

February 2025

Research to Practice Brief

Trauma-Informed Practices & Educator Well-being

This brief summarizes the following article:

Aragón, K. M., Mullin, A. C., Felix, E. D., Appel, O., & Sharkey, J. D. (2024). Identifying what educators need to support trauma-informed practices in the schools: A community needs assessment. *School Psychology, 39*(5), 520–529. <https://doi.org/10.1037/spq0000621>

10 Point Paradigm Connection: Safety, Security, Freedom

The Paradigm Point of Safety, Security, Freedom highlights the importance of school communities that work to provide an emotionally compassionate and personally validating environment for learning. One pathway for doing this is implementing trauma-informed practices.

Educators rely on trauma-informed practices to cultivate conducive learning environments that support the needs of the whole child, which encompasses physical, mental, and emotional well-being. In the research reviewed in this brief, Aragón et al. (2024) focus on educators and assess their needs in regard to implementing trauma-informed practices.

Research Summary

What

Although academic needs were high following the COVID-19 pandemic, emotional well-being and reintegration also became high priorities for educators. Post COVID-19 stress, fear, and anxiety increased for many students, in addition to traumas and behavioral health concerns that were present beforehand. Educators became key in implementing trauma-informed practices with little to potentially no preparation. This study sought to understand educators' own well-being and their views of resources and supports when implementing trauma-informed practices in schools.

Who

Two school districts invited a random selection of 450 certified school staff to participate in this mixed-methods needs assessment. For the survey portion, 178 educators (39.5% response rate) completed the survey. Focus groups included 14 participants. Of the survey respondents, 57.6% were general education teachers, with the rest serving other educational roles within the two surveyed districts.

How

This study addressed the following research questions to better understand the relationship between educator well-being and resources use for trauma-informed practices:

1. How are educators doing across measures of psychological well-being?
2. What resources did educators say they wanted? What did they use? How helpful did they find these resources?
3. What factors affected teachers' use of resources?

The identified participants were anonymously surveyed via email. Three in-person focus groups and one combined-district virtual group were conducted to meet participant availability needs.

Major Findings

1. **Educator well-being:** Educators reported mixed results for how they were doing. Teachers indicated a high degree of well-being and low levels of secondary traumatic stress. At the same time, educators reported elevated levels of burnout, with the majority experiencing symptoms of burnout (feelings of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and low levels of personal accomplishment) at least once a week. Stressors such as lack of empathy and frustration with work were high. Teachers also expressed that the delivery of self care and mental health resources without proper guidance on implementation increased feelings of burnout.
2. **Useful resources:** Of the resources that were provided to them, participants found the most helpful were opportunities to connect with others, in-person guided wellness activities, training to identify students who may need support, and other relevant trauma-informed training. Educators would have liked to have had more resources in the form of opportunities for consultation while implementing newly learned skills (38% of respondents), more training in how to advocate for further resources (37%), and support groups focused on implementing new skills (36%).
3. **Factors influencing resource use:** The researchers found that educators who reported higher well-being and who worked in a better school climate were more likely to use resources. During the focus groups, teachers expressed how they heavily rely on colleagues for learning and implementation of social-emotional practices. This finding

aligned with the study’s call to action for more training support groups that are dedicated to skill development.

Conclusion

The ever changing demands on educators to create and cultivate trauma-informed classrooms and school environments need to be accompanied by adequate resources and training. Educators must ensure that environments give special attention to students’ emotional needs and well-being while tending to their own during the school day. School and district leaders must be attentive to the stress associated with exploring and implementing new skills. Teachers expressed gratitude for and enjoyment in gathering and sharing in the professional community. Such gatherings present opportunities to capitalize on connection while building skills that benefit student and educator well-being. The desire to create environments that are conducive to emotional well-being will heavily rely on the efficacy of effective teacher training.

Suggested Citation

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