



BEST PRACTICES IN RETURNING TO LEARNING

November 2020

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INTRODUCTION

Most districts across the nation adopted a virtual instruction model in spring 2020 due to COVID-19. As districts anticipate the eventual shift back to in-person learning, district leaders are concerned about how they can support teacher preparedness and well-being and need information about preparing for students' academic recovery and social-emotional learning (SEL). To support this effort, Hanover Research (Hanover) has conducted a secondary research study to identify best practices for returning to learning to support teachers, staff, and students district-wide, including resources and strategies. In this report, Hanover shares best practices from secondary sources for assessing and remediating student learning loss, using SEL in classrooms following a crisis, and supporting teacher and staff well-being. These sources include publicly available research, advice from educational experts, and state guidance. This report will inform district-level supports for teachers and students and methods to build in-person student and teacher learning capacity. Hanover also profiles exemplar districts on their strategies, programs, and professional learning ideas for in-person teacher/student learning supports and capacity.

This report includes three sections:

- **Section I: Strategies for Assessing and Remediating Learning Loss** due to COVID reviews how to pinpoint COVID-19-related learning losses going into the 2020-21 academic year as well as short- and long-term strategies to remediate learning loss.
- **Section II: Return to Learning through Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)** details best practices for how districts can best utilize SEL in transitioning back to in-person learning.
- **Section III: Teacher and Staff Well-Being** explore identifying and acknowledging teacher trauma as well as general and COVID-19-related strategies to support teacher and staff well-being.

KEY FINDINGS



Formative assessments help districts both assess and remediate learning loss. As states canceled standardized tests in spring 2020, formative assessments provide a quick and real-time way for districts and teachers to assess students' academic gaps due to COVID-19 exist now and whenever in-person learning resumes. In remediating learning loss, formative assessments give teachers the context of individual student progress or lack thereof in a subject and strategies to target instruction and plan any necessary interventions.



Additional strategies to remediate student learning loss include additional learning time, tutoring, individualized learning plans, and cross-grade collaboration. In particular, individualized learning plans also allow districts and schools to develop targeted supports for students' academic and social-emotional needs. Individualized learning plans are student-centric, promote equity, and utilize formative assessment results in a structured way to promote student success.



Based on previous crisis responses from schools worldwide, creating normalcy for students, prioritizing communication and connections, and supporting them through relationship-centered outreach are consistent return-to-learning SEL practices. In response to COVID-19 specifically, The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) created a guide outlining and detailing four critical SEL practices for school re-opening: strengthening relationships, healing and capacity-building opportunities for staff, ensuring a supportive school environment, and using data to continue supporting students, staff, and families.



Providing trauma-recognition training to teachers and staff with a focus on secondary traumatic stress (STS) helps educators understand their traumas as well as how their students' traumas affect them. Teachers and staff may feel isolated without the ability to identify or name their trauma and stress. Without district- and school-wide acknowledgment, training, and support for primary trauma awareness, STS, and self-care, teachers and staff may feel their experiences are unique and that they must solve their problems alone. Additionally, teacher and staff recognition on supporting students with traumatic experiences helps them recognize the importance of self-care and seeking help.



Districts can best support teachers and staff in returning to in-person learning following COVID-19 through providing mental health resources, encouraging teacher and staff self-care, and weekly check-ins. Recommended check-in conversation topics include the well-being of teachers/staff and their families, helping identify support services, learning the individuals in teacher/staff support networks and their levels of engagement, and asking teachers/staff about their self-care.

SECTION I: STRATEGIES FOR ASSESSING AND REMEDIATING LEARNING LOSS

In this section, Hanover details strategies for assessing and remediating learning loss, including formative assessments, tutoring, individualized learning programs, and additional learning time. Hanover also presents research on predicted learning loss from the beginning of remote instruction in March 2020 and into the 2020-2021 academic year.

ASSESSING COVID-19 LEARNING LOSS

PREDICTED LEARNING LOSS BETWEEN MARCH 2020 AND INTO THE 2020-2021 ACADEMIC YEAR

An Annenberg Institute study examined regular learning loss between academic years using a national sample of five million students in Grades 3-8 who took the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) Measure of Academic Progress (MAP) Growth assessments during the 2017-18 and 2018-19 school years. The study compared the typical growth trajectories across a standard-length school year to projections that assumed students missed the last three months of the 2019-20 school year. Based on these projections, students likely returned for the 2020-21 school year with “approximately 63-68 percent of the learning gains in reading relative to a typical school year and with 37-50 percent of the learning gains in math.” Students may have returned to school nearly a full year behind in math in some grades. However, learning losses are not likely to be universal, as the top third of students may potentially make reading gains this academic year.¹

Similarly, research shows that students will most likely still experience learning loss in a full-time virtual learning setting. In June, McKinsey & Company (McKinsey) modeled three scenarios for the 2020-21 school year to assess extended learning loss: Scenario 1) full-time, in-person class instruction for fall 2020; Scenario 2) full-time, virtual instruction in fall 2020 as well as part-time schedules and school closures in spring 2021; and Scenario 3) full-time, virtual instruction for the entire 2020-2021 academic year. McKinsey estimates in Scenario Two that students who remain enrolled could still lose three to four months of learning even if they receive average remote instruction and up to 12 to 14 months if they do not receive any instruction at all (see Figure 1.1 below).²

Figure 1.1: Average Months of Learning Lost in Scenario Two Compared with Typical In-Classroom Learning, Projected Grade 6 NWEA Math RIT Scores

| REMOTE LEARNING QUALITY | AVERAGE MONTHS OF LOST LEARNING |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Average | 3-4 |
| Low-Quality | 7-11 |
| No-Instruction | 12-14 |

Source: McKinsey³

Additionally, McKinsey projects that learning loss will be most pronounced among low-income, Black, and Hispanic students. Students in these demographics averaging more months of learning loss in scenario two than the 6.8-month average for all students (see Figure 1.2).⁴ Factors that may influence this learning loss

¹ Kuhfeld, M. et al. “Projecting the Potential Impacts of COVID-19 School Closures on Academic Achievement.” Annenberg Institute-Brown University, EdWorkingPapers.com, May 2020. <https://www.edworkingpapers.com/ai20-226>

² Dorn, E. et al. “COVID-19 and Student Learning in the United States: The Hurt Could Last a Lifetime.” McKinsey & Company, June 2020. p. 3. <https://www.mckinsey.com/~/media/McKinsey/Industries/Public%20and%20Social%20Sector/Our%20Insights/COVID-19%20and%20student%20learning%20in%20the%20United%20States%20The%20hurt%20could%20last%20a%20lifetime/COVID-19-and-student-learning-in-the-United-States-FINAL.pdf>

³ Figure contents adapted from: Ibid., p. 4

⁴ Ibid., pp. 4-5.

include the higher rates of COVID-19 infections and deaths in the Black community, the inability of many Black and Latinx parents to work from home, and the “digital divide” in technology and internet access by race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status.⁵

Figure 1.2: Average Months of Learning Lost in Scenario Two Compared with Typical In-Classroom Learning

| DEMOGRAPHIC | STUDY EFFECTIVE SIZE BENCH |
|-------------|----------------------------|
| Overall | 6.8 |
| White | 6.0 |
| Black | 10.3 |
| Latinx | 9.2 |
| Low-Income | 12.4 |

Sources: McKinsey⁶

Students across all grade levels will require more support than usual throughout the 2020-21 school year. While similar data and projections are not currently available for high school grade levels, these studies suggest that incoming Grade 9 students may enter high school more behind than typical in both English and math. Low-income, Latinx, and Black students will also likely need additional resources to close any learning gaps caused by extended remote learning.⁷

GENERAL STRATEGIES

Usually, researchers, states, and districts use end-of-year (EOY) standardized tests to assess students’ educational progress. Since most states canceled EOY standardized tests in spring 2020, states and districts must develop alternative ways to assess learning loss and instruction (shown in Figure 1.3).⁸

⁵ Kuhfeld et al., Op. cit.

⁶ Dorn et al., Op. cit., p. 5

⁷ [1] Kuhfeld et al., Op. cit. [2] Dorn et al., Op. cit., p. 6.

⁸ Wedenoja, L. “Without Testing, How Do We Measure Learning Loss From School Shutdowns?” Rockefeller Institute of Government, September 14, 2020. <http://rockinst.org/blog/without-testing-how-do-we-measure-learning-loss-from-school-shutdowns/>

Figure 1.3: Alternative Ways to Assess Learning Loss and Instruction

| COMPONENT | QUESTIONS |
|--|---|
| Assessing “Quarantine Slide” to Improve Instruction | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Small, formative assessments identifying specific skills allow teachers to spot educational gaps, target instruction, and plan interventions Incorporating online formative assessments (e.g., Khan Academy, Carnegie Learning) |
| Assessing “Quarantine Slide” to Measure State-Level and National Learning Loss | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> If possible, conduct EOY spring 2021 standardized tests, compare the results to spring 2019 results, and make any necessary changes based on student testing history. This method provides an average learning loss for students across schools, states, and demographic groups instead of individual students. Representative sample testing in each school, district, and state |
| Assessing and Fostering Individual Student Learning and Engagement | <p>Assess students’ socioemotional and non-academic skills through providers such as the Gallup Student Poll, CASEL, and the RAND Corporation (RAND). Example assessments include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Academic and Social Self-Efficacy Scale (ASSESS)-RAND Holistic Student Assessment (HSA)-RAND Panorama Social-Emotional Learning – Teacher Rating of Student SEL Competencies-CASEL |

Sources: Multiple⁹

NORTH CAROLINA STANDARDIZED TESTS AND CHECK-INS

While some states asked the federal government for testing waivers, North Carolina currently requires students to take 2020-21 academic year state standardized tests when in-person instruction resumes. The state is considering applying for a federal waiver to conduct virtual examinations in the spring regardless of whether districts and schools return to in-person instruction.¹⁰ The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) also provides Check-Ins, a series of interim assessments in reading, math, and science correlating with state standards.¹¹ Due to COVID-19-related school closures, NCDPI moved all NC Check-Ins online, including Grades 3–8 Reading End-of-Grades (EOGs).¹² Although check-ins are not officially part of the state testing program, some districts use check-ins to “provide students, teachers, and parents with immediate in-depth action data and a reliable estimate of students’ current performance on selected subsets of content standards.”¹³

REMEDIATING LEARNING LOSS

FORMATIVE ASSESSMENTS

As districts assess and remediate learning loss when returning to in-person instruction without the benefit of state standardized test results, they require evaluations that can quickly help schools and teachers identify learning gaps and provide real-time curriculum adjustments. Formative assessment “is a planned, ongoing process used by all students and teachers during learning and teaching to elicit and use evidence of student learning to improve student understanding of intended disciplinary learning outcomes and support students

⁹ Figure contents adapted from: [1] Ibid. [2] “SEL Assessment Guide.” The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning. <https://measuringself.casel.org/assessment-guide/> [3] “RAND Education Assessment Finder.” RAND Corporation. <https://www.rand.org/education-and-labor/projects/assessments/tool.html>

¹⁰ Hui, T.K. “Many NC Students in Virtual Classes Want to Take Their Standardized Tests at Home, Too.” *The News & Observer*, September 3, 2020. <https://www.newsobserver.com/news/local/education/article245424695.html>

¹¹ “NC Check-Ins.” North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. <https://www.dpi.nc.gov/districts-schools/testing-and-school-accountability/state-tests/nc-check-ins>

¹² Howard, T. “Accountability Update: Testing 2020-21.” North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, September 2, 2020. <https://simbli.eboardsolutions.com/Meetings/Attachment.aspx?S=10399&AID=231678&MID=7518>

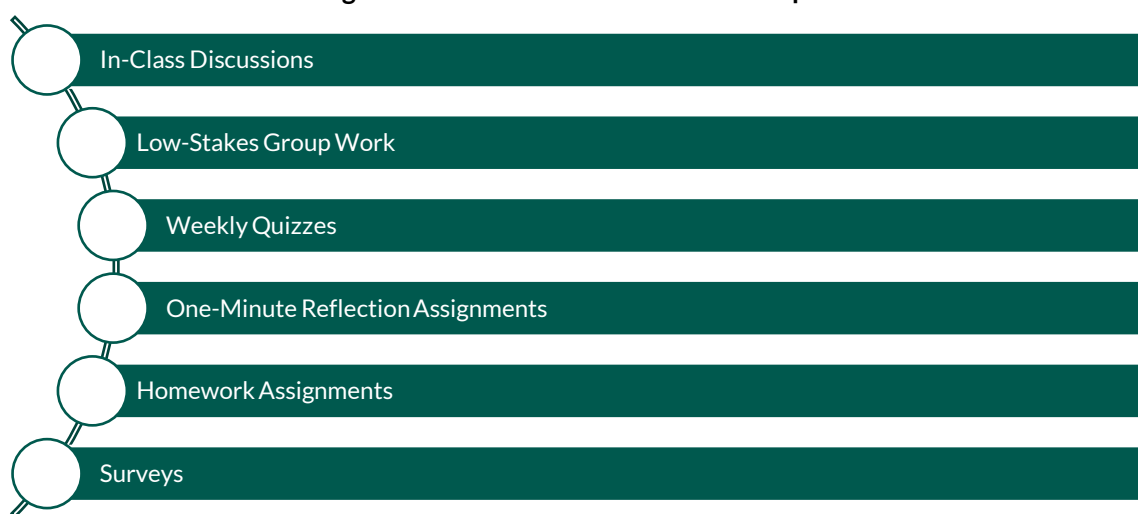
¹³ “NC Check-Ins,” Op. cit.

to become self-directed learners.”¹⁴ In addition to being well-suited for virtual learning, formative assessments will be critical for returning to in-person learning. As the NWEA explains:¹⁵

“The return of students to school is a key opportunity to build independence for students who have begun that process and use formative assessment to better understand the barriers to independence for others. Using formative assessment, teachers can create multiple, clear opportunities for students to understand what they should be ready to learn and the steps they will take to get there. While these values are critical in classrooms under any circumstances, they are particularly important when students may spend less of their learning time in schools with their teachers than ever before.”

Formative assessment gives teachers the context of individual student progress or lack thereof in a subject and subsequently provides strategies to quickly address specific student needs (see examples in Figure 1.4.). Also, formative assessment allows students to self-assess through methods including journaling, peer feedback, and small-group discussions.¹⁶

Figure 1.4: Formative Assessment Examples



Source: Yale University¹⁷

District leaders and teachers may also want to consider the following questions listed in Figure 1.5 in examining formal assessments for return to in-person learning.¹⁸

Figure 1.5: Formative Assessment Discussion Questions

| QUESTIONS FOR TEACHERS | QUESTIONS FOR DISTRICT AND SCHOOL LEADERS |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What effects of interrupted learning have you seen in your classroom? What are some ways to help students get back on track? How can you build independent learners in your classroom? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What effects of interrupted learning have you seen school or district-wide? What are some steps you can take to help with interrupted learning? How can you create a culture of independent learners? |

¹⁴ “Revising the Definition of Formal Assessment.” Formative Assessment for Students and Teachers (FAST) State Collaborative on Assessment and Student Standards SCASS), 2018. <https://www.ccsso.org/sites/default/files/2018-06/Revising%20the%20Definition%20of%20Formative%20Assessment.pdf>

¹⁵ Nordengren, C. “The Power of Formative Assessment When the Only Constant Is Change.” NWEA, June 11, 2020. <https://www.nwea.org/blog/2020/power-of-formative-assessment-when-only-constant-is-change/>

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Figure contents quoted verbatim from: “Formative and Summative Assessments.” Yale University-Poorvu Center for Teaching and Learning. <https://poorvucenter.yale.edu/Formative-Summative-Assessments>

¹⁸ Nordengren, Op. cit.

- What are some ways you can address social-emotional needs in your classroom?

- What are some ways to address social-emotional needs system-wide?

Source: NWEA¹⁹

ADDITIONAL LEARNING TIME

Academic recovery strategies often rely on the use of additional instructional time to address learning loss. This additional time may be additional school days to the academic year, additional time in the school day, or extended summer school.²⁰ For example, Grade 9 students in Chicago Public Schools (IL), profiled in Figure 1.6., receiving double math time saw significant algebra test score improvement and better long-term outcomes, including increased educational attainment.²¹

Figure 1.6: Chicago Public Schools (IL)



SPOTLIGHT: CHICAGO PUBLIC SCHOOLS (IL)

CPS required all Grade 9 students with low math test scores to enroll in a full-year regular algebra course and a simultaneous algebra support class, usually taught by the same teacher. Teachers in the program received new curricula to use and additional professional development. Teachers received professional development in using extra instructional time to promote complex math thinking through student-centered instructional practices. The extra time enabled teachers to feel like they could take risks with new modes of instruction. Students who received the double dose treatment showed larger gains in algebra scores – equivalent to about an extra quarter of a year of growth – and their algebra GPAs were about a quarter of a point higher. The gains were greatest for students whose prior math scores were between the 20th and 50th percentiles.

Source: Annenberg Institute²²

Additional learning time is most effective with strong student attendance. Research on increased learning time opportunities following school closures indicates little information on the impact of additional time, especially at the scale necessary to make up for school closures due to COVID-19. However, research on extended learning outside of disaster recovery highlights the importance of attendance in extended learning efficacy. Therefore, schools must ensure high levels of participation in any extended learning opportunities offered to students.²³

TUTORING

For students struggling the most in math and reading, one-on-one high-dosage tutoring (three times weekly, 50 hours per semester) can improve learning outcomes and make up for learning loss.²⁴ Tutoring effect sizes are the largest of all educational interventions, with a 2016 Harvard study finding the following effects for high-dosage tutoring:²⁵

¹⁹ Figure contents quoted verbatim from: Ibid.

²⁰ "From Crisis to Recovery: The Education Impact of COVID-19." Advance Illinois, April 2020, p. 29.

<https://www.advanceillinois.org/publications/from-crisis-to-recovery-the-education-impact-of-covid-19/>

²¹ Cortes, K., J. Goodman, and T. Nomi. "A Double Dose of Algebra." Education Next, December 15, 2012. <https://www.educationnext.org/a-double-dose-of-algebra/>

²² Figure contents quoted verbatim with minor modifications from: Allensworth, E. and N. Schwartz. "School Practices to Address Student Learning Loss." Annenberg Institute at Brown University-EdResearch for Recovery, June 2020. p. 3. https://annenberg.brown.edu/sites/default/files/EdResearch_for_Recovery_Brief_1.pdf

²³ "From Crisis to Recovery: The Education Impact of COVID-19," Op. cit., p. 29.

²⁴ [1] Allensworth and Schwartz, Op. cit., p. 1. [2] Sawchuk, S. "High-Dosage Tutoring Is Effective, But Expensive. Ideas for Making It Work." Education Week, August 19, 2020. <https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2020/08/20/high-dosage-tutoring-is-effective-but-expensive-ideas.html>

²⁵ Bullet contents adapted from: Barshay, J. "Takeaways from Research on Tutoring to Address Coronavirus Learning Loss." The Hechinger Report, May 25, 2020. <https://hechingerreport.org/takeaways-from-research-on-tutoring-to-address-coronavirus-learning-loss/>

- **Math:** 20 times more effective than low-dosage tutoring
- **Reading:** 15 times more effective than low-dosage tutoring.

Districts with the financial resources to implement an extensive, high-dosage tutoring program should do so. However, tutoring programs are pricey, costing several thousand dollars annually per student.²⁶ Consequently, large-scale, high-dosage tutoring may not be a viable learning loss remediation strategy for every district.

INDIVIDUALIZED LEARNING PLANS

Districts can use individualized learning plans to assess and address different learning levels caused by COVID-19 school closures. The Michigan Department of Education outlines several principles that districts can use in creating individualized learning plans, including developing weekly schedules and ensuring ongoing communication with families (see Figure 1.7).²⁷ These strategies may help account for the wide range of learning individual students achieved at the end of the 2019-20 school year. Individualized learning plans also allow districts and schools to develop targeted supports for both academic and social-emotional needs.²⁸

Figure 1.7: Strategies for Developing Individualized Learning Plans

| STRATEGY | DESCRIPTION |
|-------------------------|---|
| STUDENTS AT THE CENTER | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Build on the student's strengths, interests, and needs; and use this knowledge to affect learning positively. ■ Develop a weekly plan and schedule that offers routines and structures for consistency and balancing of think, work, and playtime for health and well-being. ■ Contact families to support student learning through ongoing communication and collaboration. Communication will not look the same for every student and family—safety remains the priority. Provide translations as necessary. |
| EQUITY AND ACCESS | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Set individual goals for each student using knowledge about them and content area standards. ■ Consider how to deliver content depending on tools and resources accessible to each student. Alternative modes of instruction may include the use of online learning, telephone communications, email, virtual instruction, videos, slideshows, project-based learning, use of instructional packets, or a combination to meet student needs. ■ Communicate with families about engagement strategies to support students as they access the learning as families are critical partners. |
| ASSESS STUDENT LEARNING | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Use a variety of strategies to monitor, assess, and provide feedback to students about their learning. ■ Use formative assessment results to guide educators' reflection on instruction's effectiveness and determine the next steps for student learning. ■ Communicate with families about assessment results to inform them about any needed next steps. |

Source: Michigan Department of Education²⁹

VERTICAL CURRICULAR REVIEW AND CROSS-GRADE COLLABORATION

Districts can facilitate vertical curricular review and collaboration across grade levels and courses to account for anticipated learning loss. Teachers should identify 2019-20 school year competency, topic, and skill gaps

²⁶ [1] Sawchuk, Op. cit. [2] Allensworth and Schwartz, Op. cit., p. 3.

²⁷ "Continuity of Learning and COVID-19 Response Plan ("Plan") Application Template." Michigan Department of Education. https://www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/MICLPlan.FINAL_685762_7.pdf

²⁸ Hess, F. "Chiefs for Change COO Weighs in on Challenges of Coronavirus." EducationNext, April 2020. <https://www.educationnext.org/chiefs-for-change-coo-weighs-in-challenges-coronavirus-covid-19-rafal-baer/>

²⁹ Figure contents were quoted verbatim with minor modifications from: "Continuity of Learning and COVID-19 Response Plan ("Plan") Application Template."

due to COVID-19-related school closures in consultation with students' prior-year teachers and develop plans to address these gaps during the 2020-21 school year and beyond. Figure 1.8 lists five actions to help districts and schools create a foundation for further learning interventions.

Figure 1.8: Five Actions for Creating Foundations for Future Interventions

| | |
|-----------------|---|
| Action 1 | Prioritize attendance and check-ins with families and students multiple times weekly. |
| Action 2 | Teach grade-level for all core courses. |
| Action 3 | Use a core curriculum across the district and avoid using online supplements. |
| Action 4 | Ensure teachers have uninterrupted teaching time. |
| Action 5 | If health and logistics permit a hybrid schedule, prioritize in-person instruction for students needing extra help and those in transition grades (Grades 1, 6, and 9). |

Source: Education Week³⁰

LONG-TERM STRATEGIES

Prior school closures suggest that districts should develop a long-term strategy to address lost learning beyond the current school year. A 2019 study of the 2009 Australian bushfire found that a disaster may erode learning across multiple academic years. The study analyzed students' test scores from Grade 1 (the year of the bushfire), Grade 3, and Grade 5. When comparing Grades 3 and 5 results, the authors determined that students attending the most affected schools recorded significantly less reading and math improvement.³¹ Similarly, research on learning loss after Hurricane Katrina found that it took two years for students to recover academic achievement.³² This research indicates that districts will need long-term strategies for helping students recover from learning lost during COVID-19 school closures, such as expanded learning time (ELT) for summer 2021 and subsequent summers. Successful summer ELT programs "have a purposeful curriculum, have stable staff, and are culturally relevant and engaging enough to stimulate consistent attendance; these programs are most effective when students experience them for multiple summers."³³

³⁰ Figure contents adapted from: Sawchuk, S. "COVID-19's Harm to Learning Is Inevitable. How Schools Can Start to Address It." *Education Week*, August 19, 2020. <https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2020/08/20/covid-19s-harm-to-learning-is-inevitable-how.html>

³¹ [1] Gibbs, L. et al. "Delayed Disaster Impacts on Academic Performance of Primary School Children." *Child Development*, 90:4, July/August 2019. <https://srcd.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/cdev.13200> [2] Becker, R. "Wildfires Take a Toll on Students' Test Scores Years after the Smoke Clears." *The Verge*, January 2019. <https://www.theverge.com/2019/1/24/18195267/wildfires-australia-california-children-survivors-school-learning>

³² Harris, D.N. and M.F. Larsen. "The Effects of the New Orleans Post-Katrina Market-Based School Reports on Medium-Term Student Outcomes." Education Research Alliance for New Orleans, 2019. <https://educationresearchalliancenola.org/files/publications/Harris-Larsen-Reform-Effects-2019-08-01.pdf>

³³ Darling-Hammond, L., A. Schachner, and A.K. Edgerton. "Restarting and Reinventing School: Learning in the Time of COVID and Beyond." Learning Policy Institute, August 2020. p. xi. https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/product-files/Restart_Reinvent_Schools_COVID_REPORT.pdf

SECTION II: RETURNING TO LEARNING THROUGH SEL





In this section, Hanover outlines best practices in how districts can best utilize SEL to transition back to in-person learning and prepare teachers to instruct traumatized students.

GENERAL SEL SUPPORTS FOR STUDENTS

CRISIS SEL SUPPORT STRATEGIES

During crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, students are at a greater risk for negative emotional responses that can interfere with their learning and daily lives.³⁴ Previous crises, such as during the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, highlighted the need to establish for children a sense of “control, empowerment, and normalcy.”³⁵ Several factors can affect how prolonged stress resulting from a crisis or natural disaster impact students’ social-emotional wellness.³⁶ Among these factors is the student’s ability to positively cope with their feelings of stress and anxiety.³⁷ Social support can reduce the adverse mental health effects of a crisis for adolescents (see Figure 2.1).³⁸

Figure 2.1: Recommendations for Districts to Support Students’ Social-Emotional Needs

| METHOD | NOTES |
|--|---|
|  <p>Be Transparent and Communicative</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Determine announcement locations, keeping in mind where families in your district will most likely be able to access information easily. Deliver consistent, proactive messages with resources for families to access at home. |
|  <p>Provide Easy Avenues for Communication</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider all the home languages served in your district. Click here for multi-lingual resources related to COVID-19. |
|  <p>Promote Strong Community Learning</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gather data from online staff and family surveys to determine what efforts are most beneficial in supporting students’ social-emotional needs and where gaps still exist. Communicate with parents and caregivers suggested steps for supporting students during the COVID-19 crisis. Click here and here for examples of resources to support families. |
|  <p>Serve as Nurturing Leaders</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider the emotional needs and challenges of both students and the adults who are directly supporting the students. Click here for strategies to support staff working with students. |

³⁴ Bartlett, J.D., J. Griffin, and D. Thomson. “Resources for Supporting Children’s Emotional Well-Being during the COVID-19 Pandemic.” *Child Trends*, March 19, 2020. <https://www.childtrends.org/publications/resources-for-supporting-childrens-emotional-well-being-during-the-covid-19-pandemic>

³⁵ Madrid, P.A. et al. “Challenges in Meeting Immediate Emotional Needs: Short-Term Impact of a Major Disaster on Children’s Mental Health: Building Resiliency in the Aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.” *Pediatrics*, 117: Supplement 4, May 1, 2006. https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/117/Supplement_4/S448

³⁶ Weissbecker, I. et al. “Psychological and Physiological Correlates of Stress in Children Exposed to Disaster: Current Research and Recommendations for Intervention.” *Children, Youth and Environments*, 18:1, 2008.

³⁷ Innemee, L. “Supporting Students Affected by Trauma.” Project HOPE-Virginia Department of Education, July 2015. <https://education.wm.edu/centers/hope/publications/infobriefs/documents/Trauma%20Brief.pdf>

³⁸ Weissbecker et al., Op. cit.

Sources: Multiple³⁹

By looking at the efforts and innovative approaches used by schools worldwide in response to various traumatic events, districts can find creative strategies to support students' social-emotional needs during prolonged school closures. Despite the differences in the types of crises experienced by the schools highlighted in Figure 2.2, creating normalcy for students and supporting them through relationship-centered outreach are consistent strategies.

Figure 2.2: Post-Disaster Tips for Districts

| SCHOOL | COLORADO ACADEMY | TEXAS SCHOOLS | NEW ZEALAND SCHOOLS |
|-------------------------|--|---|---|
| Context for Response | COVID-19 School Closure | Post-Hurricane Disasters | Post-Earthquake, Christchurch |
| Student-Focused Actions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Online programming focuses on schedule and structure Counselors hold virtual office hours for students Virtual yoga and athletic exercises for students each day | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Opportunities for students to practice positive coping strategies using art, drama, and music Incorporate breathing exercises and relaxation strategies into class time Establish a morning routine that includes regular check-ins with students | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prioritize communication and maintaining connections between schools and students Create a sense of belonging for students Develop relationships between students and teachers, school administration and families to create trust Proactively prepare for post-traumatic stress issues such as substance abuse in students or families, depression, anxiety, etc. |

Sources: Multiple⁴⁰

COVID-19 SEL SUPPORT STRATEGIES

As districts return to in-person instruction following COVID-19-related school closures and the equality-related protests over the summer, SEL implementation in schools is more critical than ever before.⁴¹ During remote learning in spring 2020, many school districts implemented SEL innovations and adaptations, including:⁴²

- Appropriate strategies for understanding and regulating emotions and practicing self-care;
- Guiding families on how to create supportive home environments; and

³⁹ Figure contents adapted from: [1] Davis, K.T. "A Coronavirus Outreach Plan: 5 Steps for District Leaders - Education Week." *Education Week*, March 5, 2020. <https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2020/03/05/a-coronavirus-outreach-plan-5-steps-for.html?r=12705065&cmp=eml-enl-eu-news2&M=59061207&U=41685&UID=c1fa111e88cc42ce2860c55a05eaae09> [2] Slade, S. "A Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child Approach to Responding to Health Crises." ASCD Inservice, March 13, 2020. <https://inservice.ascd.org/a-whole-school-whole-community-whole-child-approach-to-responding-to-health-crises/>

⁴⁰ Figure contents adapted from: [1] Mann, M. "NAIS - Coronavirus (COVID-19) Guidance for Schools." National Association of Independent Schools, March 30, 2020. <https://www.nais.org/articles/pages/additional-covid-19-guidance-for-schools/#HolisticOnlineStrategy> [2] "SupportingStudentsCopingwPost-DisasterTraumaFINAL.Pdf." <https://www.texasappleseed.org/sites/default/files/SupportingStudentsCopingwPost-DisasterTraumaFINAL.pdf> [3] Fletcher, J. and K. Nicholas. "What Can School Principals Do to Support Students and Their Learning During and After Natural Disasters?" *Educational Review*, 68:3, 2016.

⁴¹ Schlund, J. and R.P. Weissberg. "Leveraging Social and Emotional Learning to Support Students and Families in the Time of COVID-19." Learning Policy Institute, May 19, 2020. <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/blog/leveraging-social-emotional-learning-support-students-families-covid-19>

⁴² Bullets quoted verbatim from: Ibid.

- Fostering an overarching commitment to creating connectedness across physical distance.

To help districts and schools incorporate SEL practices and innovations as they re-open schools following COVID-19-related closures, CASEL created a guide outlining four major SEL practices for fostering an inclusive and equitable atmosphere for students and staff in a return to in-person learning (see Figure 2.3).⁴³


Figure 2.3: SEL Critical Practices for Re-Opening

| | |
|---|---|
| Take Time to Cultivate and Deepen Relationships, Build Partnerships, and Plan for SEL | Prioritize relationships that haven't been established, engage in two-way communication, and build coalitions to effectively plan for supportive and equitable learning environments that promote social, emotional, and academic learning for all students. |
| Design Opportunities Where Adults Can Connect, Heal, and Build Their Capacity to Support Students. | Help adults feel connected, empowered, supported, and valued by cultivating collective self-care and wellbeing, providing ongoing professional learning, and creating space for adults to process and learn from their experiences. |
| Create Safe, Supportive, and Equitable Learning Environments that Promote All Students' Social and Emotional Development. | Ensure all students feel a sense of belonging; have consistent opportunities to learn about, reflect on, and practice SEL; examine the impact of the pandemic and systemic racism on their lives and communities; and access needed support through school or community partners. |
| Use Data as an Opportunity to Share Power, Deepen Relationships, and Continuously Improve Support for Students, Families, and Staff. | Partner with students, families, staff, and community partners to learn about students' and adults' ongoing needs and strengths, and continuously improve SEL and transition efforts. |

Source: The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning⁴⁴

As mentioned in the previous paragraph, many districts developed procedures to continue SEL during remote learning and provide additional mental health support for students, families, and staff. For example, the Lower Merion School District (PA), profiled in Figure 2.4., has an article dedicated to SEL supports and resources for the current school year, including resource links.⁴⁵

Figure 2.4: Lower Merion School District PA



SPOTLIGHT: LOWER MERION SCHOOL DISTRICT (PA)

Lower Merion School District's (LMSD) Student Services Team (School Counselors, School Psychologists, and School Social Workers) are available to support students, families, and staff during this unprecedented time. At the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year, LMSD provided additional teacher training to help them support students and families. LMSD also took the following action steps to continue social/emotional learning and to support mental wellness:⁴⁶

- Instructional activities and resources addressing social/emotional learning and trauma-informed topics provided to all students K-12 by classroom teachers and Student Services team members;

⁴³ "Reunite, Renew, and Thrive: Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Roadmap for Reopening School." The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, July 2020. p. 3. <https://casel.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/SEL-ROADMAP.pdf>

⁴⁴ Figure contents quoted verbatim from: Ibid.

⁴⁵ "Supports for Mental Health and Social/Emotional Learning-Social/Emotional Supports for Students and Families for the Start of the 2020-2021 School Year." Lower Merion School District. <https://www.lmsd.org/about-lmsd/newsroom/article/~post/supports-for-mental-health-and-social-emotional-learning-20200910>

⁴⁶ Paragraph and bullets quoted verbatim with minor modifications from: Ibid.

- The Student Services Team will support teachers in providing social, emotional, and mental health interventions within the instructional setting;
- Student and family support at all school levels to address social/emotional learning, mental wellness and access to basic needs (meals, community resources, etc.);
- Individualized supports for students in need of additional support due to the impact of COVID-19 and other forms of trauma they may have experienced during the school closure; and
- Parent/Guardian Zoom sessions to provide an update on social/emotional supports being provided by LMSD and to share social/emotional learning strategies to support development within the home and community setting.

LMSD's SEL support article also provides recommendations and resources for discussing COVID-19, wearing masks, and social distancing with children; helping children's COVID-19-related anxiety; trauma-informed care; racial trauma and discrimination; Zoom/screen fatigue; and additional resources (e.g., tips for quarantining during COVID-19, other parent resources, CDC resources).⁴⁷

SUPPORTING STUDENTS IN THE CLASSROOM

CREATING A TRAUMA-SENSITIVE CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT

Teachers can support students experiencing trauma such as COVID-19 by creating a safe, supportive, and trauma-sensitive classroom environment.⁴⁸ A trauma-sensitive classroom environment is predictable and minimizes reminders and triggers of student trauma.⁴⁹ Indeed,

*While safety encompasses ensuring the physical well-being of students, it also extends to ensuring that psychological safety is bolstered through creating a predictable classroom environment where every member feels respected, validated, and heard.*⁵⁰

The physical classroom environment should be organized, not overstimulating, and create a welcoming space that reduces environmental triggers.⁵¹ Teachers should consider the physical features of the classroom when creating a trauma-sensitive classroom environment, such as the lighting, furniture, and materials.⁵²



⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ [1] Buckwalter, K.D. and C. Powell. "Beyond the Basics: Creating Trauma-Informed Classrooms." Chaddock, January 4, 2018. p. 5. <https://creatingtraumasensitiveschools.org/wp-content/uploads/Buckwalter-Handouts.pdf> [2] Call, C. et al. "Creating Trauma-Informed Classrooms." National Council for Adoption, September 2014. <https://www.adoptioncouncil.org/files/large/4b9294d4e0fc351> [3] "Creating, Supporting, and Sustaining Trauma-Informed Schools: A System Framework," Op. cit., p. 9. [4] Pickens, I.B. and N. Tschopp. "Trauma-Informed Classrooms." National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, 2017. pp. 10–12. https://www.ncjfcj.org/sites/default/files/NCJFCJ_SJP_Trauma_Informed_Classrooms_Final.pdf

⁴⁹ [1] Buckwalter and Powell, Op. cit., p. 5. [2] "Creating, Supporting, and Sustaining Trauma-Informed Schools: A System Framework," Op. cit., p. 9.

⁵⁰ Pickens and Tschopp, Op. cit., p. 10.

⁵¹ [1] Buckwalter and Powell, Op. cit., p. 5. [2] Call et al., Op. cit., pp. 7–9.

⁵² [1] Call et al., Op. cit., pp. 7–9. [2] Figure contents quoted verbatim from: Buckwalter and Powell, Op. cit., p. 5.

In addition to the physical classroom environment, a trauma-sensitive classroom includes a supportive psychological classroom environment and culture.⁵³ Characteristics and actions that promote psychological safety within a trauma-sensitive classroom environment include:⁵⁴

- Clear expectations for behavior;
- A defined process for addressing behavioral concerns that students understand; and
- Mechanisms for helping students communicate about experiences that undermine feelings of safety.

Specifically, at the beginning of the school year, teachers should discuss with students how they can express feelings of anger, frustration, or sadness safely and respectfully and communicate expectations that students will not bully one another.⁵⁵

Furthermore, teachers can establish a safe space for students experiencing trauma to calm themselves within the classroom and elsewhere in the school building.⁵⁶ Safe spaces “provide opportunities for students to self-regulate when experiencing behavioral and emotional challenges.”⁵⁷ These spaces should contain a relaxing, sensory-friendly environment and include comfortable furniture (e.g., beanbags, rocking chairs), music, sensory toolkits, and books.⁵⁸

PROMOTING CONSISTENCY AND PREDICTABILITY

Students who experienced trauma benefit from consistency in the classroom environment, classroom procedures, and instruction, as sudden changes in routine, a lack of structure, or unclear boundaries can trigger these students.⁵⁹ Teachers can implement consistency in their classrooms through similar daily structures, reliable warmth, clear and consistent expectations, and predictability.⁶⁰ Providing students with some choices can help students develop a sense of self-control over their environment, which may be impacted by trauma.⁶¹ Additionally, teachers can implement the strategies in Figure 2.5 for integrating predictability and consistency in the classroom.

Figure 2.5: Strategies for Integrating Predictability and Consistency into the Classroom

- Discuss, rehearse, and frequently revisit rules, expectations, and rewards;
- Discuss the rationale for rules, expectations, and rewards;
- Avoid threats, intimidation, and battles for control;
- Reinforce that schools are a nonviolent and safe place for children, both physically and emotionally; and
- Integrate safety and conflict resolution skills throughout the curriculum.

Source: Phi Delta Kappan⁶²

Students also benefit from knowing class activities ahead of time and teacher expectations of them.⁶³ Accordingly, “Implementing even small classroom systems can greatly alleviate emotional stressors and prevent behavioral incidents.”⁶⁴ One strategy includes clearly posting or presenting students with visual icons to represent the major events and activities of the day, so they can anticipate their routine and know what to expect.⁶⁵ For older students, sharing a clear agenda for the day increases predictability and decreases student stress.⁶⁶

Transitions between activities and beginning new assignments often create stress and uncertainty for students who experience trauma. By implementing consistent practices for activity

For example, leading up to transitions, provide students with a warning, such as:⁶⁷

- “Five minutes until we go to lunch,”
- “Three minutes until we go to lunch,”
- “One minute until we go to lunch.”



⁶⁷ Bullet points quoted verbatim from: Call et al., Op. cit., pp. 7–9.

beginnings and transitions, students experience less stress and fewer negative reactions.⁶⁸

USING TRAUMA-INFORMED INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Teachers can implement instructional practices that support the learning and academic development of students experiencing trauma, as traumatic experiences can make the skills necessary for learning (e.g., engagement, attention, memory, organization) difficult for students.⁶⁹ In addition to creating a trauma-sensitive environment, building relationships, and anticipating and de-escalating behavioral incidents, teachers can implement instructional practices to support the learning and academic development of students experiencing trauma. Teachers should provide students who experienced trauma with additional support when needed and differentiated instruction to ensure that students experiencing trauma maintain academic development with their grade level.⁷⁰

As with the classroom environment, students who experienced trauma benefit from instruction and predictable lessons.⁷¹ Teachers can break lessons up into multiple parts to be less overwhelming and warn students of any changes or transitions.⁷² For example, one strategy includes “designing lessons so that they follow the same sequence of steps with a standard format and cues.”⁷³ Additionally, teachers can use the following strategies during classroom instruction, which support the academic development of students who experienced trauma:⁷⁴

- Emphasize causal and sequential relationships in classroom activities;
- Divide tasks and instruction into parts to help students feel less overwhelmed;
- Present information in multiple ways to reduce the likelihood of children missing essential pieces of information and lessen the anxiety they experience when uncertain of classroom expectations;
- Because traumatized children often struggle to think abstractly, provide concrete examples, and use visual cues, physical movement, and recall activities during instruction to help children stay focused and engaged;
- Utilize graphic organizers and physical manipulatives in academic lessons to help children organize new information;
- Create opportunities for children to repeat and rehearse instructions; and

⁵⁴ Bullet points quoted verbatim from: Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ “Creating, Supporting, and Sustaining Trauma-Informed Schools: A System Framework,” Op. cit., p. 9.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Buckwalter and Powell, Op. cit., p. 6.

⁵⁹ “Trauma-Informed Teaching Tips for Educators & Traumatized Students.” Concordia University. <https://education.concordia.edu/blog/classroom-resources/trauma-informed-teaching-tips/>

⁶⁰ [1] Ibid. [2] Wright, T. “Supporting Students Who Have Experienced Trauma.” *The NAMTA Journal*, 42:2, 2017. p. 147. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1144506.pdf>

⁶¹ “Trauma-Informed Teaching Tips for Educators & Traumatized Students,” Op. cit.

⁶² Bullet points quoted verbatim from: Wright, Op. cit., p. 147.

⁶³ Craig, S.E. “The Trauma-Sensitive Teacher.” *Educational Leadership*, September 2016. http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational_leadership/sept16/vol74/num01/The_Trauma-Sensitive_Teacher.aspx

⁶⁴ “Trauma-Informed Teaching Tips for Educators & Traumatized Students,” Op. cit.

⁶⁵ Craig, Op. cit.

⁶⁶ “Trauma-Informed Teaching Tips for Educators & Traumatized Students,” Op. cit.

⁶⁷ Bullet points quoted verbatim from: Call et al., Op. cit., pp. 7–9.

⁶⁸ “Trauma-Informed Teaching Tips for Educators & Traumatized Students,” Op. cit.

⁶⁹ Wright, Op. cit., p. 149.

⁷⁰ “Strategies and Resources to Create a Trauma-Sensitive School.” Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. p. 1. <https://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/imce/sspw/pdf/traumastrategies.pdf>

⁷¹ Craig, Op. cit.

⁷² Wright, Op. cit., p. 149.

⁷³ Craig, Op. cit.

⁷⁴ Bullet points quoted verbatim from: Wright, Op. cit., p. 149.

- Offer ongoing support and encouragement to support children in staying on task.

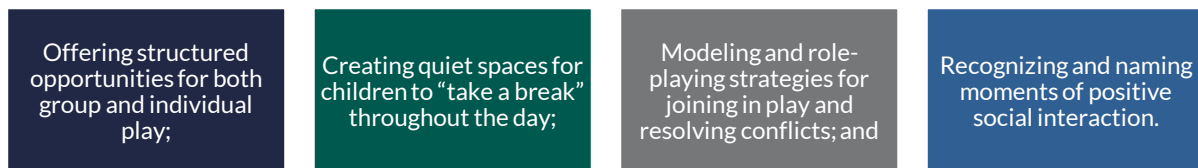
BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

Students who experienced trauma benefit from positive, connected relationships with teachers who make them feel safe and supported to learn.⁷⁵ Nurturing positive connections with students who experienced trauma requires deliberate action from teachers, including through strategies such as:⁷⁶

- Making eye contact using soft eyes when speaking with students or making a request;
- Encouraging healthy positive touch into the classroom routine, such as handshakes, high fives, and fist bumps; and
- Taking an interest in students' lives:
 - Ask questions.
 - Listen.
 - Incorporate a journaling activity in class. Read and respond to entries.
 - Recognize emotional states; e.g., when a student looks like they are upset or angry.
 - Have a check-in question at the beginning of each class; e.g., "On a scale of 1 to 10, my stress level is a ___" or "The best gift I ever received was ____."


Intentionally forming positive relationships with students who experience trauma requires teachers to model and teach strong social-emotional skills, especially self-monitoring and self-regulation skills.⁷⁷

Students who experienced trauma also benefit from positive relationships with other students. Teachers can facilitate the peer relationships of students who experienced trauma through the following strategies:⁷⁸



Schenectady School District (NY), profiled in Figure 2.6., provides an example of a district promoting a trauma-sensitive school environment for students and teachers.

Figure 2.6: Schenectady School District (NY)



SPOTLIGHT: SCHENECTADY SCHOOL DISTRICT (NY)

Over the past few years, Schenectady City School District (SCSD) has prioritized shifting to a framework for trauma-sensitive schools. This initiative stems from the district's comprehensive education plan, which included a commitment to "leading the development and implementation of pro-social curriculum to support social and emotional developmental health of students," which includes implementing trauma-sensitive schools. SCSD aims to support both students and staff through trauma-sensitive environments, noting that "[i]n a trauma-sensitive school, there is not only an understanding that students have to feel

⁷⁵ [1] Ibid., p. 6. [2] Wright, Op. cit., p. 42. [3] Call et al., Op. cit., pp. 7–9. [3] "Creating, Supporting, and Sustaining Trauma-Informed Schools: A System Framework," Op. cit., pp. 8–9.

⁷⁶ Bullet points quoted verbatim from: Call et al., Op. cit., pp. 7–9.

⁷⁷ [1] "Creating, Supporting, and Sustaining Trauma-Informed Schools: A System Framework," Op. cit., pp. 8–9. [2] Craig, Op. cit. [3] "Creating, Supporting, and Sustaining Trauma-Informed Schools: A System Framework," Op. cit., pp. 8–9.

⁷⁸ Bullet points quoted verbatim from: Wright, Op. cit., p. 146.

safe to learn but teachers also have to feel safe to teach.”⁷⁹ SCDS’ efforts to develop trauma-sensitive schools include creating a supportive and respectful school culture, preparing school staff to recognize and support those experiencing trauma, and setting clear expectations for students.⁸⁰ The graphic below presents additional activities to support trauma-sensitive approaches throughout the district.

| | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Restorative Circles as a method of resolving conflict Mindfulness in the school routine Sensory Rooms as calm spaces Book Studies Turn Around Rooms for De-Escalation Infusion of strategies in elementary literacy centers (TSS theme) Restorative Questions & Reflections In the Classroom Social-Emotional Curriculum infused in the class schedule Crisis Response Planning Family and Staff Engagement in TSS Work | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partnerships around TSS Community Collaboration with Mental Health Providers Professional Development within the school School Staff Collaboration and Planning on TSS Initiatives Collaboration of work with efforts to address disproportionate student outcomes (TAC-D Work) Building-wide planning to address compassion, fatigue & burn out Support Groups for Staff Development of Measurement Tool for Plan Evaluation |
|--|--|

Source: Schenectady City School District⁸¹

A key strategy SCSD is using to support trauma-sensitive schools is through staffing. First, the district formed a “TSS Core Team” of 15 central office administrators, principals, social workers, behavioral specialists, and an instructional coach who worked “to create the framework, timeline for district-wide implementation and guidance for the work that is underway and ahead of us.”⁸² Next, every school within the district formed an 8-14 member building-level implementation team comprised of teachers, paraprofessionals, clinicians, parent liaisons, and cafeteria staff. This team needed to “identify training needs, provide school culture assessments, conduct book clubs and events, communicate district activities to the school and serve as TSS ambassadors in the building.” Then, each school identified three building teams to serve as building leaders.⁸³

SCSD has prioritized targeted trainings for all staff to ensure they can implement and support trauma-sensitive approaches and environments.⁸⁴ Notably, the district has offered different trainings to different groups of staff. For instance, all new staff receive training on trauma-sensitive schools during new teacher orientation. The graphic below shows how SCSD supports various staff groups with trainings to implement trauma-sensitive approaches. Additionally, the district offered a book study, where all staff received the book *Hope for Billy* and participated in book studies at locations across the district.⁸⁵



Core team members attended system-level trainings on TSS last school year—including the ACE Symposium in May and Beyond Consequences National TSS Conference in St. Louis in June.

⁷⁹ “Developing Trauma Informed Schools.” Schenectady City School District.

http://www.schenectady.k12.ny.us/about_us/strategic_initiatives/trauma_informed_school

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ “Trauma Sensitive Schools.” Schenectady City School District, January 2018. p. 3.

http://www.schenectady.k12.ny.us/UserFiles/Servers/Server_412252/Image/Initiatives%20Page/TSS/01-TSS%20Communication%20-%20Winter%202017-Staff-%20JANUARY%202018.pdf

⁸² Ibid., p. 2.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.



Building team leaders attended turnkey training at the TSS Summer Institute in July 2017. They were responsible for taking information and tools back to their schools and providing turn-key training to all staff. Team leaders were also required to read the book, Trauma-Sensitive Schools.



New staff was trained on TSS at new teacher orientation. There is a plan for all staff and newly inducted staff, to receive ongoing training on trauma sensitivity as it pertains to your role in the district.



Secretaries have received TSS training as part of professional development last year.



Operations and maintenance staff will receive TSS training at an upcoming professional development session.



Paraprofessional TSS training is currently being planned.

Source: Schenectady City School District⁸⁶

SCSD also highlights the impact of compassion fatigue for educators working with students experiencing trauma and recommends that school staff engage in self-care. The district offers the following suggestions for engaging in self-care:⁸⁷

- Guard against your work becoming the only activity that defines who you are;
- Keep perspective by spending time with children who are not experiencing traumatic stress;
- Be sure to eat well, exercise, engage in fun activities, take a break during the day and find time to self-reflect; and
- Mindful Identity and Connection (meditation).

⁸⁶ Figure contents quoted verbatim from: Ibid.

⁸⁷ Bullet points quoted verbatim from: Ibid., p. 4.

SECTION III: TEACHER AND STAFF WELL-BEING

In this section, Hanover details best practices for supporting teachers as they transition back to school following COVID-19-related school closures. Specifically, this section details how districts and teachers can identify, acknowledge, and address trauma as well as strategies to support staff wellness.

IDENTIFYING AND ACKNOWLEDGING TEACHER TRAUMA

PERSONAL AND SECONDARY TRAUMATIC STRESS

In addition to personal trauma experiences, students' traumatic experiences also impact educators.⁸⁸ The emotional and physical impacts of experiencing others' trauma are known as secondary traumatic stress (STS), defined as "the emotional distress that results when an individual hears about the traumatic experiences of another individual. Distress may result from hearing someone's trauma stories, seeing high levels of distress in the aftermath of a traumatic event, needing to retell a student's story, and/or seeing photos or images related to the trauma."⁸⁹

Compassion fatigue is another name for STS.⁹⁰ The COVID-19 pandemic and resulting quarantines and shutdowns require school staff to help children and families cope with crises. Staff often find themselves providing supports that extend beyond their formal training and expertise. Therefore, school personnel, particularly those who fail to engage in self-care or monitor their crisis response, are at increased burnout risk or STS.⁹¹ Educators may also experience personal trauma from health concerns for themselves and family members, economic insecurity, or public cases of institutional racism and police brutality in the media over the spring and summer.

Consequently, "these layered issues have the potential to contribute to anxiety, depression, or symptoms of secondary traumatic stress."⁹² As the National Education Association (NEA) explains, "educators are burned out, they are stressed, they are fatigued, they are demoralized, and many are now coping with trauma—all conditions with similar symptoms that require proper diagnosis to treat effectively. The trauma could be their own - or their students'."⁹³

⁸⁸ Walker, T. "'I Didn't Know It Had a Name': Secondary Traumatic Stress and Educators." National Education Association, October 2019. <https://www.nea.org/advocating-for-change/new-from-nea/i-didnt-know-it-had-name-secondary-traumatic-stress-and>

⁸⁹ "Secondary Traumatic Stress and Self-Care Packet." National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments. p. 1. https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/sites/default/files/Building_TSS_Handout_2secondary_trauma.pdf

⁹⁰ Baicker, K. "The Impact of Secondary Trauma on Educators." *ASCD Express*, March 2020. <http://www.ascd.org/ascd-express/vol15/num13/the-impact-of-secondary-trauma-on-educators.aspx>

⁹¹ "Care for the Caregiver: Guidelines for Administrators and Crisis Teams." National Association of School Psychologists (NASP). <https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-climate-safety-and-crisis/mental-health-resources/care-for-caregivers-tips-for-families-and-educators/care-for-the-caregiver-guidelines-for-administrators-and-crisis-teams>

⁹² Halladay Goldman, J. et al. "Trauma-Informed School Strategies during COVID-19." The National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2020. p. 1. https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/resource-guide/trauma_informed_school_strategies_during_covid-19.pdf

⁹³ Walker, Op. cit.

RECOGNIZING TRAUMATIC STRESS SYMPTOMS

To support educators experiencing trauma, both school leaders and staff themselves must recognize the signs and symptoms. Educators experiencing trauma, either primary or secondary, experience various physical, emotional, and social symptoms. These symptoms include increased anxiety; negative thoughts related to their own or students' traumatic experiences; trouble concentrating; and feeling drained, numb and detached, powerless, and socially and emotionally withdrawn from others.⁹⁴ While anyone who works with adults or students exposed to trauma is at risk for secondary trauma, the staff at higher risk include those with prior traumatic experiences, less teaching experience, and female and younger staff.⁹⁵ Figure 3.1 lists warning signs of secondary stress and vicarious trauma for education leaders and staff awareness.

Click [here](#) to access a webinar on secondary traumatic stress for educators from the National Child Traumatic Stress Network.

Figure 3.1: Warning Signs of Secondary Traumatic Stress and Vicarious Trauma

| | |
|--|---|
| HYPERVIGILANCE | Excessive alertness for potential threats or dangers at and outside of work. Always being “on” and “on the lookout.” |
| POOR BOUNDARIES | Lacking a balanced sense of your role so that you take on too much, step in and try to control events, have difficulty leaving work at work, or take the work too personally. |
| AVOIDANCE | Coping with stress by shutting down and disconnecting. |
| INABILITY TO EMPATHIZE/NUMBING | Unable to remain emotionally connected to the work. |
| ADDICTIONS | Attaching to distractions to check out from work, personal life, or both. |
| CHRONIC EXHAUSTION/ PHYSICAL AILMENTS | Experiencing physical, emotional, and spiritual fatigue or inexplicable aches and pains exceeding what you expect for an ordinary busy day or week. |
| MINIMIZING | Trivializing a current experience by comparing it with another situation that we regard as more severe. |
| ANGER AND CYNICISM | Using cynicism or anger to cope other intense feelings that we may not understand or know how to manage. |
| FEELINGS OF PROFESSIONAL INADEQUACY | Becoming increasingly unsure of yourself professionally, second-guessing yourself, feeling insecure about tasks that you once felt confident to perform. |

Source: National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments⁹⁶

Notably, additional responses to trauma impacting educators that share STS elements include burnout, compassion fatigue, vicarious trauma, and compassion satisfaction, detailed in Figure 3.2.

⁹⁴ “Secondary Traumatic Stress and Self-Care Packet,” Op. cit., p. 1.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 2.

⁹⁶ Figure contents quoted verbatim from: Ibid., p. 3.

Figure 3.2: Additional Responses to Trauma Impacting Educators

| RESPONSE | DESCRIPTION |
|--------------------------------|---|
| BURNOUT | Characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a sense of reduced personal accomplishment. Although burnout is also work-related, burnout develops as a result of general, occupational stress. The term is not explicitly used to describe the effects of indirect trauma exposure. |
| COMPASSION FATIGUE | A less stigmatizing way to describe STS and is sometimes used interchangeably with the term STS. |
| VICARIOUS TRAUMA | Internal changes in teachers and staff members who engage empathetically with students affected by trauma. It is a theoretical term that describes the cumulative effects of secondary exposure to trauma. |
| COMPASSION SATISFACTION | The positive feelings derived from competent performance as a professional working with trauma survivors. Positive relationships with colleagues and the conviction that one's efforts contribute meaningfully to students, their families, and the community characterize competent performance. |

Source: National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments ⁹⁷

Schools must enable staff to identify and acknowledge when they are experiencing primary /STS or burnout.⁹⁸ Teachers may feel isolated without the ability to identify or name these conditions and further negative consequences. Without school-wide acknowledgment, training, and support for STS and self-care, educators may feel their experiences are unique and that they must solve traumatic stress and burnout alone.⁹⁹ Additionally, staff recognition on supporting students with traumatic experiences helps staff recognize the importance of self-care and seeking help.¹⁰⁰

Implementing preventative awareness requires that schools offer training teaching staff to understand the signs of and ways to prevent traumatic stress and burnout. Training should also train staff on social and emotional skills to support all staff and students' social, emotional, academic, and physical well-being.¹⁰¹ The Los Angeles Unified School District (CA), profiled in Figure 3.3., is an example of a district addressing staff trauma and providing trauma-relating training.

⁹⁷ Figure contents quoted verbatim from: Ibid., p. 1.

⁹⁸ Plumb, J.L., K.A. Bush, and S.E. Kerseovich. "Trauma-Sensitive Schools: An Evidence-Based Approach." *School Social Work Journal*, 40:2, Spring 2016. p. 52. <http://www.communityschools.org/assets/1/AssetManager/TSS.pdf>

⁹⁹ Walker, Op. cit.

¹⁰⁰ Plumb, Bush, and Kerseovich, Op. cit.

¹⁰¹ "Creating, Supporting, and Sustaining Trauma-Informed Schools: A System Framework." The National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2017. pp. 10-11. https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/creating_supporting_sustaining_trauma_informed_schools_a_systems_framework.pdf

Figure 3.3: Los Angeles Unified School District (CA)



SPOTLIGHT: LOS ANGELES UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT (CA)

Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) takes a multi-tiered, trauma-sensitive approach to school-based mental health to support students' and staff's positive outcomes. To support staff, LAUSD provides staff with access to training, resources for promoting positive mental health and social-emotional well-being in themselves and students, recommendations, and books on self-care.

Sources: Multiple¹⁰²

SUPPORTING TEACHER AND STAFF WELLNESS

GENERAL TRAUMA-RELATED STRATEGIES FOR SUPPORTING TEACHER AND STAFF WELLBEING

CREATING A TRAUMA-SENSITIVE WORKING ENVIRONMENT

School leaders must ensure staff have access to in-school and external support services. Examples of in-school supports include peer supports, check-ins, and stress-management strategies. Schools can also provide staff with access to resources such as support services and Employee Assistance Programs, and try to provide use and access to reduce stigma associated with utilizing these resources.¹⁰³ Figure 3.4 presents both school-wide and individual staff strategies for supporting staff experiencing traumatic stress.

Figure 3.4: School-wide and Individual Strategies for Addressing Traumatic Stress

| WHAT THE SCHOOL CAN DO | WHAT A TEACHER CAN DO |
|--|--|
| Educate staff about the effects of trauma, STS, and related conditions and provide regular staff opportunities to address potential issues related to STS. | Increase your knowledge and awareness of the effects of trauma and STS. |
| Identify and monitor STS and related conditions among staff. Here are two tools that may be helpful: <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Compassion fatigue self-test○ Professional quality of life scale, ProQOL 5 | Assess your current level of burnout, STS, and vicarious trauma. |
| Encourage and develop formal strategies for peer support and mentorship. | Stay connected to other people and groups that are supportive and nourishing. |
| Create a culture that fosters staff resilience that includes: fair leave policies, benefits, a physically safe and secure working environment, sufficient supervision, support and resources to do the work, and processes for shared decision making. | Identify and incorporate specific self-care strategies to promote resilience and maintain a healthy work-life balance (e.g., exercise, good nutrition, supportive networks). |

Source: National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments¹⁰⁴

Additionally, the following five steps help schools create supportive environments for staff processing trauma:¹⁰⁵

- **Listen:** Create a safe space for teachers to share their stories.
- **Protect:** Preserve that teacher's confidentiality and work to keep them safe from their stressors.

¹⁰² Figure contents adapted from: [1] "School Mental Health: Educators/Schools." Los Angeles Unified School District. <http://3A%2F%2Fachieve.lausd.net%2Fsite%2Fdefault.aspx%3FPageID%3D15484> [2] "School Mental Health: Staff Resources." Los Angeles Unified School District. <http://3A%2F%2Fachieve.lausd.net%2Fsite%2Fdefault.aspx%3FPageID%3D12149> [3] "School Mental Health: Self-Care," Op. cit.

¹⁰³ "Creating, Supporting, and Sustaining Trauma-Informed Schools: A System Framework," Op. cit.,.

¹⁰⁴ Figure contents quoted verbatim with minor modifications from: "Secondary Traumatic Stress and Self-Care Packet," Op. cit., p. 4.

¹⁰⁵ Bullet points quoted verbatim from: Baicker, Op. cit.

- **Connect:** Connect with the teacher's experience and help provide them with resources for stress management.
- **Model:** Develop systems and plans for stress management.
- **Teach:** Using these steps, help one another in your teacher capacities, continue to learn more about STS, and share your experiences.

School leaders and staff must create an environment that reduces burnout and STS chances and appropriately responds to and supports staff experiencing trauma and school-wide and individual strategies.¹⁰⁶ Figure 3.5 offers staff-wellness support strategies for educators and school administrators.

Figure 3.5: Trauma-Sensitive Strategies for Educators and Administrators to Support Staff Wellness

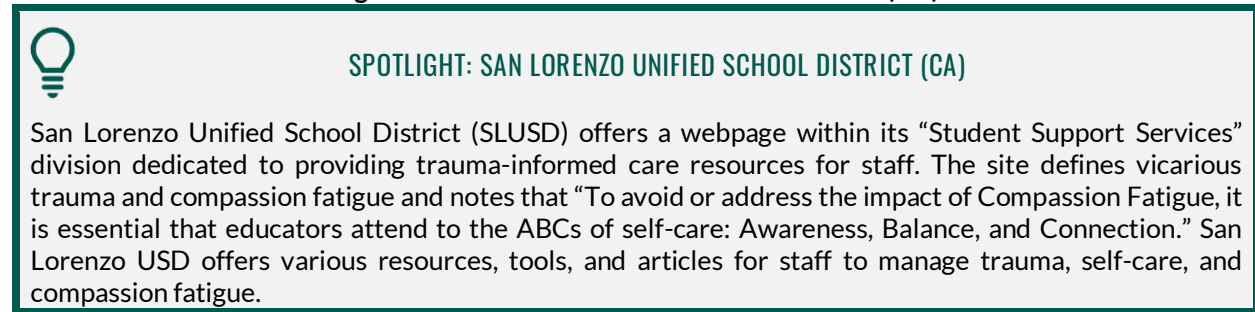
| STRATEGIES FOR EDUCATORS AND SCHOOL STAFF TO REDUCE THE IMPACT OF STRESSORS |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Practice self-compassion: remember that it is best to take care of yourself before you try to take care of others. ■ Take time to check in with yourself to gain insight into any areas where you may be struggling. Once you identify the issues, create a plan to address the issues you can control and work on letting go of the ones you cannot. ■ Utilize social supports as needed. Consider planning a virtual coffee break or lunch hour with colleagues or other educators. During these sessions, you might share strategies that are or are not working, talk about what you're cooking or watching on Netflix, and experience a much-needed sense of community. ■ Create a routine that includes getting up at a regular time, then getting ready and dressed for the day, and following a work schedule. Incorporate into your day some physical movement, as well as some breaks to connect with others. ■ Remember that, as adults, we can be the best guides for how our students and children will do. They are watching and listening to us, so when we take care of ourselves, we're modeling how they can take care of themselves, too. ■ Be safe and follow the latest public health recommendations related to hygiene and protective equipment to go to the school or into the community for teaching supplies. |
| STRATEGIES FOR ADMINISTRATORS TO SUPPORT STAFF WELL-BEING |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Prioritize the entire school community's physical safety when making decisions related to re-opening the school or holding any in-person events. ■ Ensure all your staff's physical safety by following the latest public health recommendations related to hygiene and protective equipment, minimizing exposure as much as possible. Provide any staff on the school grounds or conducting school business with the equipment, policies, and enforcement tools they need to maximize their physical safety. ■ Check-in with your staff, both collectively and individually. Encourage them to take time to manage their stress and take care of themselves and their families during the school day. ■ Identify and distribute resources for staff who may need additional screening, assessment, and/or treatment for stress, mental health issues, or secondary traumatic stress symptoms. Many mental health resources are now available via telehealth platforms. Identify a range of resources that you can provide for your staff. ■ Consider virtual professional development sessions that promote positive ways to cope with stress, and that help staff to understand the signs of secondary traumatic stress and the ways to prevent and address it. Offer wellness activities and promote routine health care and safety. ■ Validate your staff members' concerns about their students. Communicate your district's plan for identifying students who need to be located, helping families who need internet access or hotspots, and reaching students who may need additional services during this time. It's vital for staff to understand the expectations around their roles in reaching students and the limits of their responsibilities, and what other supportive methods and resources are available. ■ Create opportunities for staff to connect through peer check-ins, or using professional development time to reflect and process. |

¹⁰⁶ "Secondary Traumatic Stress and Self-Care Packet," Op. cit., p. 4.

Source: The National Child Traumatic Stress Network¹⁰⁷

District websites often contain pages with information for staff on addressing trauma and providing staff-care resources. Figure 3.6 profiles San Lorenzo Unified School District's (CA) webpage dedicated to providing trauma-related resources for staff.

Figure 3.6: San Lorenzo Unified School District (CA)



Source: San Lorenzo Unified School District¹⁰⁸

STAFF SELF-CARE

In the wake of COVID-19-related traumas, schools must provide opportunities for, and expectations that educators will engage in self-care and ensure that staff can continue to support students appropriately.¹⁰⁹ Self-care requires individuals to decompress, take breaks, and set reasonable, set self-boundaries.¹¹⁰ Examples of self-care activities for educators include:¹¹¹

- Findings ways to relax and "blow off steam";
- Appropriate nutrition;
- Physical fitness;
- Spiritual wellness; and
- Spending time with friends.

Self-care is also essential as a preventative measure, as self-care helps prevent burnout, compassion fatigue, or vicarious trauma, and consequently helps educators better respond to their students' needs.¹¹²

STRATEGIES FOR SUPPORTING TEACHER AND STAFF WELLBEING DURING AND AFTER THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

In addition to the strategies described above, managers should check in with staff at least weekly during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. In a remote (or even an in-person) environment, these check-ins can take the form of individual video check-ins, online office-hours, and/or regular team conference calls.¹¹³ Managers

¹⁰⁷ Figure contents quoted verbatim with minor modifications from: Halladay Goldman et al., Op. cit., p. 2.

¹⁰⁸ Figure contents adapted from: "Trauma Informed Care Resources." San Lorenzo Unified School District. https://www.slusd.org/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC_ID=1208514&type=d&pREC_ID=1446492

¹⁰⁹ [1] "What Are the Basics of a Trauma-Informed Environment?" KnowledgeWorks. <https://knowledgeworks.org/resources/basics-trauma-informed-environment/> [2] "Creating Trauma-Informed Learning Environments." WestEd, 2019. p. 2. <https://www.wested.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/TIP-K-3-TIP-SHEET.pdf>

¹¹⁰ "What Are the Basics of a Trauma-Informed Environment?" Op. cit.

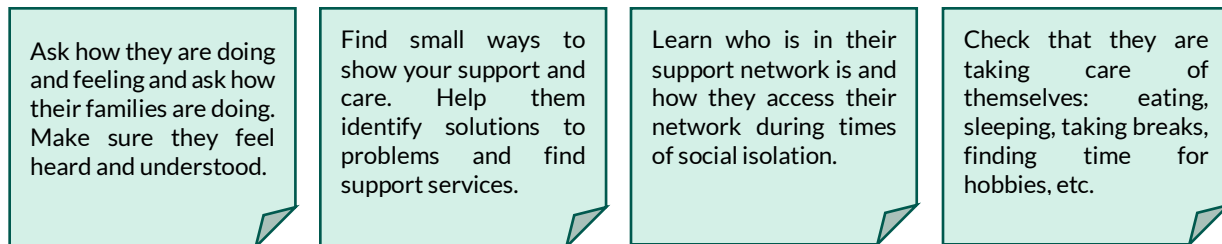
¹¹¹ Plumb, Bush, and Kersevich, Op. cit.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Nawaz, S. "How Managers Can Support Remote Employees." *Harvard Business Review*, April 1, 2020. <https://hbr.org/2020/04/how-managers-can-support-remote-employees>

with limited time or capacity can monitor employee well-being by establishing a “buddy system.”¹¹⁴ Figure 3.7 lists recommendations for weekly check-in conversation topics.

Figure 3.7: Recommendations for Checking-In with Staff During the COVID-19 Pandemic



Source: American Health Care Association (AHCA) and the National Center for Assisted Living (NCAL)¹¹⁵

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs recommends that managers use the Stress First Aid (SFA) model to support employees experiencing challenges to well-being as a result of COVID-19.¹¹⁶ The SFA model provides guiding questions that managers can use to assess employees' stress reactions along a continuum.¹¹⁷ Figure 3.8 outlines the five SFA components and questions recommended by the Department of Veterans for manager assessment.

¹¹⁴ "NIOSH Fact Sheet: The Buddy System." Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, March 28, 2018. <https://www.cdc.gov/index.htm>

¹¹⁵ Figure contents adapted from: "Tips on Supporting Staff During the COVID-19 Pandemic." American Health Care Association (AHCA) and the National Center for Assisted Living (NCAL). https://www.ahcancal.org/facility_operations/disaster_planning/Documents/Emotional-Support-HCW.pdf

¹¹⁶ "For Leaders: Supporting Your Staff During the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic - PTSD: National Center for PTSD." General Information. https://www.ptsd.va.gov/covid/COVID_leaders_support_staff.asp#two

¹¹⁷ "Stress First Aid Self Care / Organizational Support Model." U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs National Center for PTSD. p. 2. <https://www.theschwartzcenter.org/media/Stress-First-Aid-Self-Care-Organizational-NCPTSD10.pdf>

Figure 3.8: Stress First Aid Model

| COMPONENT | QUESTIONS |
|-------------------|--|
| Cover | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How has the pandemic affected your sense of safety? If it has, what can we do to help? |
| Calm | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How are you doing? What changes have you experienced regarding sleep, feelings of being on edge, or ability to stay calm? If you're having trouble staying calm, is there anything we can do to help? |
| Connect | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has there been an impact on how you talk with each other, work morale, or connecting with family and friends? Is there someone you feel comfortable talking with about this? Has anyone you know done or said something that really helped? Do you feel the need for practical support right now? |
| Competence | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do you have any concerns about being able to handle what's going on in your life, deal with your stress reactions, or do your work? What are some things that you have done to cope that have been helpful in the past, or have been helpful recently? What else could we do that would help? |
| Confidence | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have you noticed any change in your confidence in your ability to do your job the same way as before the outbreak or your confidence in leadership? Are you feeling guilty or wish you could do something differently? Does the outbreak hold special meaning or connect with other experiences in any way? What else could help? |

Source: U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs National Center for PTSD¹¹⁸

Managers can also encourage staff to engage in self-care, debrief with other school staff members about their COVID-19 experiences, and take advantage of available resources, such as Employee Assistance Programs.

¹¹⁸ Figure contents taken verbatim from: "For Leaders," Op. cit.

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