following: **trust, knowledge and experience, strong facilitation skills, and flexibility.**

- Trust:** The ability to establish a trusting relationship with staff in the schools was key, especially at the beginning of the process. This trust made it possible for the sounding board to be viewed as *“a part of the team”* rather than an *“outsider.”* In addition, the sounding board was described as *“non-judgmental,” “unimposing,”* and engaged with staff in a *“nonthreatening”* way—characteristics that helped to foster a trusting relationship. The flexibility of the process also seemed to support trust building as it allowed schools to tailor their activities to their own circumstances and enabled the sounding board to work collaboratively with schools rather than imposing a rigid structure on their work. According to one participant, *“It didn’t feel like they were here and they were running the show. It just felt like everybody is in it together.”* In addition, data suggest that the sounding board’s interaction with schools modeled the core values of safety and support that staff were working to develop in their schools. This not only helped to create a more trusting environment in which schools could engage in this work, but also provided an example that school leaders and steering committee members could follow.
- Knowledge and Experience:** Participants felt that the sounding board brought a deep knowledge and understanding of the work. This included a deep understanding of trauma and its impact on learning, a strong background in student behavior and interpersonal relationships, and knowledge about program development. For example, one participant noted, *“Every time I listen to them I learn something new.”* In addition to knowledge, participants also noted that the sounding board brought *“real hands-on experience”* working in schools, which meant that they had a sense of what could and could not be done and brought a *“very realistic”* perspective to steering committee discussions. As a result, participants found the sounding board’s feedback to be thoughtful and driven by an understanding of the context of schools in general and their schools in particular. Finally, it was noted that being an external expert also carried weight. According to one participant, *“[School administrator] may be saying all the same stuff as the [Sounding Board]. But as soon as they say it, it’s heard and it’s amplified. It actually sinks in. Whereas, when internal folks say it, it doesn’t necessarily have the same bang.”*

- **Strong Facilitation Skills:** The sounding board was not a coach that came in to teach school staff how to implement the inquiry-based process. Instead, the sounding board served as a thought partner that facilitated each school’s journey through the process. Participants appreciated having someone in this role and identified key facilitation skills that they felt the sounding board had and that anyone in this role would need to promote success within the schools. These included an understanding of group dynamics, and the ability to synthesize, make meaning of, and reframe the conversation in a way that was optimistic and helped to keep the dialogue moving forward. For example, one participant reported the sounding board did a good job of *“identifying the strengths of the school, identifying the strengths of the members of the team and encouraging the development of those. [The Sounding Board] really picked up on the personality of the team members and would really consciously try to play to their strengths to pull them deeper into the work.”* Participants also described the importance of good listening skills and noted that the sounding board heard everyone’s ideas, made connections that staff did not see, and kept the conversation on track. According to one participant, *“I think [the Sounding Board] is good at kind of sitting back and taking things in and then offering some support, but doesn’t take over the situation. It’s more that they’re the facilitator, and they have a nice way of doing that, and allowing the group to do the work. But they know when to step in.”* Finally, participants noted that the sounding board’s approach involved listening and learning about their school’s context. As one participant pointed out, *“It’s really tough when someone else comes in and starts kind of telling you how it needs to be, but they don’t understand the dynamics of the school. So I like what [colleague] said about being the facilitator and listening to what’s going on at this school, which is going to be very different than what’s going on at another school.”* It is likely that this willingness to listen also contributed to the development of trust between the sounding board and the schools.
- **Flexibility:** The sounding board was viewed as flexible and adaptable. They also were experienced as having a solid understanding of how schools work and were therefore able to adapt to changes that occurred during the school year. According to one participant, *“[A good sounding board] has to have some background in [this work], but at the same time they have to be open to the fact that every school has a different history, a different culture and comes from a different place, which is what the beauty of that flexible framework is because it is flexible. It’s a backbone, but everything around it is flexible.”* Along these lines, participants also indicated that a good consultant needs to be patient and comfortable with uncertainty, and this characterized their experience with the sounding board. Findings from this study also revealed that flexibility was needed to address the varied and sometimes unpredictable needs that school leaders and staff might require. This ranged from helping school leaders to advocate for their needs with the district, to providing direct consultation about a difficult student, to supporting a school leader in the struggle to engage reluctant staff.

Assessing Progress

The inquiry-based process encouraged schools to identify their own measures of success in order to assess the effectiveness of their action plan. This was emphasized in the fourth essential question: “*How do we know whether we are becoming a trauma-sensitive school?*” Based on the data gathered during the school year, the steering committee could refine its action plan or identify new priorities as it reengaged in the planning process.

Box 7. Key Implementation Findings—Assessing Progress

- Aligned with the inquiry-based process, each school developed its own strategies for measuring progress. Schools relied on informal qualitative measures, and four of the five schools developed quantitative measures to assess progress toward meeting their trauma-sensitive goals.
- Progress monitoring also focused on the extent to which schools implemented the activities set forth in their action plans.
- There was evidence that schools were using the data to make data-driven decisions to support their action plan and continuous improvement.

Schools relied on both informal qualitative measures and school-developed quantitative measures to assess progress toward meeting their trauma-sensitive goals. Qualitative indicators of change included shifts in mindset, changes in interactions with students, changes in the dialogue about students and their families, and general thoughts about the “feel” of the school (e.g. “*the school feels calmer*”). Four of the schools developed their own quantitative data sources to track their progress (see Box 8). Some schools also chose to monitor school discipline data (e.g., number of crisis calls, detention, School-Wide Information System data [SWIS]). In addition, to capture the student perspective, all of the schools administered the Conditions for Learning survey during Year 1, and three schools elected to gather these data again in Year 2.

Box 8. Examples of Quantitative Data Sources Used to Assess Progress.

School A: Developed a staff survey to help monitor progress toward its staff connectedness and communication goals.

School B: Developed an informal system to track students with high levels of need (e.g., How often are they seen?, What services were put in place?, Were the strategies effective?).

School C: Developed a student survey to assess the understanding of school norms and whether these norms were being applied consistently by staff.

School E: Administered a student connectedness survey to determine which students needed more social support.

Progress monitoring also focused on the extent to which schools were able to implement the activities set forth in their action plans. Although schools used a wide range of data sources to assess progress, there was the realization that change takes time; therefore, some of the desired outcomes would not show up in the data immediately. As one participant pointed out, *“I think that, reflecting on this two-year demonstration school experience and then the whole process that this has given us to use as a guideline, it was really clear that this was going to take a lot longer than two years because change takes a long time.”* Therefore, schools also chose to focus on implementation outputs. These outputs were viewed as indicators of success, and schools expressed a certain level of pride when they realized that they could form a plan and act on it.

Schools used data to make data-driven decisions to support their action plan and continuous improvement. Examples of data-driven decision making were reported at School C where they revised the school’s reflection sheet that was filled out during a disciplinary event to gather more information about the incident (e.g., triggers, how the situation was handled). This provided an additional source of data that was used to help with problem solving. According to one participant, *“If we have repeat kids, we’re looking and we’re collecting this data so we’re really understanding what the issues are. That’s to solve it, not to just keep going to detention.”* In addition, as part of their goal to provide more tools for teachers, School E created a staff bulletin board that provides tips and resources for various problem areas. The selection of resources and strategies was based on the problems areas that emerged in the SWIS data.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

As expected, the schools experienced some common challenges during the first year of implementation, which did not derail their efforts. The inquiry-based process provided a structure

that enabled these schools to address the challenges and continue moving forward. Box 9 presents some challenges that schools reported and lessons learned.

Box 9. Key Implementation Findings—Challenges and Lessons Learned

- Challenges experienced by schools included staff reluctance, competing priorities, navigating different viewpoints and varying motivations.
- Schools reported lessons learned related to the timing between the identification of priorities and developing the action plan, and promoting two-way communication between the steering committee and the rest of the staff

Implementation Challenges

Staff reluctance.¹⁴ Participants noted that buy-in for the process was high among most staff, but at each school there were some who were more reluctant to change. Sometimes this reluctance revolved around conflicting belief systems (reflected in staff concerns that students were “getting away with it” or being rewarded for negative behavior), and sometimes it was driven by a general discomfort with change and/or adjusting to new practices. For example, participants described this challenge at one school in which they were piloting a program that offers access to additional support to build self-regulation skills among students who are struggling in their regular classroom. One participant reported:

One of the concerns of the staff is that it seems with a lot of kids, it’s almost encouraging escape behavior because they’re leaving their classroom and going into another classroom where the staff that are working there might not be as familiar with the child or with their capabilities. So the kid might be “getting away with it.” That’s what we need to work on, what are the expectations for specific children when they’re in that environment.

It is important to note that staff at the three schools that implemented the process consistently over the 2-year study period reported increased buy-in and engagement over time. This was attributed to several factors, including time (i.e., it takes time for some staff to get used to change), experiencing positive results, and increased district support.

Competing priorities. At some schools, competing priorities made it difficult for staff to remain focused on or devote the desired time to the process. One participant commented:

¹⁴ TLPI expects a certain degree of staff reluctance and addresses this reluctance to change in its book, *Creating and Advocating for Trauma-Sensitive Schools: Safe, Supportive School Environments That Benefit All Children (Helping Traumatized Children Learn, Vol. 2)*. (2013). Boston, MA: Massachusetts Advocates for Children, p.41.

There were times during the year when staff was experiencing some burnout, or other things felt like they were taking priority, or other needs weren't being met for staff where it created a little bit of conflict. But I think ultimately, we did get to a place where people are really invested in what we chose. It just was a messier process.

In addition, a school leader stated:

We have half-day professional days once a month for most of the months, and then we have three full-day professional development days. Well, the last one of those was in March. I had to focus on some other things on the half days, so we haven't really come back to this work in a while.

Despite these competing priorities, most schools continued to make progress toward implementing their action plans, with the exception of School D, for the reasons described earlier.

Navigating different viewpoints and varying motivations. Although staff generally agreed on urgent needs and priorities, in some cases, motivations differed, and staff did not agree on how to address these priorities. One participant described this challenge:

I think that there's also a distinction between priorities and the actions, too. And at that point we had sort of taken a step towards one action that many of us agreed as soon as we took that step towards it, it wasn't the right action. And so, that kind of colored people's views of what the priority was, too. So it's complicated because I think if you asked objectively right now and you said, 'Hey, there's three priorities—are those valuable priorities?' everybody would say, 'Yeah, totally.' But then if you say, 'Here's our action for these two things,' and they didn't like that action, then that hurts their buy-in on the whole process, right? And they say, 'Well, maybe that wasn't the right priority,' and they start to question that.

At some schools, managing different opinions and viewpoints was challenging at times but also was a learning process. However, there were times when some voices got lost, despite efforts to be inclusive and consider all opinions. As one participant explained:

I think with a lot of voices, it can be difficult to give everybody enough [of a voice]. Everyone had a voice. But then I think it was hard to narrow things down a little bit. Discussions take a little longer when you have 12 people with an opinion rather than if you had a group of four people with an opinion. But in order to get everyone involved, I think that this worked as well as it could with that many people.

Lessons Learned

Communication about the work of the steering committee. During Year 1, participants across schools reported varying levels of awareness about the steering committees' role, among staff who were not on the committee. Although the schools put strategies in place to promote two-way communication, this finding suggests a need for more effective communication between steering committees and the rest of the staff. This situation improved at four of the five schools, as school leaders and the steering committees began to disseminate information through the development of new tools and resources that were made available to staff (e.g., the trauma-sensitivity toolkit, staff and student surveys, external presentations).

Timing between the identification of priorities and developing the action plan. The time lag between the identification of priorities and the development of the action plan caused some teams to lose their momentum. As a result, staff forgot that the action plan was connected to the priorities and questioned why certain action steps were chosen. In one instance, that lag made a steering committee feel like it was starting over instead of moving forward. At other schools, it was not immediately apparent to people who were not on the steering committee that the action plan was informed by schoolwide feedback about their urgent priorities.

Key Findings: Outcomes

Research Question 3: To what extent does the action plan move schools closer to becoming trauma-sensitive (as defined by the attributes)? In what ways?

The following section reports outcomes that were realized by Schools A, B, and C, which engaged in the inquiry-based process for the full 2 years of the study. This includes examples of how the schools embodied trauma sensitivity (as defined by the attributes). The remaining schools experienced some challenges and were unable to fully implement the process consistently during the study period. Findings from these schools regarding readiness and implementation are included in the sections above. Individual school profiles that present a more comprehensive picture of how the process played out in these schools¹⁵, can be found in Appendix E. Box 10 includes key findings on outcomes for the three schools.

Box 10. Key Findings—Outcomes

- Staff reported shifts in mindset with regard to how they approached their work and they began to look at problems and solutions through a trauma-sensitive lens.
- Shifts in mindset were associated with changes in practice.
- School leaders reported positive changes in their school climate and culture. These included reports of the school feeling “safer” and “calmer,” fewer crisis calls, improved staff cohesion, improved relationships between students and staff, and increased parent engagement.
- The schools demonstrated movement toward becoming more trauma sensitive as defined by the trauma-sensitive attributes.

Staff reported shifts in mindset and began to view challenges and solutions through a trauma-sensitive lens. Staff described a shift in mindset that began in Year 1 and deepened during Year 2, with teachers more likely to use a trauma-sensitive lens to describe and understand student behavior, guide their interactions with students, and problem solve. One participant described this shift stating, *“[Teachers] really understand the importance of the “why,” because last year when we were doing this, we had to keep going back to the vision questions. We’d say, okay, let’s go back to this. Is this achieving our goal? This time, [the process] almost seemed effortless.”*

Additional evidence of this shift to a more trauma-sensitive mindset also was observed by school leaders, who reported that teachers were more likely to ask questions about what was

¹⁵ Appendix E also includes the process and preliminary outcomes from the first year of full implementation at School D (Year 1) and School E (Year 2).

going on with a student rather than just react to the student's behavior. In addition, at School C, teachers were observed giving feedback to colleagues who were not following the newly developed norm for thinking about students in a trauma-sensitive way. The shift in mindset at School C also extended to parent interactions, and some staff began to view their approach to working with parents through a trauma-sensitive lens. For example, staff reported more dialogue about how parents/guardians may have their own trauma histories or a history of negative interactions with schools. According to one participant, this new understanding has *"motivated the teachers to think about meeting parents where they're at. . . with the understanding that [some] parents have limited positive experiences with schools in the past."*

Shifts in mindset were associated with changes in practice. As schools shifted their thinking and viewed their actions through a trauma-sensitive lens, they began to change their practices. This change was most evident in their approach to student discipline and behavior management. For example, several schools shifted their disciplinary approach from managing student behavior to helping students develop self-regulation skills. At School C, staff began to move away from the traditional model of discipline, which is heavily focused on consequences, and worked to attain a healthy balance of addressing student behavior in a supportive way without reinforcing negative behaviors. Similarly, at School B, participants described a noticeable shift in the dialogue concerning student behavior and how staff approach discipline. It was noted that some staff now view behavior challenges as a *"learning opportunity"* and are learning not to take things personally. As a result, they are starting to take *"more dynamic"* approaches to discipline as opposed to immediately handing out consequences.

Schools reported positive outcomes, which suggest that their school climate and culture was changing and becoming more trauma-sensitive/safe and supportive. Staff reported positive changes within their school. These changes included reports of the school feeling *"safer"* and *"calmer,"* with a decrease in the number of crises (School B); a decrease in daily detentions and disciplinary incidents, and more consistent implementation of schoolwide expectations (School C); and a decrease in the number of office referrals (School A). Staff also described improvements in relationships. For example, participants reported increased staff cohesion (School A, School B, and School C), as evidenced by improved communication among staff and staff being more supportive of each other. In addition, some participants described better student-staff and student-student relationships (School A). Finally, at School C participants reported that action plan activities designed to get students more involved in school activities and to increase communication with parents resulted in increased student and parent engagement.

The schools demonstrated movement toward becoming more trauma-sensitive as defined by TLPI's trauma-sensitive attributes. TLPI's six attributes of trauma sensitivity were reflected in

the activities and outcomes implemented by the schools as a result of their participation in this study.¹⁶ The following section provides examples of these activities at Schools A, B, and C, which implemented the inquiry-based process for the full 2 years of the study. The activities took a different shape at each school, in response to their differing contexts. It is important to note that although each activity is described under the most salient attribute, in most cases there is overlap across the attributes.

Attribute 1: Leadership and staff share an understanding of trauma’s impacts on learning and the need for a schoolwide approach.

The inquiry-based process supports schoolwide change that starts with staff having a shared understanding of trauma and its impact on student learning. Data suggested that this understanding was growing across each school. Evidence of staff’s growing understanding of trauma sensitivity included the following:

- Staff viewed their policies and interactions with students through a trauma-sensitive lens. For example, at one school the principal reported a change in how teachers described students and families. Instead of making judgments or assumptions (“parents don’t care”), there was more reflection about what was happening with the students, followed by problem solving, with a focus on what staff can do at school to support students (i.e., what is within their control) (three schools).
- Staff developed a new mission and vision statement that was more aligned with the trauma-sensitive attributes (one school).
- Staff reported that the initial TLPI trauma-sensitive training helped to enhance their knowledge and understanding of the impact of trauma on students (three schools).
- The sounding board reported that trauma-sensitive ideas and strategies began to originate from the teachers, not just the steering committee or school leaders (three schools).

ATTRIBUTES OF A TRAUMA-SENSITIVE SCHOOL

“No single attribute of a trauma-sensitive school can be viewed as an isolated fragment; they are all interrelated, adding up to a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. Together they define ways to empower schools to understand and realize a shared vision.”

—Helping Traumatized Children Learn, Volume 2 (2013)

¹⁶ Because the inquiry-based process is designed to be adaptable to a school’s unique priorities and contexts, these activities are not meant to offer a list of expected activities. Instead, they serve as examples of how addressing urgent priorities in their own way, has helped schools to move toward becoming more trauma-sensitive learning environments.

- School leaders took steps to ensure that trauma sensitivity remained at the forefront by encouraging staff to view students' challenges and their approach to managing these challenges, through a trauma-sensitive lens (three schools).
- Staff made a conscious effort to view their interactions with their colleagues or with parents through a trauma-sensitive lens (three schools).

Attribute 2: The school supports *all students to feel safe physically, socially, emotionally, and academically.*

Having a clear and predictable structure and limits helps to create a sense of safety for students. As part of their action plan, several schools implemented strategies to support more consistent schoolwide behavior management strategies and develop a common language for interacting with their students, most of which involved staff professional learning experiences and building staff relationships. The following describes examples of steps that schools took that contributed to creating a safe learning environment.

- Held a professional development session on the Zones of Regulation approach to help students and staff develop a common language for behavior and a common approach to behavior management¹⁷ (two schools).
- Held PBIS trainings to promote consistent schoolwide behavior expectations and clarify procedures for major/minor infractions, with minors being addressed in the classroom and majors in the office – all in a trauma-sensitive way. (one school).
- Focused on improving staff relationships as a means of creating a more supportive learning environment for everyone (two schools).
- Changed the school's physical environment (e.g., painted, created calming corners in the classroom, brought in items to make the classroom warmer and more welcoming) (one school).
- Shifted behavior management strategies from a focus on grade-level consistency to consistency across grades (three schools).
- Changed their student behavior reflection sheet to make it more trauma sensitive (e.g., less punitive and more focused on skill-building language, included questions to aid reflection). The changes are designed to gather more information about the reason/issue that might be underlying the challenging behavior and encourage staff to think holistically about strategies to build needed skills. (three schools).

¹⁷ The Zones of Regulation is a cognitive behavior approach used to promote self-regulation by teaching students to be more aware of and control their emotions and impulses.

- Changed disciplinary practices to make them more safe and supportive and less punitive (three schools).
- Restructured the school’s homework policy (one school, see Box 11)

Box 11. A Trauma-Sensitive Approach to the Homework Policy (School A)

The steering committee at School A engaged in a few brief discussions about the need to change the school’s homework policy. Informed by their deepening understanding of the impact of trauma on learning, the discussions referenced the issues faced by the school’s families that created barriers to homework completion and increased stress, adding to the many stressors that families were already experiencing (e.g., homelessness, constant fear of deportation, chronic poverty). The staff wanted to support students in a more holistic way by freeing up more time out of school for physical activity, restoring emotional well-being, and connecting with family. Steering committee members brought these discussions to their grade-level teams and thus set the groundwork for a larger staff discussion about the pros and cons of changing the homework policy. Not only did staff immediately embrace and begin to implement ideas about ways the school might significantly limit both the content and time expectations for homework, (e.g., focusing on reading, math facts, and sporadic but meaningful and engaging family projects), but there was no pushback to the idea of removing consequences for not completing assignments. The staff had already shifted their thinking and practice, replacing punitive and shaming behavior management approaches with strategies focused on support and skill building in Year 1 of the research study, so getting on board with a similar non-punitive approach was immediate. Also, the thinking that undergirded the decision to alter homework expectations was rooted in the trauma-sensitive attributes.

(as observed by the TLPI Sounding Board)

Attribute 3: The school *addresses student needs in holistic ways*, taking into account their relationships, self-regulation, academic competence, and physical and emotional well-being

Schools implemented strategies to address the needs of high-need students in holistic ways.

Examples include the following:

- Rethinking, with flexibility and creativity, how supports are matched to respond to students’ needs (one school).
- Initiated a schoolwide shift toward skill building and implemented specific programs (e.g., Zones of Regulation) to help students develop appropriate self-regulation skills. At two schools, this included holding a “make and take” workshop where staff created sensory/calming kits (two schools).

- Implemented the “Red Envelope” strategy to improve information sharing and communication about student needs. This strategy is used to let staff know (in real time) that a student is struggling or experiencing a challenging event, so that they are more conscious of their interactions with the student and can respond in a trauma-sensitive way (two schools).¹⁸
- Began examining instructional practices through a trauma-sensitive lens (e.g., identified some of the underlying assumptions of their model of instruction and highlighted safe and supportive components) (three schools).
- Restructured recess to include more opportunities for structured play (one school, see Box 12).

Box 12. A Trauma-Sensitive Approach to Recess (School B)

As a result of this work, staff at School B examined their recess strategy through a trauma-sensitive lens. Their decision to restructure recess came about because of staff’s observations that many of their students were having great difficulty transitioning to afternoon classes after coming in from recess frequently dysregulated and agitated by their interactions with peers on the playground. In order to have recess serve more effectively as an opportunity to support relationship building, as well as physical health and well-being and connectedness to the school community, the staff engaged in trauma-sensitive problem solving, and planned and immediately implemented changes. Students at this school are now able to choose from a variety of “Innovation Stations,” including some that afford opportunities to engage in activities that are not focused on physical games/sports.

(as observed by the TLPI Sounding Board)

Attribute 4: The school *explicitly connects students to the school community* and provides multiple opportunities to practice newly developing skills.

There were several examples of schools implementing strategies to *explicitly connect students to the school community* and providing multiple opportunities to practice newly developing skills. These included the following:

- Created more extracurricular opportunities to encourage student engagement and promote stronger student-staff relationships (one school).
- Developed a peer mentoring program (one school).

¹⁸ To maintain students’ confidentiality, findings were shared within legal and ethical limits so teachers were not given the details about the challenges that students were experiencing.

- Established opportunities for restorative conversations between students and staff (one school, see Box 13).

Box 13. A Trauma-Sensitive Approach to Student-Staff Communication— Restorative Conversations Between Teachers and Students (School C)

Staff at School C have been focusing on trauma-sensitive ways to have conversations with individual students who present challenging behaviors that interfere with the learning environment. Their goal is to address these challenging behaviors in a way that supports students' sense of accountability for their actions while also helping students develop the needed skills that will decrease the behavior. The staff's intent is to accomplish this by using approaches based on their holistic understanding of the student that will increase the student's sense of connection to the staff and the school, rather than break the connection with a punitive disciplinary approach. Staff developed a reflection form for students and staff to use after such an incident occurs, with questions related to what may have triggered the student's response, what skills need to be supported to prevent such challenges in the future, and how best to repair the rift in the relationship between the student and staff member. The important next step in the process involves the dean of students or their associate convening a brief meeting with the student and teacher to facilitate a discussion between them, using their responses on the reflection form and enabling a restorative conversation to occur. This change represents a remarkable advance, in that students for whom the restorative meeting with the teacher has not yet occurred come to ask when it will happen. In addition, teachers are engaging in authentic conversations with students, including sharing why they may have responded in a more negative way than they intended due to something that occurred prior to coming to school that day—allowing for a genuine exchange based on sharing typical human frailties.

(as observed by the TLPI Sounding Board)

Attribute 5: The school embraces teamwork, and staff share responsibility for all students.

There were examples of schools *embracing teamwork* and sharing responsibility for all students. These included:

- Held regularly scheduled steering committee meetings to reflect on and oversee implementation of the school's action plan (three schools).
- Developed a system that required staff to share the responsibility of reaching out to parents across grade levels. (one school).
- Teachers stepped up to help each other out with challenging students and situations (three schools).

- Created new opportunities for staff to work together (e.g., professional learning communities, peer observations) (three schools).

Attribute 6: Leadership and staff anticipate and adapt to the ever-changing needs of students.

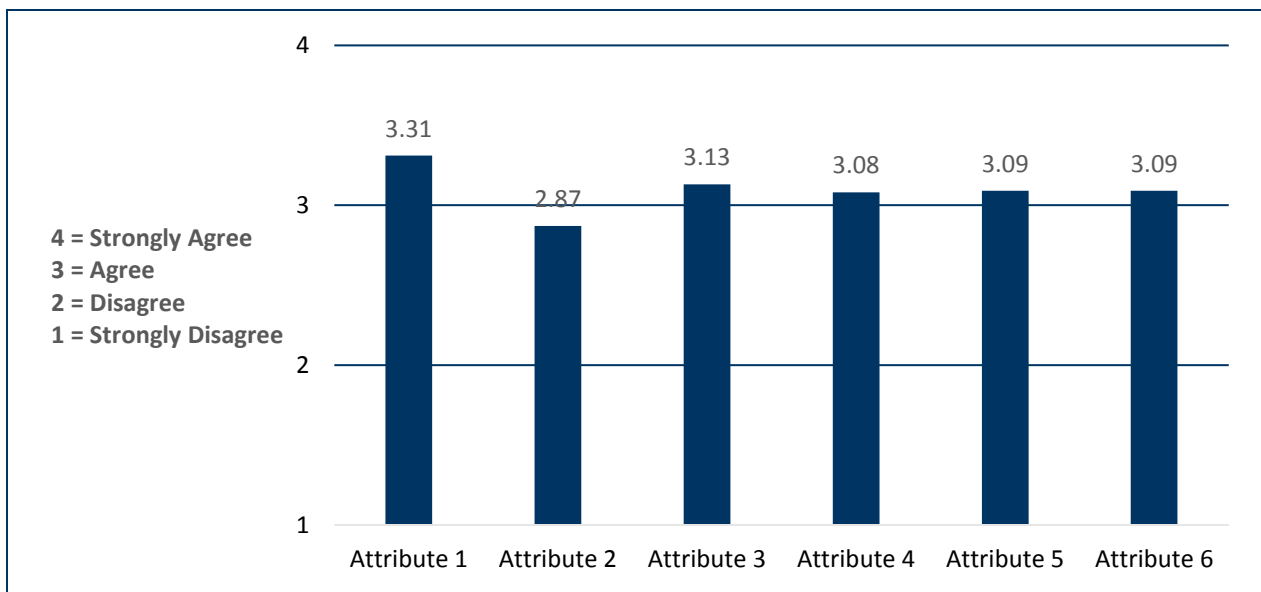
The inquiry-based process allowed for leadership and staff to *anticipate and adapt* to changing needs of students. Examples include the following:

- Used steering committee meeting time to reflect on challenges and engage in problem solving as the need arose (three schools).
- Revisited the Trauma-Sensitive Vision Questions to inform decision making and address new priorities (three schools).

Staff Perceptions of Progress toward Trauma Sensitivity

During the second year of the study, staff at each school completed a survey designed to assess the extent to which they felt that this work had helped to move the school toward trauma sensitivity (as defined by the six attributes). Findings from the survey indicated that after two years most staff agreed that this work was moving their school towards trauma sensitivity. Specifically, it was found that: Across schools, staff were more likely to indicate that their efforts to create a trauma-sensitive school has had an impact on Attribute 1—“*Leadership and staff share an understanding of trauma’s impacts on learning and the need for a schoolwide approach*” (mean = 3.31; 1 [Strongly Disagree] to 4 [Strongly Agree]). In addition, staff were less likely to indicate that their efforts had an impact on Attribute 2— “*The school supports all students to feel safe physically, socially, emotionally, and academically*” (mean = 2.87; 1 [Strongly Disagree] to 4 [Strongly Agree]) (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Staff Survey Results: School A, School B, and School C



Note:

Attribute 1: Leadership and staff share an understanding of trauma’s impacts on learning and the need for a schoolwide approach.

Attribute 2: The school supports all students to feel safe physically, socially, emotionally, and academically.

Attribute 3: The school addresses student needs in holistic ways, taking into account their relationships, self-regulation, academic competence, and physical and emotional well-being.

Attribute 4: The school explicitly connects students to the school community and provides multiple opportunities to practice newly developing skills.

Attribute 5: The school embraces teamwork, and staff share responsibility for all students.

Attribute 6: Leadership and staff anticipate and adapt to the ever-changing needs of students.

Key Findings: Sustainability

Research Question 4. What are factors for success that are important to have in place to sustain school action plans? What are the greatest challenges that key stakeholders identify in sustaining their action plan?

Although it is too early to determine whether schools will sustain their action plan activities and outcomes, and continue using the inquiry-based process, some of the schools have already put structures in place to support sustainability. The following sections presents key findings of activities that will likely promote sustainability within the schools. Results are presented for Schools, A, B, and C, which had 2 full years of implementation, and therefore had begun to embed trauma-sensitive practices into their schools. (see Box 14).

Box 14. Key Findings—Sustainability

- Factors that promote sustainability (e.g., capacity building, opportunities for reflection, a school-driven approach) are built into the inquiry-based process.
- Trauma-sensitive thinking and practices were becoming embedded into the culture of the schools as they engaged in activities that helped to solidify their identity as trauma-sensitive/safe and supportive learning environments in the school and community.
- Staff developed tools that operationalized what it means to be a trauma-sensitive school to continue to build a schoolwide, shared understanding of this work. Efforts to operationalize trauma-sensitivity occurred organically in each of the three schools.
- By the end of the study, the schools had taken full ownership of the process. They followed through with their action plan activities during Year 2, used lessons learned to revise and improve upon their initial efforts, and reported plans to continue this work beyond the study period.
- A potential challenge to sustainability is ensuring that schools can continue to set aside the time for steering committee meetings, especially if competing priorities surface in the future.

Factors that support sustainability are built into the inquiry-based process. Sustainability is more than just maintenance or continuing with a new practice beyond the study period. Instead, it is demonstrated by a certain level of adaptability to internal and external changes over time, which often occur in districts and schools. Sustainability also requires reflection to better understand what is and is not working, and what can be improved (Jerald, 2005). In addition, it cannot be assumed that educators have the knowledge and skills to implement an initiative as planned. Limited or insufficient training and support can pose a challenge to sustainability. Thus, capacity building, including professional development, should be at the forefront of any new initiative. Both capacity building and opportunities for reflection are built

into the inquiry-based process. Opportunities for reflection start with the identification of school urgencies and the development of an action plan, both of which are school-driven processes informed by the context of each school. Findings suggest that having the schools' self-identified urgencies be the driving force behind this work contributed to buy-in and engagement, which are required for sustainability. Also, Essential Question 4 of the inquiry-based process (*"How do we know whether we are becoming a trauma-sensitive school?"*) encourages schools to reflect on their data and engage in a process where they are learning from the implementation of their action plan, and using this information to revise and improve their activities.

Capacity building also is an integral part of the inquiry-based process. This was done through the schools' ongoing consultations with the sounding board and was further supported by school-initiated professional development for specific programs (e.g., Second Step, Zones of Regulation). The sounding board took a developmental approach in which they offered more support during Year 1 but remained accessible and adapted to the capacity-building needs of each school during the second year. By the end of the study, the schools reported more confidence in their abilities to continue this work independently.

Trauma-sensitive thinking and practices were becoming embedded in the culture of the school. The value system that supports education reform is of critical importance, as this is key to having new practices become fully integrated into the school culture. Schools are more likely to sustain an initiative that they think is meaningful and important to achieving the goals of their school. TLPI's initial presentation about the impact of trauma on learning introduced the core beliefs and values of trauma sensitivity. Data suggest that subsequent activities (the staff survey, action planning, and implementation of the action plan) helped to reinforce these values, particularly among school leadership and the steering committees, which spearheaded the work. The focus on establishing trauma-sensitive norms and values continued during Year 2 with the delivery of a refresher training at the start of the school year and the distribution of lanyard cards (distributed by the sounding board) that offered an easily accessible reference to remind staff about the trauma-sensitive attributes.

Evidence that the process was becoming a part of the school culture was seen in the shift from staff viewing it as just another initiative to the "norm" or an extension of what they are already doing. For example, in Year 2, one participant stated:

When I first heard about [the inquiry-based process], it sounded to me like an initiative. It sounded like we were trying something new. The further along you got, the more we were doing with this work, it was like, oh, it's most of the things we already do, we are just improving and formalizing the way we talk about being safe and supportive, and have the questions to reflect on.

Another stated, “[Trauma-sensitivity is] just becoming more and more a part of the culture at the school, so I think that will stay” In addition, some school leaders shared related books and articles with their staff, further promoting a culture of continuous learning about trauma sensitivity.

District level support. Support from school leadership is essential for successful implementation and sustainability. However, schools are situated within a larger system and will be more likely to sustain school improvement efforts if there is support at multiple levels. Therefore, district-level support is critical. In all three of the schools, there was direct evidence of district level support. At Schools A and C, the respective districts are supporting the schools’ efforts to become trauma sensitive and are sharing their successes with other schools and districts. At School B, there was an increase in district support over the course of the study. Specifically, the district provided additional support from outside consultants to enhance the growth of the school’s therapeutic support program, offered professional development sessions on trauma and its impact, and provided funds for school staff to present at a conference. In addition, it was reported that the superintendent has been addressing mental health and inclusion, and has made it clear that School B’s safe and supportive efforts fit into this framework. Having district support has allowed school leaders at School B to frame the work more globally—in a way that demonstrates alignment with other district priorities—helping to promote buy-in.

Developing a trauma-sensitive/safe and supportive identity. Another indicator of sustainability is the development of a trauma-sensitive/safe and supportive identity. It was found that by Year 2, all three schools had begun to solidify their identity as a trauma-sensitive schools. For example, one participant reported:

This year [Year 2] has been more like “This is who we are and we’ll just do it.” “We are a safe and supportive, trauma-sensitive school.” That was kind of how we started the year. Last year, there were a lot of questions about “When will we get there?,” “When will it happen?” We did a lot of work as a steering committee over this summer in putting together the backbone, then creating a plan for initial staff meetings to just kind of put it out there and say, “We are it!”

Although all of the activities are contributing to the schools’ identity as trauma sensitive, several notable actions have occurred in each of the schools. First, schools have integrated safe and supportive information and resources into existing policies and practices. School C now includes information about trauma sensitivity in the new teacher onboarding process and developed a set of training videos that demonstrate safe and supportive practices. At School B, safe and supportive goals were included in its new 2017–18 school improvement plan. Similarly, at School A, school leaders “tweaked” its school mission and vision statements to reflect the goal of

developing a safe and supportive environment. Schools also are building this work into their hiring practices by seeking out staff who seem to understand or share the school's vision.

In addition, schools are sharing their journey with parents and the community, and increasing the visibility of their work (see Box 15). Presenting their work to the community seems to have helped propel schools further toward culture change, as it enables the leadership and steering committees to reflect on and articulate all that has been accomplished. For example, one participant described the positive impact of sharing their work:

The superintendent is kind of sharing our name with people and people are reaching out, which is great. Every time we have visitors or we're sharing or we're presenting, it just kind of makes you feel good. It makes you feel like, oh, we really did do a lot in a short amount of time. It's validating.

It is possible that sharing their journey with others outside of the school also could foster a sense of accountability for this work. As schools continue to implement their action plans, it is expected that they will strengthen their trauma-sensitive identities, which also will promote sustainability.

Box 15. Developing a Trauma-Sensitive/Safe and Supportive Identity

School A: Hosted the demonstration schools and shared their strategies for becoming a trauma-sensitive school; shared their work during a site visit requested by state's Department of Education, and included a tour of safe spaces that were created in the school (e.g., tranquility room).

School B: Presented at two conferences about the school's journey to become a safe and supportive school (one presentation was made to a national audience of educators, the other was made to educators in their county); developed a newsletter for parents that highlighted the school's safe and supportive goals; included multiple references to the school being a safe and supportive school on the school's website.

School C: Hosted the demonstration schools and shared their strategies for becoming trauma-sensitive schools; presented at 2 statewide conferences, including a conference for safe and supportive school grantees.

Operationalizing trauma sensitivity. All three schools have taken steps toward sustainability by developing resources and tools that operationalize what it means to be trauma sensitive at their school. It is important to note that the creation of these resources occurred organically and was not a specific requirement of the inquiry-based process. These resources and tools reflect the schools' efforts to bring their vision to life, bring clarity to the process, and ensure

that everyone was on the same page regarding this work. Table 5 provides an overview and description of the resources that were developed.

Table 5. Examples of Materials Developed to Operationalize Trauma-Sensitivity

School A	
Resource	Purpose
Looks Like—Sounds Like Chart	Provides concrete examples of what this trauma-sensitive school “looks like” and “sounds like,” and helps to develop a shared approach and common language to ensure consistency in the way that teachers interact with students
Staff Survey	Assesses outcomes of trauma-sensitive work from the staff perspective
School B	
Resource	Purpose
Video—a brief review of the school’s work to become trauma sensitive; students answering the question: <i>“What does being a safe and supportive school mean to you?”</i>	Accompanies the distribution of the trauma-sensitive attributes lanyard card and was developed to remind staff about the thinking and practices that underlie the school’s safe and supportive goals
Staff Binder/Toolkit	Provides trauma-sensitive resources and tools that outline the major areas where they want to see consistency, and provides some options for how to achieve it; identifies the negotiables and non-negotiables
School C	
Resource	Purpose
Videos	Serve as a tool to orient new staff and remind veteran staff about the safe and supportive practices at the school; promotes consistency by sharing norms and values, and demonstrating what trauma-sensitive interactions look like at School C
Peer Observation Protocol	A self-assessment and observation tool to develop teachers’ proficiency on the Educator Evaluation Rubric’s Standard II objective, which is closely related to safe and supportive school practices

Student Survey	Developed to get student input and assess their buy-in to norms, both on how well they know and understand the norms, and whether there is consistent application from teachers; also used as a progress monitoring tool for the related action step
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Continuation of inquiry-based process and action plan activities. Sustainability is most evident in schools’ plans to continue this work. By the end of the study, all three schools described concrete plans to build on their work once the demonstration project ended. Schools reported plans to maintain their steering committees and have begun to have discussion about what this would look like. For example, School B decided that its steering committee will meet three times next year—late fall, winter, and spring—as an advisory committee to continue to address school needs by brainstorming, reflecting, and discussing safe and supportive approaches. It also is exploring the idea of rotating staff in and out of the committee to promote a more widespread understanding of the work. At School C, school leaders have planned their steering committee team meeting agenda for the next school year and will include professional development on collaborative problem solving and helping students to develop coping skills, both of which are aligned with its safe and supportive goals. School A reported plans to integrate new SEL programming. Although most staff were confident that they could sustain this work, potential challenges to sustainability mentioned by staff included a change in leadership, time, and declining motivation to sustain more time-consuming activities (e.g., parent workshops).

Conclusions

The goal of this study was to describe the trajectory of five schools as they went through the 2-year journey toward becoming trauma-sensitive learning environments using TLPI's inquiry-based process. Data gathered during the study supported the following conclusions regarding readiness, implementation, outcomes, and sustainability.

School Readiness

- To successfully move through the process, the following six readiness indicators needed to be in place for the process to proceed as planned: a general understanding of the inquiry-based process and the need for a whole school approach to bring about schoolwide trauma sensitivity, a sense of urgency and motivation, elements of the school's climate and culture that might support or be a barrier to implementation, a dedicated time to meet, alignment with other initiatives, and leadership commitment. When one or more of these indicators was missing, the school either had a difficult time generating the momentum needed to move forward or well-intentioned efforts were undermined, making it difficult to remain focused on trauma-sensitivity and action plan activities.
- Readiness is a developmental and dynamic process that evolves over time. The sounding board/thought partner needs to be flexible enough to adapt to where schools are in terms of their level of readiness at each stage of the process, particularly with regard to their motivation and organizational capacity (e.g., fiscal and human resources). Taking a flexible approach to their work with schools allowed the sounding board to offer support when needed, reinforced their positive relationship with the school, and put the school in a better position to get back on track.
- Although there are no initial demands for material resources to implement the inquiry-based process, schools needed to have the resources to meet the basic educational needs of students (e.g., sufficient teachers and support staff). Not having these basic resources interfered with a school's ability to prioritize this work.

Implementation and Benefits of the Inquiry-Based Process

- School leadership commitment was essential for successful implementation. This commitment was demonstrated in several ways including: establishing a steering committee, providing the time for staff to develop a shared understanding of trauma-sensitivity, allocating the necessary time and infrastructure for staff to engage in the inquiry-based process, reallocating resources to support the implementation of the school's action plan, ongoing engagement with the sounding board and steering committee, and being responsive to staff professional development needs related to this work. Evidence of

leadership commitment was further supported by staff who described school leaders as being very involved and invested in creating trauma-sensitive schools.

- The inquiry-based process tolerates variability (e.g., size and composition of the steering committee, resources, action plans) and can be aligned with existing initiatives. However, the process must be given equal priority to gain traction. This means having a dedicated steering committee, time to focus on the work, and developing a trauma-sensitive action plan. When this work was viewed as secondary to another initiative or as a strategy that could simply be integrated into existing activities without first allowing staff to engage in collaborative inquiry, subsequent activities seemed fragmented and sometimes disconnected from the goal of whole-school change.
- Working as a team to identify action steps that are directly related to the school's urgent priorities builds staff's ownership of the changes and was found to be a necessary part of the process. When this step was not included strategies were implemented, but there was no common thread to the work.
- The role of the sounding board is critical to helping schools develop an understanding of the impact of trauma on teaching and learning, and take ownership of the work. It also brought a level of accountability that helped schools continue moving forward, even when faced with challenges or competing priorities. Participants identified several key attributes that helped to foster a positive and collaborative relationship with the sounding board and were most beneficial in their efforts to becoming a trauma-sensitive school. These attributes were trust, knowledge and experience, strong facilitation skills, and flexibility.
- Initially some staff struggled with the inquiry-based process and what trauma-sensitivity would look like at their schools, and they wanted more direction from the sounding board. Once staff understood that the sounding board's role was to support their use of the inquiry-based process and accepted that the sounding board would not tell them what their priorities should be or how to address them, the facilitation process led to a greater sense of empowerment within the school, and the sounding board observed discussions that resulted in creative problem solving. Steering committee meetings were well attended, indicating a commitment to and ownership of the school's work to become trauma-sensitive.
- The inquiry-based process provided a structure for educators to talk to each other about their practice. By answering the Trauma-Sensitive Vision Questions, staff could articulate why particular practices were or were not trauma sensitive. The questions helped staff stay on course to address issues consistent with the norms and values of a trauma-sensitive school. The sounding board noted that these discussions also seemed to promote increased motivation and continuous momentum building among staff to make changes that were

sometimes difficult, and that engaging in often difficult conversations to discern the underlying tension about what needed to change and why deepened staff’s understanding of trauma-sensitive values.

- Building community within the school was a common priority across schools. Although each school took a different approach, creating a safe and supportive community for adults appeared to be critical to creating a safe and supportive learning community for students. It was noted that educators coming together to create consistent approaches to address the needs of students also was connected to creating a sense of community in a school.

Outcomes¹⁹

- The inquiry-based process’s bottom-up approach empowered teachers and helped to build shared ownership for school climate and culture change. For example, school staff reported an increase in teacher voice, and teacher leaders emerged as staff worked to come up with creative solutions to their school’s urgent needs.
- Implementing the inquiry-based process produced shifts in mindset that led to changes in practice. For example, over the course of the year, dialogue on discipline and student support shifted away from managing behavior or punishment and toward helping students develop social and self-regulation skills. This included adopting more positive approaches to discipline (e.g., restorative practices, teaching social and self-regulation skills), increased support for students with high levels of need, restructuring recess, and revising the homework policy.
- Many of the reported outcomes suggest that the schools were beginning to change their climate and cultures in a relatively short period of time. Specifically, staff reported positive changes in student behavior as evidenced by: reports of fewer crises, the school feeling “safer” and “calmer,” decreased office referrals and fewer disciplinary incidents. In addition, staff described improvements in relationships, including increased staff cohesion –as evidenced by improved communication and support among staff, staff being more supportive of each other, and more consistent implementation of schoolwide expectations – and better student-staff and student-student relationships. There were also reports of increased student and parent engagement.
- Teachers were given the opportunity to be reflective practitioners. The inquiry-based process is designed to encourage active reflection and thoughtful inquiry regarding ways to create a trauma-sensitive learning environment. Although reflection has usually been described within the context of teaching, there is less evidence on the use of reflective

¹⁹ Findings in the Outcomes and Sustainability sections reflect data from the three schools that consistently implemented the inquiry-based process during the 2-year study period.

practice to address issues related to school climate and culture. Findings from this study suggest that offering the opportunity to reflect is key. This gave staff the time to think critically about and grapple with the issues that were facing their schools, including how to deploy resources to carry out their action plan. The TLPI sounding board noted that, in addition to reflecting on identified priorities/urgencies, the process laid the foundation for broad-based discussions among educators on fairness, equity and academic excellence for all.

Sustainability

- Trauma-sensitive thinking and practices were becoming embedded in the culture of the school, as schools engaged in activities that helped to solidify their identity as trauma-sensitive/safe and supportive learning environments in the school and community.
- Staff developed tools that operationalized what it means to be a trauma-sensitive school, to continue to build a schoolwide, shared understanding of this work. This process happened organically.
- By the end of the study, the schools had taken full ownership of the inquiry-based process. They followed through with their action plan activities during Year 1 and Year 2, and used lessons learned to revise and improve upon their initial efforts. A potential challenge to sustainability is ensuring that schools can continue to set aside the time for steering committee meetings, especially if competing priorities surface in the future. However, all three schools reported that they would continue this work beyond the study period and had already made plans to do so.

Implications

Many school improvement efforts fail because they do not produce lasting changes in school practices and within the school in general. Given that a safe and supportive school climate and culture is linked to positive student outcomes, it is critical that educators understand how to create and sustain such an environment. The findings from this study suggest that the focus on a whole-school, trauma-sensitive approach, which enables educators to view challenges and solutions through a trauma-sensitive lens, can help to create optimal conditions for teaching and learning, which should ultimately lead to improved student outcomes. Within a relatively short period of time, schools that were actively engaged in the process implemented action plans that directly addressed their self-identified priorities. The evidence suggests that, because of these actions, the culture is changing at the schools. Findings also point to the following implications or considerations for educators, researchers, and policymakers:

- It is important to leverage the expertise of educators and consider the value in allowing schools to grapple with their challenges and come up with their own solutions. This means moving beyond the usual push for local ownership and providing the time and space for reflective discussions to occur, particularly around school climate and culture.
- Stakeholders need to think more creatively about how best to measure climate and culture change. The use of more conventional variables (i.e., attendance, discipline data) may not fully tell the story of what is happening in a school. These measures also might restrict educators' ability to identify more creative solutions. Therefore, the research on school climate and culture may benefit from an emphasis on more qualitative variables, such as shifts in staff values and mindsets, improvements in relationships, and changes in staff behaviors.
- There is a need to reconsider implementation and evaluation timelines for school improvement efforts, and to make adjustments as needed, based on the real-time circumstances of the school. The inquiry-based process is flexible regarding timing. Each of the schools moved through the process at its own pace, but by the end of the two years, the three schools which had engaged in the inquiry-based process for the full 2 years of the study had accomplished the tasks put forth in their action plans and had begun to experience positive change. All of this was done without having strict implementation timelines, but with the guidance of the sounding board. When the fourth school had to shift its focus toward state mandates that emerged during the study, the Steering Committee continued to use the sounding board as a source of support. In addition, the fifth school restarted the effort during the second year with a new strategy and dedicated steering committee and time to focus on implementation that allowed them to make more progress towards their trauma-sensitive goals.

- There also is a need to rethink the types of professional development and technical assistance that are offered to advance school improvement efforts. The role of the sounding board was critical to the process. The sounding board served as a facilitator of the change process—rather than a coach—and the support was ongoing, responsive, and promoted staff empowerment. Moving forward, stakeholders should consider what types of support are most useful for schools, as well as the frequency and intensity of the support provided.

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Appendix A. TLPI Facilitation Schedule and Alignment with the Inquiry-Based Process

TLPI Facilitation Schedule	Teal Book Process
Year 1—Planning Phase (Hours spent with Sounding Board for all of Year 1: 16-25 hours)	
1. Trauma-Sensitive Schools Study Application Process	Question 1: Why do we feel an urgency? a. Articulating the urgency b. Growing a coalition c. Role of the principal d. Role of external sounding boards e. Role of the steering committee f. District support
2. Introductory Meeting with Building Leadership <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding leadership’s urgency to become trauma sensitive • Organizing the steering committee • Becoming familiar with the self-assessment tool • Reviewing <i>Helping Traumatized Children Learn</i> (Volumes 1 and 2) 	
3. Leadership Completes State’s Department of Education Self-Assessment Tool	
4. All-Staff Training on Trauma-Sensitive Schools (2 hours) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TLPI presents basic information from <i>Helping Traumatized Children Learn</i> (Volumes 1 and 2). • Staff complete the three-question staff survey. 	Question 2: How do we know we are ready? a. Extending the sense of urgency through shared learning b. Surveying the staff c. Analyzing the survey and “the buzz” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do enough staff share the urgency? • Have the staff coalesced around short-term priorities? What are they? How do they align with the needs identified by the self-assessment tool? d. Arriving at priorities through whole-school discussion
5. Debriefing the All-Staff Training <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership reviews responses to the staff survey. • The steering committee meets to assess readiness to move forward. 	
6. All-Staff Meeting <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff reach consensus on priorities for action planning (school determines whether TLPI is present for staff meeting) 	

TLPI Facilitation Schedule	Teal Book Process
<p>7. Meetings With Steering Committee to Develop Action Plan</p>	<p>Question 3: What actions will address staff priorities and help us become a trauma-sensitive school?</p> <p>Deciding where to start</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Brainstorming actions Using the Flexible Framework to develop an action plan Using the Flexible Framework to organize action steps Behavioral Health and Public Schools Self-Assessment Tool Looking at the action plan through the trauma lens Planning for assessment of the action plan Sharing the action plan with the whole school
<p>8. All-Staff Meeting (school determines whether TLPI is present for staff meeting)</p>	
<p>Initial Implementation and Evaluation</p>	
<p>9. Months 1–7 of Implementation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monthly meeting with steering committee Meeting with leadership as needed 	<p>Question 4: How do we know we are becoming a trauma-sensitive school?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Identifying observable measures of progress
<p>10. Month 8 of Implementation and/or summer 2016</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monthly meeting with steering committee Meeting with leadership as needed Debriefing on this year and planning for next year 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Focusing the assessment process <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are we accomplishing the actions in our action plan? Are our actions addressing the staff’s priorities in the ways we hypothesized? Has our action plan moved us closer to becoming a trauma-sensitive school?

TLPI Facilitation Schedule	Teal Book Process
Year 2—Ongoing Implementation and Evaluation (Hours spent with Sounding Board: 4-12 hours)	
<p>11. Refresher Training</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full staff receive refresher training on <i>Helping Traumatized Children Learn</i> (Volumes 1 and 2). • Staff survey is re-administered. 	<p>a. Moving beyond the first action plan</p> <p>b. Continual learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refresher training • Becoming part of a learning community outside the school
<p>12. Meetings with Steering Committee to Refine Action Plan</p> <p>(Frequency and focus of meetings determined by the school)</p>	<p>c. Reviewing and adjusting the action plan</p>
<p>13. Ongoing Meetings with Leadership and Steering Committee</p> <p>(frequency and focus of meetings determined by the school)</p>	

Appendix B. Readiness Interview Protocol

Interview questions

I. Groundwork/reviewing expectations/addressing their questions

- A. Review of inquiry-based process, as described in Chapter 2
 - Do you have any questions about the inquiry-based process? Any concerns about implementing this process at your school?
 - Focus on readiness assessment is built into the process—the survey questions—so they understand they may not continue as part of the research project depending on what those responses to survey questions indicate regarding staff readiness to move forward. **(Frame this so that schools understand that this is not an evaluation of their school but an assessment to determine whether their school is a good fit for this work right now. Note that having the required level of readiness will help to improve the process and their experience, and that schools that are not ready may not get the full benefit of the process at this time.)**
- B. Review of Facilitation Schedule—time commitment to consultation and training schedule with TLPI
 - Do you have any questions? Does this seem feasible? (Have more discussion later.)
- C. Review of time required with research team from AIR
 - Show schedule; address questions. Does this seem feasible?
- D. Do you have district approval to participate in this research project?
 - Research disclosures.
 - If not, what steps would be involved in getting it?

II. Questions regarding readiness, motivation/leadership, organizational capacity

- A. Why is it important for your school to become trauma sensitive? (Expand on application response.)
 - Listen for leader’s motivation/urgency.
 - Probe, if needed, to address both school-based and personal motivation.
- B. Follow up on responses to application question regarding unique features of school and/or school community related to readiness (if any).
- C. Describe for us the culture and climate in your school.

- Probe, if needed, to address mission, values/norms. What’s working and what’s not?
- Probe regarding information about community culture and existing relationships between the school and external/community organizations.

D. What are the other major initiatives you currently have in place in your school?

- How do you see this fitting in?
- How will you make time for this?
- Review again that this is process—not a program. What does this mean in terms of how they see it working?

III. Describe the next part of the process—timeline

- Will review today’s interview with TLPI team; there may be follow-up questions.
- Decision making with AIR team is at end of July; will inform you on 7/31.

If selected, work can begin in August, if feasible, or as soon as possible after August depending on your school schedule.

Appendix C. School Action Plans

School A Action Plan Chart

Priorities	Action Plan	Action Steps/Activities	Outputs/Outcomes
<p>Need to address communication among staff—difficult to communicate needs of students among various departments (specialists, therapists, other teachers), paraprofessionals, and office—due to size and layout of building.</p> <p>Need to develop common language and approach to dealing with students across the whole school—less punitive and more restorative—finding the balance between dealing with reactive students while ensuring that quieter students also get attention.</p> <p>Need to address staff cohesion—size and layout of building and having so many different programs makes a shared community difficult; staff feel isolated and disconnected, and connect only with those in their “hallways” or program (there are</p>	<p>Communication: To improve information sharing (within legal and ethical limits) about students among <i>all</i> School A staff members.</p> <p>Social-emotional learning: To teach students how to identify their emotions and how to select and use appropriate regulating strategies.</p> <p>Connectedness: To create a sense of team and build a collaborative culture among <i>all</i> School A staff to better serve <i>all</i> School A students.</p> <p>To create a sense of connectedness within classrooms, among grade-level peers (Year 2).</p> <p>Teach students how to positively contribute in a community (Year 2).</p>	<p>Implemented Red Envelope strategy.</p> <p>Held positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) refresher professional development.</p> <p>Overview of Zones of Regulation workshop (common language).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Followed up with additional training in grade-level teams. <p>Developed a clear distinction between problem behaviors that are staff-managed (minor) versus office-managed or crisis-managed (major).</p> <p>Held professional development on elements of effective classroom management strategies.</p> <p>Held make-and-take session for sensory starter toolkits.</p> <p>Used vertical teams to maintain a focus on ongoing initiatives, such</p>	<p>Improved information sharing (within legal limits): 75% of staff agreed that information sharing about students has improved.</p> <p>Developed a collaborative culture among staff: 75% of the staff responded affirmatively that a collaborative culture was in place.</p> <p>Decrease in office referrals.</p> <p>Trauma sensitivity/safe and supportive schools was kept on the front burner through frequent references in daily newsletter.</p> <p>Increased attention of the steering committee on the need to move away from managing student behavior to helping students develop self-regulation skills—reflected in school’s decision to shift practice away from classroom behavior management systems to PBIS major/minor and build staff</p>

Priorities	Action Plan	Action Steps/Activities	Outputs/Outcomes
<p>so many different programs—staff identify mainly with their specific program).</p> <p>Professional development—feels like a “drive-through”—there is no time to talk with peers about implementing; need more time for building-based professional development, not just district-determined; need to include nonprofessional staff.</p>		<p>as Red Envelope, morning meeting, and PBIS.</p> <p>Created an all-staff bulletin board to enhance staff connectedness. Piloted the breakfast buddies program (Year 2).</p> <p>Implemented the Choose to Be Nice curriculum and MindUP (Year 2).</p>	<p>capacity to help students develop self-regulation skills.</p> <p>Increased staff cohesion with an understanding that this would translate to a more safe and supportive school for students.</p> <p>The goal to develop a trauma-sensitive, safe, and supportive school was reflected in the mission and vision statements that the school was tweaking under the new leadership.</p> <p>Improved school climate, including improved student-student and student-staff relationships (Year 2).</p> <p>60% of staff felt that students in their classrooms have made progress in identifying their emotions and using appropriate self-regulation strategies. (Year 2).</p>

School B Action Plan Chart

Priorities	Action Plan	Action Steps/Activities	Outputs/Outcomes
<p>High-need students are impacting the school (“hijacking” the classroom). Need to create menu of support options for HNS. Responses now are primarily reactive, which is frustrating for students and staff and emotionally draining. Need to be proactive—teach skills (from later discussion).</p> <p>Creating a strong staff community: getting everyone on the same page, building positive staff communication, learning how to have compassion with boundaries (from staff priority “vote”).</p>	<p>High-need students: Objective: To implement proactive approaches to managing high-need students.</p> <p>Expand staff “toolkit” of trauma-sensitive approaches: Objective: To expand the school’s “toolkit” of trauma-sensitive approaches to be used across all settings to support all learners. Strategies will be used with <i>all</i> students.</p> <p>Create a stronger staff community: Objective: To use an approach embracing shared responsibility; will be used to support all learners and staff through the implementation of the first two goals.</p>	<p>Development of a space to help high need students build skills.</p> <p>Revise student support team meetings to refine process and make it more responsive.</p> <p>Provide differentiated overview of Zones of Regulation workshop (establish a common language) and Universal Design for Learning.</p> <p>Share knowledge of practices already in place.</p> <hr/> <p>Toolkit with resources to guide staff in responding to students in safe and supportive ways; rolled out in fall (Year 2).</p> <p>New protocol using CPI strategies and teacher-to-teacher responses to call for student crisis support in the</p>	<p>Student behavior:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decrease in the need for crisis response based on supports implemented in February 2016 • Decrease in the number of students using the space for skill-building supports • Decrease in frequency of use of the space for skill-building supports and the amount of time students needed to stay • Reduction in absenteeism/increase in attendance <p>Strengthening staff community:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in number of staff expressing interest in learning more about use of restorative practices • Beginning to work together as a team in the building to spread consistent practice <p>Established identity as a safe and supportive school:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school developed a safe and supportive schools float in the local parade.

Priorities	Action Plan	Action Steps/Activities	Outputs/Outcomes
		<p>classroom was put in place (Year 2).</p> <p>Established cross-discipline and cross-grade level professional learning communities and staff committees to build cohesion. (Year 2).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Over the summer, the school hallways were painted in a more calming color. • A large purple ribbon was placed around the building to welcome students back to school. • A flyer for parents was created with language that emphasizes a whole-child approach and explains the philosophy of shifting discipline practices to teaching and developing accountability, rather than controlling by fear or power of coercion. • As teachers returned to school in August to begin the 2016–17 academic year, many returned early to work in their classrooms to create safe and welcoming spaces. • Decreased need for crisis response; students getting the support they need (Year 2) • School now feels “safer” and “calmer” (Year 2). • Staff reported seeing a shift toward more collaboration between staff and feeling more like a team working toward a common goal (Year 2).

School C Action Plan Chart

Priorities	Action Plan	Action Steps/Activities	Outputs/Outcomes
<p>Community is key—as a whole school, we need to create environments that support all students, but we do not have consistent skills, beliefs, or time to do this effectively for all students.</p> <p>Connections program does not work—it is not implemented consistently and effectively. Staff are split on whether it is needed and should continue.</p> <p>Differences between upper school and lower school</p> <p>Not all staff are comfortable with how to facilitate community—how to talk with students; how to deal with oppositional behavior; how to create a safe, quiet, calm place to start the day; how to prevent</p>	<p>Parent engagement: communication:</p> <p>We believe parents are valuable members of our community who are instrumental in supporting their child’s and our school’s success. We strive to meaningfully engage all parents and families in our learning community.</p> <p>Building community: activities fair:</p> <p>We believe that every student can and wants to succeed. A strong community in which all individuals feel a sense of belonging is created through thoughtful relationships, supported by structure and rituals that celebrate learning.</p> <p>Professional development: classroom consistency (classroom management/ teacher and student interactions):</p>	<p>Parent engagement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developed a tool/process for communicating with parents and students that focuses on topics related to academic performance that are not evident from looking at a grade. Increased communication from all teachers to all families about nonacademic factors that influence academics. Establish no more than five skills that can be observed and agreed upon, and on which all grades will focus (teach, measure progress, and report on). Provide opportunities for students to get involved, build relationships with peers/adults, improve self-esteem, and so on. Two activities fairs planned to engage students in afterschool activities, one for the fall and one for the spring. <p>Building community:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase student and parent involvement in afterschool activities. 	<p>Staff cohesion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Moving toward problem solving more quickly after identifying the concern; finding possible approaches to address the concern; building the necessary skills; giving the necessary support. Teachers are giving feedback to each other if a peer is not following the newly developed norm for thinking and talking about students. Shift in language that teachers use to talk about students—no longer general statements that characterize the students but instead referring to what the student is doing and wondering what it might mean. <p>Building community/parent engagement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using the communication tool and protocol with parents resulted in improved communication and increased parent engagement, as demonstrated by increased frequency of contact between families and the school, improved parent responsiveness to staff calls and e-mails, and increased numbers of parents taking the initiative to reach out to teachers. Parents are directly contacting teachers, not the dean of students.

Priorities	Action Plan	Action Steps/Activities	Outputs/Outcomes
<p>behavior from escalating by being proactive and setting the context in the classroom.</p>	<p>Safe and supportive environments are characterized by structure and consistency and are grounded in mindful teacher and student relationships.</p> <p>Action: Create consistently safe and supportive classrooms through professional development, peer collaboration, and student buy-in.</p> <p>Build school spirit (Year 2).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leverage afterschool activities to meet the needs of at-risk student populations. Create consistently safe and supportive classrooms through professional development, peer collaboration, and student buy-in. <p>Classroom consistency:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop an observation tool and create a teacher culture with a mindset of growth and an emphasis on collaboration. Develop a student survey to ensure that students understand expectations and why they are in place. Use the data to inform and improve practice. Develop a teacher survey; achieve teacher confidence and buy-in and strong foundational knowledge of the school system by developing videos of teachers at the school. Develop teacher proficiency on the Educator Evaluation Rubric: Standard II. Develop videos to demonstrate the safe and supportive school culture and practices that all staff are encouraged to use. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers report a shift in attitude about contacting parents and feel more empowered and supported to contact parents. Student response to the increased communication with parents was positive. Teachers are more empowered—have time within the school day; have the process-protocol-support and sentence starters for framing the dialogue with parents. Completion of the staff survey regarding afterschool activities resulted in many more and varied activities that can be offered. <p>Classroom consistency:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decrease in the average number of detentions given per day Used video as a training tool for new and current staff to help build the school’s identity as a safe and supportive school. The need for dean of students to intervene with “repeat offenders” has decreased—fewer students and fewer incidents requiring attention. Higher level of student engagement (i.e., an increase in the number of students participating in extracurricular activities

Priorities	Action Plan	Action Steps/Activities	Outputs/Outcomes
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a school mascot (Year 2). • Develop a peer mentoring program (Year 2). • Research and incorporate restorative practices (Year 2). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> and a reduction in the number of students missing special school events) (Year 2) • School leaders and staff noted that the relationship between teachers and students has improved (Year 2). • Student survey data suggest that staff are more consistent in supporting school norms (Year 2). • Shifting away from traditional discipline (i.e., revised reflection protocol to be more supportive and less punitive, more holistic, and focused on problem solving) (Year 2) • Improved communication between staff and parents (i.e., increased frequency of contact with families and improved problem solving between families and staff) (Year 2) • Fewer disciplinary incidents requiring attention (Year 2) • School now “feels” more trauma-sensitive; being safe and supportive is becoming a part of their school culture (Year 2).

School D Action Plan Chart

Priorities	Action Plan	Action Steps/Activities	Outputs/Outcomes
<p>Support staff in getting to know each other better, reinforce working together, and merge the two schools into one School D team.</p> <p>Develop useful classroom strategies to address the self-regulation and social skills needs of students, including specific classroom management ideas.</p>	<p>Staff team building:</p> <p>Social Thinking curriculum: Provide training about its use for increasing student skill development.</p> <p>Integrate subgroups, such as special service providers (e.g., occupational therapist, physical therapist, speech and language therapist), Unified Arts, and prekindergarten into the West staff team.</p>	<p>Use three half-day staff meetings to help staff get to know each other and enhance team building among all staff.</p> <p>Use the half-day staff meeting in early January to provide information about the various school-based programs, initiatives, and supports at West.</p> <p>Develop a staffwide training for the half-day staff meeting in March. Follow-up to include an overview of the Social Thinking curriculum</p> <p>Create a bulletin board in the cafeteria dedicated to Social Thinking; provide visual representations of the core elements of the Social Thinking curriculum.</p> <p>Include the speech and language specialist in the Social Thinking work to provide the specialist group with “leadership” representation.</p> <p>Maximize all opportunities to connect staff, including prekindergarten teachers and specialists.</p> <p>Have the coordinator for special education develop a process to clarify</p>	<p>Group cohesion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schoolwide shift toward teaching students skills to increase awareness and develop improved capacity to self-regulate and manage peer and adult relationships in positive ways. • Improved sense of “team” observed by leadership team. Staff are looking out for each other, promoting self-care for the group. • Staff are working together to problem-solve issues for all students (e.g., finding time in the existing schedule for social skills development). • Staff have a concerted focus on coming together—understand the need for connectedness—and working to support student success with a common approach; resurgence of enthusiasm for PBIS. • Focus on adults feeling safe and supported—steps to take for self-care—and reminding each other of opportunities such as mindfulness and yoga. • Staff are asking for help—expressing their desire to learn more—which is evidence of developing a learning community. • Steering committee is reflecting on changes within the school and how to adapt.

Priorities	Action Plan	Action Steps/Activities	Outputs/Outcomes
		<p>and support staff understanding of the process and answer questions.</p> <p>Implement the Red Envelope strategy.</p> <p>Provided all-staff training and supported implementation of Second Step’s anti-bullying curriculum (Year 2).</p> <p>To further staff cohesion, cross-discipline and cross-grade-level groups were put in place, such as college communities for planning for assemblies and work groups focused on varied tasks related to PBIS implementation (Year 2).</p>	<p>Understanding what underlies student behavior and how to address it:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership team is observing differences in the way staff describe students and families—nonjudgmental, not complaining—shifting to thinking about “what I can do at school.” • Staff are rethinking how they are handling challenging situations with students; there is a shift to more realistic and empathic responses, and a focus on creating a safe and supportive refuge for students at school. • Leadership team is observing a shift to a problem-solving approach—moving toward what they can make happen at school. • Discussions in the School Support Team meetings indicate that staff have an increased awareness about the whole child. • Staff are interested in setting up calming corners in their classrooms. <p>Prevention:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff demonstrate an increased focus on prevention—intervening before student escalates—and sharing information with leadership team/counseling staff.

School E Action Plan Chart ²⁰

Priorities	Action Plan	Action Steps/ Activities	Outputs
Move the school away from a singular focus on individual student needs and toward systemic change to the school culture.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developing staff toolkits that will support staff in creating a safe and supportive learning environment. Embedding the safe and supportive messages into student assemblies. 	<p>Brainstorm ideas for the toolkit.</p> <p>Address community building using the First Six Days of School Curriculum.</p> <p>Develop tools and resources for staff that focus on “why” taking this action is safe and supportive.</p> <p>Develop a staff bulletin board that provides safe and supportive strategies and resources for responding to student behavior.</p> <p>Restructure the therapeutic support program to offer more support for students with high levels of need.</p>	<p>Built on the school’s existing First 6 Days curriculum by engaging staff in generating the “why” behind the community building activities suggested in the curriculum and integrating more team building exercises.</p> <p>Staff reported that the building feels “calmer.”</p>

²⁰ This action plan was developed and implemented in Year 2 of the study. During Year 1, the school did not create a specific action plan but used the school improvement plan that was already in place.

Appendix D. Composition of School Steering Committees

School	# Steering Committee Members	Steering Committee Members	Total # of Meetings and Meeting Time (Year 1) ²¹	Total # of Meetings and Meeting Time (Year 2)
School A	13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Principal School adjustment counselor Two specialists (occupational therapist and instructional resource specialist) Nine classroom teachers 	14 meetings/16 hours	11 meetings/12 hours
School B	13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Principal Assistant principal Administrator for special-needs program (building level) School adjustment counselor School psychologist One specialist (technology integration) Six classroom teachers Special education chair (district level) 	13 meetings/25 hours (plus 8 hours with principal)	5 meetings/10 hours

²¹ Includes the 2-hour training held at the beginning of Year 1.

School	# Steering Committee Members	Steering Committee Members	Total # of Meetings and Meeting Time (Year 1) ²¹	Total # of Meetings and Meeting Time (Year 2)
School C	7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Head of school/ Principal of lower school • Principal of upper school • Dean of students • Special education director • Two school adjustment counselors • Learning specialist 	12 meetings/ 24 hours	2 meetings/4 hours with TLPI Additional hours spent by all staff in upper school and lower school action planning teams without TLPI
School D	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Principal • Assistant principal • Two school adjustment counselors • Two teachers (one classroom teacher and one from the school's student support program) 	9 meetings/21 hours (plus 8 hours with staff)	5 meetings/8 hours TLPI (plus 4 hours in staff meetings and 6 hours meeting with staff teams)

Appendix E. Individual School Inquiry-Based Process Profiles

School A

Priorities: (1) address communication among staff, (2) develop a common language and approach to addressing student behavior across the whole school, (3) address staff cohesion, and (4) allow more time for building-based professional development, and include nonprofessional staff—current PD feels like a “drive-through.”

Action plan to address priorities: School A set forth three specific actions in its plan during Year 1: (1) improve information sharing about students (within legal and ethical limits) among staff, (2) create a sense of team spirit and build a collaborative culture among all staff, and (3) teach students how to identify their emotions and use appropriate regulating strategies. Two priorities were added in Year 2: (4) build student connectedness within classrooms, among grade-level peers, and within the school community; and (5) teach students how to positively contribute in a community.

Activities: School A staff “tweaked” its school mission and vision statements to reflect the goal of developing a safe and supportive environment. They also revisited their discipline practices and decided that their existing system was not trauma sensitive. The steering committee led efforts to rethink the school’s approach and decided to move away from managing student behavior with punishment toward building students’ social and self-regulation skills. During Year 1, specific activities related to this new approach to discipline included distinguishing between major and minor offenses (a Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports [PBIS] technique), helping staff address behavior in non-punitive ways, professional development on PBIS in combination with the Zones of Regulation strategy, and developing sensory starter toolkits for the classroom.

The steering committee worked to increase staff cohesion with the understanding that this would translate to a more safe and supportive environment for students. Specifically, to help build a collaborative culture among staff, an all-staff bulletin board was created where staff put up pictures and information about themselves (e.g., languages spoken and staff interests). The committee also established vertical teams to enhance staff’s exposure to teachers outside their grade level, and used the vertical teams to organize small-group discussions in staff meetings and trainings. They also set up trainings that cultivated teacher partnerships and elicited teacher input (e.g., involving teachers in a “make-and-take” session to create items for the sensory toolkits for the classroom Zones of Regulation corners). To further cultivate connections among staff, the principal used the daily newsletter to share news about staff and activities in the building.

In addition, the school implemented the “Red Envelope” system, which is used to let staff know in real time that a student is struggling (in a way that does not violate student confidentiality). The goal of this system is to help shift teacher perceptions of student behavior when the student is struggling because of things that have happened to him/her inside or outside school.

In the second year, additional activities included implementing a classroom buddy system, where a student can go to the buddy classroom to complete a reflection form with help processing from the buddy teacher, and adding new opportunities and supports to help students increase their repertoire of self-regulation skills (e.g., a focus on de-stressing, understanding how the brain works [the MindUP curriculum], matching the size of a reaction to the size of the problem [Zones of Regulation]). In addition, specific actions were taken to promote a deeper understanding and schoolwide uptake of trauma-sensitive norms as they relate to students’ self-regulation. These included follow-up training on the Zones of Regulation, asking specialists to incorporate teaching the Zones of Regulation into their time with students, and the development of a Looks Like/Sounds Like chart to further operationalize trauma-sensitive interactions with students.

Finally, to address the new priorities, the steering committee piloted the Breakfast Buddies” program among committee members’ classrooms. The program was designed to enhance peer connections by providing expanded opportunities and support for developing friendships by eating breakfast together on a regular basis. They also implemented grade-level community service learning projects throughout the school based on the Choose to Be Nice curriculum.

Outcomes:

- **Deepened understanding of trauma sensitivity and a shift in mindset.** During the 2-year study period, staff at School A deepened their understanding of what it means to be a trauma-sensitive school. The creation of a “Looks Like/Sounds Like” chart served as evidence of this deeper level of understanding as it demonstrates staff’s ability to operationalize trauma-sensitive attributes in a holistic way (by addressing the relational, behavioral, and academic aspects). In addition, teachers were reflecting on their own interactions with students (e.g., a teacher noted that she used to be “a yeller,” but because of her new understanding of trauma she now focuses on using a more measured tone of voice). These findings are consistent with staff survey data, which found that almost all staff agree that this work has helped them to develop a shared understanding of trauma-sensitivity and what it takes to be a trauma-sensitive school.
- **Communication.** At the end of Year 2, the steering committee conducted a staff survey to gauge the success of its efforts. This survey found that 71% of staff felt that information sharing among staff about students had improved.

- **Staff cohesion.** The staff bulletin board was described as a success. It received a great deal of positive feedback from staff and helped them learn more about their colleagues. The board also became a centerpiece for discussion among staff, students, and parents. A staff survey administered by the steering committee found that in Year 2, 54% of staff felt that there was a collaborative culture among all school staff, and that 64% of staff felt there was a collaborative culture among their team members, (e.g., grade level or department teams).
- **A shift in student behavior management strategies.** School staff shifted their discipline approach from managing student behavior to helping students develop self-regulation skills. This change included an emphasis on using PBIS major/minor categories to screen for the need for an office referral and building staff capacity to help students develop self-regulation skills. Evidence of this shift also was found in the classrooms. Each classroom included the following: a sensory toolbox, and a “calming area” with a Zones of Regulation poster. In addition, steering committee staff survey data, gathered during Year 2, indicated that 59% of the respondents felt comfortable using the language and tools of the Zones of Regulation in their classroom.
- **Establishing identity as a trauma-sensitive/safe and supportive school.** The school’s focus on becoming safe and supportive was kept on the front burner through frequent references and information sharing in the principal’s daily newsletter to staff. Also, the goal to develop a trauma-sensitive, safe, and supportive school was incorporated into the school’s mission and vision statements. In addition, the school has shared its work with the district and other schools.
- **Emerging school climate and culture findings.** Staff reported an improved school climate, including improved student-student and student-staff relationships. It was reported that the number of office referrals was starting to decrease. In addition, the Year 2 staff survey, administered by the research team, indicated that 60% of staff felt that students in their classrooms had made progress in identifying their emotions and using appropriate self-regulation strategies. Findings from the study’s staff survey, administered at the end of Year 2, also suggest that most respondents felt that the process has helped to move the school toward trauma sensitivity.

School B

Priorities: (1) be proactive and create a menu of support options for high-need students who were impacting the school (“hijacking” the classroom); responses now are primarily reactive, which is frustrating and emotionally draining for students and staff; and (2) create a stronger staff community (e.g., get everyone on the same page, build positive staff communication, learn how to have compassion with boundaries).

Actions to address priorities: School B focused on three actions to address its priorities: (1) implement proactive approaches to manage high-need students, (2) expand the staff toolkit of trauma-sensitive approaches, and (3) create a stronger staff community that embraces shared responsibility for supporting all learning and staff through implementation of the first two goals.

Activities: During Year 1, the school took actions to create a stronger community and embrace shared responsibility for all students by providing staff with consistent, schoolwide practices to support all students, including “high-need students.” These activities included: piloting a space where students who are struggling in the classroom can go to calm down, take a break, and build skills, increasing staff’s capacity to support high-need students; initiating schoolwide implementation of the Zones of Regulation to establish consistent, schoolwide practices to support all students in learning self-regulation skills²²; and implementing universal design for learning plans to provide opportunities for differentiated instruction and address the needs of the whole child using the four domains for success, as well as Second Step, brain gym/movement breaks and restorative practices. Staff at School B also worked to refine the support team meetings so that they are more responsive to student needs.

During Year 2, School B staff continued to work on their action plan items by strengthening existing efforts and implementing actions that they were not able to get to during the first year of the study. A small group of steering committee members met during the summer to develop the toolkit. The toolkit contains two components—a physical box in the teachers’ lounge with actual tools and resources, and information in the staff handbook that offers staff resources to help decide what to do to address student behavior in safe and supportive ways. Some staff have chosen to study a resource from the toolkit as their focus during their professional learning community (PLC; see discussion below regarding PLCs).

²² This action step involved the following: (1) providing professional development and more support for classroom educators on strategies to address students’ self-regulation and social skills, and to develop a common language; and (2) expanding the school’s toolkit of trauma-sensitive approaches to promote staff inclusion through the use of consistent practices and provide staff with resources for developing strategies to address the needs of all students.

The identified space for supporting high need students to build skills has continued to evolve, and the school's special education committee, staff, and school leaders collaborated on refining it and addressing issues related to space and role clarity for providing these supports to students. During the 2017–18 school year, the school will work with an external consultant on further refining the space.

In Year 1, the need to create a stronger staff community was identified as an urgent priority. It was expected that this would happen organically as they addressed the first two priorities, and no specific action items were created. However, this did not happen. As a result, the steering committee had to reflect on and rethink their strategy at the end of the year. During Year 2, they developed a new plan of action that was driven by a newfound understanding about how staff were being affected by this work and focused on implementing strategies that accounted for staff needs. First, the school made changes in the way support was provided to classroom teachers as they responded in a safe and supportive way to crises with individual students. Specifically, to address staff's concerns that they were being "evaluated/judged" each time a member of the administration arrived to help, teachers who were confident with the Crisis Prevention Intervention (CPI) protocol are now responding instead. Next, the school has established PLCs where they can focus on a topic of interest (e.g., responsive classroom, wellness). For the PLC's, teachers could select who they wanted to work with and what they wanted to focus on. The steering committee also wanted to create another opportunity for staff to work together in a guided way, so staff meetings were reorganized to make better use of planning time and to encourage staff connectedness and cohesion. Staff now meet in groups that address specific topic areas (or negotiables) that are related to the school improvement plan (e.g., effective classroom management, space utilization in the school, technology use in the classroom, parent communication). For these committees, staff could prioritize which group they wanted to join, but the final composition of the groups was decided by the steering committee and school administrators to ensure collaboration across discipline and grade-levels. As part of this transition, staff received mindfulness training as well as information about various communication styles. Teacher committees used this information to structure conversations about how to work together more effectively with colleagues.

Outcomes:

- **A shift to more trauma-sensitive approaches to building students' self-regulation skills.** The school has moved toward more empathic and restorative practices. Staff began working together as a team to adopt consistent practices throughout the building, including helping students develop self-regulation skills. In addition, there was an increase in the number of staff expressing interest in learning more about how to use restorative practices.

- **Shift in approaches to student discipline and addressing crises.** Participants described a noticeable shift in the dialogue related to student behavior and how staff approach discipline. It was noted that some staff now view behavior challenges as a “*learning opportunity*” and are learning not to take things personally. As a result, they are starting to take “*more dynamic*” approaches to discipline as opposed to immediately handing out consequences. In addition, it was reported that teachers are becoming more confident about their ability to handle behaviors in the classroom and are less likely to view getting the student out of the classroom as the first option. Finally, the identified space for supporting high need students to build skills continues to evolve and, although it is still a work in progress, staff are motivated by the changes they have observed. Namely, they have transformed it into more of a preventive (rather than reactive) space. With this positive change, the next step is to consider how they can structure the space for use with Tier 2 students. Finally, the school has been more proactive in addressing high-need students. For example, they moved some students around so that new teachers had fewer challenging students in their classroom.
- **Staff collaboration and cohesion.** Participants reported that they are starting to see a shift in the level of collaboration, with staff helping each other more and being more supportive of each other. The creation of the PLCs and committees also has helped staff to get to know each other better and to increase staff awareness and respect for their colleagues. It was noted that they feel more like a team working toward a common goal. In addition, as a result of their efforts to respond to high-need students more effectively, case management occurs more frequently and now includes the whole team, so there is more collaboration around finding solutions. In addition, the steering committee’s shift to a more trauma-sensitive approach to problem solving has extended beyond students and is now evident in how they are addressing issues with their colleagues. These factors likely contributed to the overall increase in morale reported by several participants.
- **Establishing an identity as a trauma-sensitive/safe and supportive school.** During Year 1, School B began to establish its identity as a “safe and supportive school,” both internally and within the broader community. Educators voluntarily came back early in August 2016 to work in their classrooms to create safe and welcoming spaces (e.g., flexible seating arrangements, calming corners). Leadership viewed this as an outgrowth of their efforts to strengthen the staff community and work together to increase their capacity to respond to the staff-identified priority of addressing high-need students. The school’s identity as a safe and supportive school also can be seen in the way it presents itself to the broader community. The school created a flyer for parents using language that emphasized a whole-child approach and explained the philosophy of shifting discipline practices toward teaching and developing accountability rather than controlling through fear or power of coercion.

The school also created a safe and supportive school float for the local July 4 (2016) parade and welcomed students and families back to school in September with a large purple ribbon placed around the building. During Year 2, School B continued to increase the visibility of its work. Internally, to start off Year 2, the principal shared a slide show that included photos highlighting changes that teachers had made in their classrooms that reflected their safe and supportive work. Staff also shared a video about toxic stress and relaxation techniques with parents during the open house. Externally, school staff had the opportunity to share their journey at national and local conferences.

- **Emerging school climate findings.** During Year 1, staff reported a decrease in the need for crisis response. This was based on a comparison of number of crisis responses during a 3-week period in 2015 with the same 3 weeks in 2016. This finding persisted into Year 2 and was attributed to the fact that students are getting the support that they need—staff are identifying high-need students faster and pulling together a plan in a more timely manner. As a result, the school was described by staff as feeling “*safer*” and “*calmer*.” However, staff survey results indicated that supporting all students to feel safe is an area for continued attention.

School C

Priorities: (1) We need to create environments that support all students, but do not have consistent skills, beliefs, or time to do this effectively for all students; (2) the Connections program does not work—it is not implemented consistently and effectively; and (3) not all staff are comfortable with how to facilitate community (e.g., how to talk with students, how to deal with oppositional behavior).

Action plan to address priorities: School C set forth the following actions to address its priorities: (1) meaningfully engage parents and families in the learning community, (2) build community by creating a sense of belonging among students, and (3) provide professional development to promote consistent classroom management and supportive teacher–student interactions.

Activities: During Year 1, School C developed several tools and protocols to facilitate implementation of its action plan. To promote parent engagement, the school piloted and implemented a communication process for reaching out to parents; time to make these calls was built into weekly grade-level team meetings. The process went more smoothly during the first year but experienced some difficulty with consistency across teams during Year 2. These challenges were attributed in part to logistics (i.e., not having enough time to make calls during the team meetings). Additional strategies to increase parent engagement included the development of a parent newsletter for Grades 6 and 8, setting up Google Classroom to facilitate parent communication, and offering additional support for English language learner (ELL) parents to encourage engagement (e.g., translation and interpretation services at a school meeting).

The school also ran an activities fair in the upper and lower schools to help students build relationships with peers/adults and explicitly connect students to the school. Although the fairs were successful, staff in the lower school learned some lessons about how to improve the process to ensure that it goes more smoothly in the future (e.g., making sure that sixth-grade parents know about the activities fair ahead of time and what is being offered so they can preplan with their students). School C staff created a series of videos of their educators demonstrating ways to welcome students and share what the norms and values of their safe and supportive school look like. During Year 2, the school began to use the videos as a training tool, for new and current staff, to demonstrate the safe and supportive school culture and practices that all staff are encouraged to use. Key themes of the videos include consistency, structure, and positive teacher–student relationships. To accompany the videos and promote consistent practices schoolwide, staff developed and implemented a peer observation protocol based on the skills being evaluated through the state’s new teacher effectiveness evaluation tool. By the spring

of Year 2, lower school staff had completed three cycles of peer observations. School staff also developed several surveys to track the impact of their action plan.

Outcomes

- **Deepened understanding of trauma sensitivity and a shift in mindset.** Staff described a shift in mindset that began in Year 1 and deepened during Year 2, with teachers more likely to use a trauma-sensitive lens to view student behavior. To help encourage this mindset shift, School C has instituted a mantra—that “students do as well as they are able”—which appears to be having an impact on the way staff talk about students. For example, it was reported that teachers are now more interested in understanding what is going on with a student that could be contributing to his/her behavior, and informal conversations are now more strength-based and solution-focused. Teachers also are more likely to ask questions about what is going on with a student. In addition, staff are more vigilant, more likely to notice if students are having a rough day, and more compassionate in their interactions with students. Finally, it was noted that teachers are giving feedback to each other if a peer does not follow the newly developed norm for thinking and talking about students.

The shift in mindset also has extended to parent interactions, and some staff are now viewing their approach to working with parents through a trauma-sensitive lens. Staff reported more dialogue about how parents/guardians may have their own trauma histories or a history of negative interactions with schools. These findings are consistent with staff survey results indicating that almost all staff feel this work has helped to develop a shared understanding of the impact of trauma and what it means to be a trauma-sensitive school.

- **Increased student engagement.** Staff reported higher student engagement as evidenced by an increase in the number of students who were participating in extracurricular activities and a reduction in the number of students who are missing special school events. School leaders and staff also noted that relationships between teachers and students have improved.
- **Transitioning away from traditional models of discipline.** School C staff acknowledged that they still have a way to go in terms of implementing a more trauma-sensitive model for student discipline. Like the other schools, they are moving away from the traditional model, which is heavily focused on consequences, and working to attain a healthy balance between addressing student behavior in a supportive way without reinforcing negative behaviors. They are currently in a transitional phase where they are working on the lack of consistency in how staff respond to challenging student behaviors. However, they noted that that they are making progress in this area. For example, in Year 2 they revised the protocol in their reflection room so that it feels more supportive and less punitive. The reflection sheets require more documentation and are more detailed and holistic (e.g., focused on problem

solving). In addition, students sent to the reflection room now have the opportunity to do meditation. There also is increased follow-up and transparency regarding student discipline.

- **Parent engagement.** Staff at School C reported improved communication between staff and parents, as evidenced by increased frequency of contact between families and the school, (e.g., staff reaching out to parents more), improved response rates to staff calls and e-mails, and better problem solving between the two (fewer issues taken to the dean of students). There also was a reported a shift in attitude about contacting parents, with teachers feeling supported, more comfortable, and more empowered to do so. In addition, staff reported that students had a positive response to the increased and more positive parental communications. In the lower school, there was an increase across all three grades in the number of parents who attended award ceremonies.
- **Staff cohesion.** Using the new observation protocols, teachers have started giving feedback to each other, which has reportedly encouraged staff communication. Discussions about students have moved from identifying negative attributes to identifying concerns and developing ways to build skills.
- **Emerging school climate findings.** During Year 1, it was reported that the average number of daily detentions decreased, as did the need for the dean of students to intervene with repeat offenders. It also was reported that there were fewer disciplinary incidents requiring attention. These findings persisted into Year 2. Data from a school-administered student survey suggested that staff are more consistent in supporting school norms. In addition, it was reported in the staff survey that the school now “feels” more trauma sensitive, and that being safe and supportive is becoming a part of the school culture.

School D

Priorities: (1) support staff in getting to know each other better, reinforce working together, and merge the two schools into one School D team; and (2) develop useful classroom strategies to address the self-regulation and social skills needs of students, including specific classroom management ideas.

Action plan to address priorities: School D's action plan focused on the following four items: (1) staff team building, (2) training staff on the Social Thinking Curriculum, (3) integrating special service providers (e.g., occupational therapist [OT], physical therapist [PT]) into the School D staff team, and (4) increasing staff knowledge about the various programs, initiatives, and supports available at the school.

Activities: During the first year of the study, the school implemented specific action steps to address each of its priorities. In response to the school's identified priority to support staff in getting to know one another and facilitate the merging of staff from the two schools into one cohesive school team, activities focused on building staff cohesion and ensuring that all staff were familiar with student supports. The steering committee held a series of staff meetings to address this goal, including one where they set up six "stations" for staff to learn more about the initiatives and supports offered at the school (e.g., individualized education programs, social skills group, interventionist entrance/exit criteria, PBIS). The committee also focused explicitly on ways to integrate subgroups such as special service providers (e.g., OT, PT, Unified Arts) and prekindergarten teachers, into the school's staff team. The school also held a schoolwide training on the Social Thinking Curriculum to help build staff capacity to support students' social-emotional and self-regulation skills. To supplement this training, they developed and placed a Social Thinking bulletin board in a central location in the school to reinforce key concepts and visuals for teaching skill building. The school also implemented the Red Envelope strategy to improve sharing and communication about student needs, encouraging teachers to be more trauma sensitive in their interactions with students.

During Year 2, the growing resource constraints left the school with little time and space to continue implementing its action plan. However, school leaders did continue to work toward staff team building by organizing teachers and their classes into "college communities." Each community consisted of staff from different grade levels. The idea was that staff would get together in the college communities for small-group discussion, social time, and assemblies. The staff also worked together in cross-discipline and cross-grade-level work groups focused on various aspects of PBIS implementation. In addition, they provided training in and implemented the Second Step Anti-Bullying Curriculum, a social-emotional learning (SEL)-based curriculum that will support student skill building related to bullying prevention.

During Year 2, the school's focus shifted from implementing its original action plan to reflecting and problem solving about how to address the persistent challenges brought on by the school's resource deficits. These discussions resulted in specific actions to address this problem, including advocacy to the district to raise awareness of their struggles and to emphasize that the current situation with limited resources and escalating student needs was not sustainable. The sounding board observed that staff engaged in this process with safe and supportive values in mind.

Outcomes:

Despite the challenges experienced during the 2-year study period, School D did see some movement toward becoming trauma sensitive. Most of the outcomes related to its action plan were attained during Year 1 when staff had more time to focus on implementing their action steps. However, by the end of Year 1, staff were feeling overwhelmed by the challenging situation in the school. The challenges persisted into Year 2, making it difficult to focus on their action plan.

- **A shift in mindset.** There was evidence that the steering committee at School D had begun to internalize the trauma-sensitive values by looking at problems and solutions through a trauma-sensitive lens. Although the school struggled to move forward with its action plan, the staff's deepened understanding of trauma-sensitive values was evident as they continued to problem solve. For example, steering committee members noted that their understanding of the need for making decisions that are based on trauma-sensitive, safe, and supportive approaches that encompass predictability and consistency has often led them to assume the primary role of coordinating and planning for students in the school who are in the care of the Department of Children and Families (DCF), or put in foster placements, as these students are often vulnerable to further risk of experiencing negative/traumatic impacts from DCF decisions. Staff survey data also indicated that staff believe this work has given them a better understanding of the impact of trauma.
- **Greater district and community support.** The school successfully advocated for additional student support. As a result of this work, the district agreed to provide additional staff to help support the school. Specifically, for the 2017-2018 school year, the school will have a second teacher for the student support program, three additional instructional assistants, and a dean of students. The district also agreed to make available a district-based family resource coordinator. In addition, although it is time consuming, School D is collaborating with community agencies to help increase supports for its students.
- **Staff cohesion.** During Year 1, leadership reported an improved sense of cohesiveness, as evidenced by their observations that staff are watching out for each other, promoting self-care (e.g., offering yoga and mindfulness training after school), and demonstrating appreciation and

validation of their colleagues' work. There also was an increased understanding of the need for connectedness and a resurgence of schoolwide enthusiasm for implementing PBIS.

Implementing the Red Envelope strategy led to more staff-initiated conversations with the administration about students. In addition, a schoolwide focus on developing students' ability to self-regulate and improving peer and adult relationships in positive ways also helped to promote the school's goal of staff cohesion. Staff perspectives about the impact of these communities are mixed, but this strategy has reportedly helped some staff get to know each other better.

- **Deeper understanding of student behavior and a focus on prevention.** During Year 1, it was reported that the process gave staff "permission" to be more proactive and intervene before problems escalated (e.g., by sharing information, reaching out for assistance). There also is evidence that staff are starting to view student behavior through a trauma-sensitive lens. For example, school leaders reported a noticeable difference in how teachers described students and their families. Specifically, instead of making judgments or assumptions (e.g., parents don't care), teachers were reflecting more on why a particular behavior was occurring and were displaying more empathetic responses. In addition, the leadership team observed a shift toward a problem-solving approach that emphasized how staff can help students at school, rather than focusing on what parents should be doing at home. Leadership further reported that staff are now asking for help and expressing their desire to learn more about new strategies to support their students. Staff also admitted that, at times, it was challenging to remain trauma sensitive because of the stressful environment.
- **Emerging school culture and climate outcomes:** Because of its designation during the fall of Year 2 as an underperforming school, School D had to participate in a state-funded monitoring site visit. School leaders reported that findings from this report revealed positive relationships between staff and students, suggesting that the school was making progress toward creating a safe and supportive learning environment. However, staff survey results at the end of Year 2 indicate that staff perceptions regarding the impact of this work in helping the school become more trauma sensitive were mixed. This is likely due, in part, to the school's shift in focus during Year 2, from implementing its original action plan to reflecting and problem solving about how to address the persistent challenges brought about by the school's resource deficits.

School E

(The following profile provides details about School E during Year 2 of the research study. As described earlier in this report, a competing initiative made it difficult for School E to dedicate sufficient time to fully implement the process during the first year. The school began Year 2 with new leadership and created a Safe and Supportive Steering Committee with its own time and space, and a dedicated focus on trauma-sensitive whole-school approaches.)

Priorities: Transition to a whole-school approach to creating a safe and supportive community.

Actions to address priorities: The school identified new priorities and a new action plan and began working on implementing the plan in the spring of Year 2. To address their urgent priorities, School E set forth two specific action items: (1) developing staff toolkits that will support staff in building community and developing a safe and supportive learning environment, and (2) embedding the safe and supportive messages into assemblies.

Activities: School E was starting over in Year 2; therefore, most of the steering committee’s time was spent brainstorming action steps and getting started with implementation of the action plan. The steering committee began their work on the toolkit by brainstorming existing resources, identifying which resources staff and families needed, and identifying other areas for additional research. They chose to start with community building, noting that much attention is given to community building in the first 6 days of school, but that staff often forget to go back and nurture the community after that time period. They also built on the school’s existing First 6 Days curriculum by engaging staff in generating the “why” behind the practices suggested in the curriculum and integrating more team building exercises. In addition, the committee aimed to articulate how the safe and supportive approaches were connected with their existing framework—the school’s pillars/school rules and the matrix developed through their work on PBIS/MTSS. The team identified the need to adjust the matrix to include “emotional language” rather than just “physical language.” Finally, drawing on what they learned from another demonstration school, the team made video recordings of classrooms holding morning meetings using the toolkit, to serve as a model for teachers who are beginning to use morning meetings to build community in their classrooms. Another tool that was developed was a staff bulletin board that provided safe and supportive strategies and resources for responding to student behavior.

Outcomes:

- **Shifts in mindset.** The school started the process over in Year 2 and began implementation as designed. The new principal spent some time working with staff to conceptualize what it means to be a trauma-sensitive/safe and supportive school. Staff at School E reported that

they are starting to see a shift among staff, from viewing trauma-sensitivity from the perspective of the individual child to a more whole-school approach. As one participant noted, *“I hear a lot more about what are we going to do as a grade level team for everyone or how are we going to frame this for our kids or teachers, how are we going to present this so it’s not insular anymore.”* This finding was supported by staff survey data that found that more than half of the participants had taken the trauma-sensitive course offered by TLPI, and the majority of staff indicated that this work had led to a shared understanding of trauma sensitivity.

- **Emerging school climate and culture outcomes.** Staff reported that the building feels “calmer” now that they have restructured the therapeutic support program to offer more support for students with high levels of need.



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