



International Network for School Social Work

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**A Mental Health Service for Schools:
Partnership between the School of Social Work and Local Schools**

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Schools have been identified as an ideal setting for increasing access to mental health services, particularly for at-risk youths who may lack access to other services. There is also a growing recognition that meeting the needs of students who have been exposed to trauma is best served by a school-wide approach and this has led to an increased interest among schools in the United States in becoming trauma-responsive. On the other hand, public schools often face multiple challenges in meeting student needs. They are constantly balancing between trying to provide quality services and allocating sparse resources in the effort to address the social-emotional needs of students. They often must rely on collaborations with community partners to increase capacity to meet student needs despite waning resources and limitations.

An example of such partnerships is with Universities, most commonly with field placements in schools for social work students. Partnering with universities may be complex and ambitious, but it may also be an invaluable resource for building capacity to serve students and gaining access to resources that are otherwise too costly or unavailable.

Collaboration between the School of Social Work and Local Schools

A collaboration between USC Suzanne Dworak-Peck School of Social Work and local schools and school districts is one example of such an endeavor. The partnership has become the pathway for schools and school districts to increase their capacity in the effort to meet the needs of students who exhibit signs that they have been exposed to trauma, by using a school wide-approach. Through the collaboration, they have been able to access resources from the Treatment, Services and Adaptation Center for Resiliency, Hope and Wellness in Schools (<https://traumaawareschools.org>). The Center offers a broad range of resources for schools such as evidence-based and evidenced-informed interventions to help meet the needs of trauma-exposed students. Many of these resources are available free of charge online. The Trauma-Informed Skills for Educators (*TISE*) is one training program available from TSA that is supporting schools'/districts' efforts to create a trauma-responsive lens system-wide.

Training Teachers and Transforming Schools

TISE is a four-hour in-service training designed to enhance educators' knowledge about trauma and its impact on students, as well as enhance educators' ability to engage with youth who have been exposed to trauma.

Part 1 of the training addresses various types of trauma (from domestic violence, to natural disasters, to bullying), the neurological impact of trauma on students, the signs and symptoms of trauma, and a description of how trauma can manifest in the classroom and impact student learning.

Part 2 of the in-service training provides concrete strategies and skills to help educators engage with students in a more trauma-responsive way. This includes fostering a trauma-sensitive classroom climate, enhancing trauma-responsive communication, de-escalating disruptive incidents and fostering trauma responsiveness throughout the school community.

Part 3 outlines a framework for trauma-responsive schools and aligns trauma-informed practices and interventions with the *Multi-Tiered System of Support* and *Response to Intervention* frameworks. (These are two protocols derived from federal programs for students with disabilities and are widely used in the US.)

The in-service training also provides guidance on how schools can transform into trauma-informed systems using the online Trauma-Responsive School Implementation Assessment <https://traumaawareschools.org/traumaResponsiveSchools>. The objective of the training is three-fold. First, is to help schools understand how exposure to trauma can impact students' emotional, social, and academic functioning. Second, to enhance educators' ability to engage supportively with students who have been exposed to trauma. Third, to outline a framework for a trauma-responsive school system.

School Social Work Involvement

Training like *TISE* is just the beginning of a long process of transforming a school to respond to needs of students who have been exposed to trauma. School Social Workers play a significant role in this process. They are in key positions to support the training and provide on-going consultation and supports. There is a varying level of engagement among administrators, educators and staff in becoming trauma-informed. School Social Workers can advocate and be the ongoing agent of change. They can keep the conversation alive and provide on-going support via continued consultation, as the knowledge and skills are used by school personnel. They can play an important role in sustaining the development of a shared language for dealing with trauma. This shared language is important in any culture shift. School Social Workers can also support trauma-responsive transformation by integrating the newly acquired knowledge and skills in the different programs and services that already exist within their respective schools. Aligning new knowledge to enhance a pre-existing educational framework is always more effective than adding something new to everyone's plate. Schools are always struggling to meet education demands and are stretched. If trauma responsiveness can be aligned with existing initiatives, this may increase the chances of the knowledge and skills being used.

School Social Workers interact with all types of employees (including teachers, administrators, support personnel and cafeteria workers) and understand the school process, thus giving them the advantage in promoting the ideas and engaging everyone in the school. These are just some roles School Social Workers around the world can assume as schools become more receptive in addressing the socio-emotional needs of students to get them ready to learn.