

NORTH DAKOTA MULTI-TIER SYSTEM OF SUPPORTS

Trauma-Informed Practices for Schools Needs Assessment Introduction

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**Trauma-
Informed
Practices for
Schools**

Project Coordinator:

Lyndsi Engstrom

Director of Research, Design and Value

Central Region Education Association

lyndsi.engstrom@k12.nd.us

(701) 441-1737

Project Collaborators:

Heather Simonich

Operations Director

PATH

hsimonich@pathinc.org

Lisa Klabunde

Administrator

Wilton Public School

lisa.klabunde@k12.nd.us

Keely Ihry

Health & Wellness Coordinator

South East Education Cooperative

keely.ihry@k12.nd.us

Reviewed By:

National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN)

Collaborative for Academic Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL)

Center for Great Teachers and Leaders at American Institutes of Research (AIR)

Midwest & Plains Equity Assistance Center, a project of the Great Lakes Equity Center

Lutheran Social Services of North Dakota (LSS)

North Dakota Department of Public Instruction, Safe and Healthy Schools Unit

NDMTSS Implementation Team:

Nancy Burke

SPDG Coordinator

Jennifer Glasheen

Director of Teaching, Learning & Assessment

South East Education Cooperative

jennifer.glasheen@k12.nd.us

(701) 446-3170

Luke Schaefer

Executive Director

Central Region Education Association

luke.schaefer@k12.nd.us

(701) 838-3025

INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Trauma-Informed Practices for Schools (TIPS) Needs Assessment

The purpose of the Trauma-Informed Practices for Schools (TIPS) Needs Assessment is to provide educators and schools with a tool to assess their progress towards creating and maintaining trauma-informed learning environments. The TIPS Needs Assessment serves as a framework to enhance a school system's trauma-informed practices by, 1) Providing a course of action upon completion of the professional development curriculum: *Trauma Sensitive Schools: A New Perspective on Student Behavior and Learning*; 2) Conducting a system-wide gap analysis between current state and the desired state of a trauma-informed school; 3) Supporting the guidance, planning and preparation for professional development in relation to implementation and sustainability of trauma-informed practices in schools (<http://www.legis.nd.gov/cencode/t15-1c07.pdf>, page 7); and 4) Providing school districts an information source to utilize when considering allocation of district support. The TIPS Needs Assessment is intended to be utilized as a tool to measure the extent to which schools are implementing trauma-informed practices, as well as monitoring implementation progress. It is not intended to be a prescription, checklist or one-size-fits-all approach.

North Dakota Multi-Tier System of Supports (NDMTSS) Alignment

North Dakota's Multi-Tiered System of Supports (NDMTSS) is a framework to provide all students with the best opportunities to achieve their academic, social-emotional, and behavioral goals in school. NDMTSS focuses on providing high-quality instruction and interventions matched to student need, monitoring progress frequently to make decisions about changes in instruction or goals. Data are used to allocate resources to support staff implementation of highly effective practices to improve student learning outcomes. TIPS improve academic, social-emotional and behavioral outcomes by focusing on equitable and inclusive solutions to reduce opportunity gaps for all students.

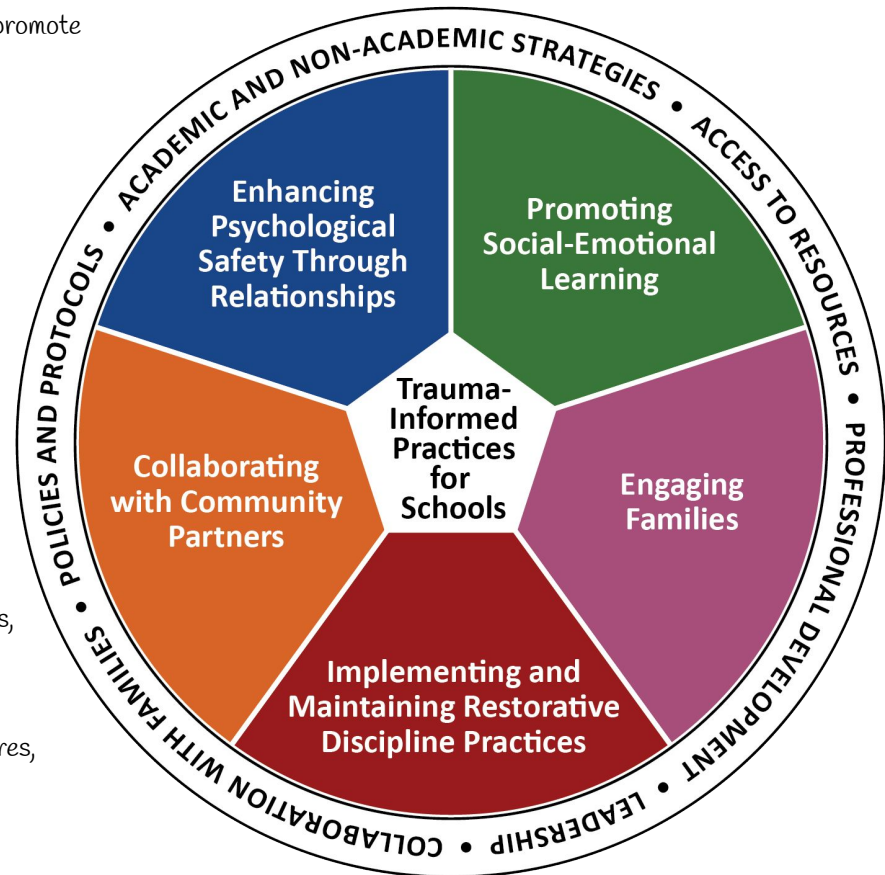
Trauma-Informed System Defined

According to the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN), a trauma-informed system is "one in which all parties involved recognize and respond to the impact of traumatic stress on those who have contact with the system including children, caregivers, staff, and service providers. According to McInerney & McKlindon (2014), by adopting trauma-informed practices, "schools undertake a paradigm shift at the staff and organizational level to recognize, understand and address the learning needs of children impacted by trauma. This requires a commitment to shaping school culture, practices and policies to be sensitive to the needs of traumatized learners. This effort positively impacts schools and changes the life trajectory of vulnerable students."

Trauma-Informed Practices for Schools (TIPS) Defined

Upon review of multiple resources, forming a focus group to research each of the practices, and consulting with experts representing multiple national organizations, NDMTSS identified the following Trauma-Informed Practices for Schools:

- 1) **Enhancing Psychological Safety through Relationships** – Psychological safety refers to the subjective nature of feeling safe..The feeling of safety is essential in shutting down an overactive fight, flight or freeze response and can help all students do their best in school. Trauma-informed schools provide predictability, set limits, build competence and provide opportunities for building supportive relationships with the intention of helping students and staff feel safe at school to promote learning.
- 2) **Promoting Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)** – Social-Emotional Learning is defined as "The process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes and skills to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions." (CASEL). The five core competencies of social-emotional learning include self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. When taught across settings (home, school and in the community), these competencies help individuals navigate the world more efficiently (CASEL. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://casel.org/>). Trauma-informed schools explicitly teach and promote social-emotional learning through curriculum and complimentary programs.
- 3) **Implementing & Maintaining Restorative Discipline Practices** – Traditional, exclusionary discipline leads to missed schoolwork and emotional disengagement from the school community which decreases likelihood of graduation and increases the "School to Prison Pipeline." Conversely, trauma-informed schools use instances of misconduct as learning opportunities, emphasizing peacemaking, open dialogue and conflict resolution to focus on what needs to happen to repair harm.
- 4) **Engaging Families** – It is well established that what happens outside of the classroom, affects educational outcomes. Students with engaged caregivers attend class more regularly, demonstrate higher levels of academic achievement, and exhibit more positive behavior both at home, school and in the community. Trauma-informed schools commit to engaging family members in the educational process at many levels.
- 5) **Collaborating with Community Partners** – Partnerships and collaborations, although challenging to create and maintain, can bolster student success. Trauma-informed schools recognize and respond to the impact of traumatic stress (experienced both in and outside the school) by partnering with agencies that infuse trauma awareness, knowledge, and skills into their organizational cultures, practices, and policies using the best available science to assist them in maximizing safety, facilitating the recovery or adjustment of the child and family, and supporting their ability to thrive (National Child Traumatic Stress Network).



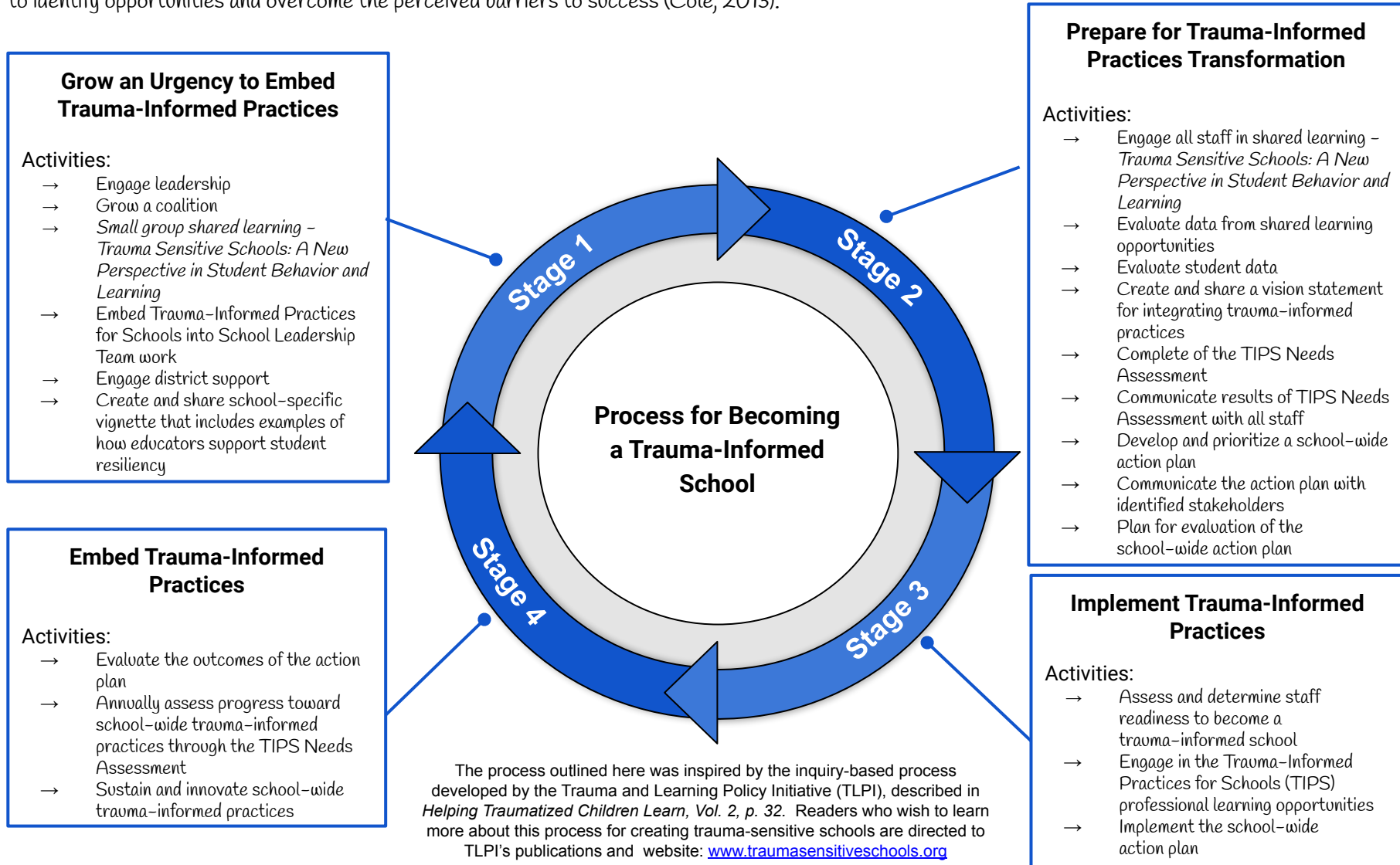
The Flexible Framework

Six familiar, yet imperative school operations have been identified as critical components for implementing and sustaining trauma-informed practices in school. School climate and student support initiatives can be effectively organized by these six operations termed the *Flexible Framework* to ensure alignment and reinforcement. The Framework outlined here was inspired by the Flexible Framework developed by the Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative (TLPI), described in *Helping Traumatized Children Learn, Vol. 2, p. 27*. Readers who wish to learn more about this Framework for creating trauma-sensitive schools are directed to TLPI's publications and website: www.traumasensitiveschools.org

- 1) **Leadership** – School leaders play a key role in any effort for staff to understand and address trauma's impact on learning as a part of the core educational mission of the school. School and district administrators empower leadership teams to create an infrastructure and culture that promotes trauma-informed practices. Building leaders engage their staff in strategic planning and encourage the integration of trauma-informed approaches into existing school operations. Leadership teams meet on a regularly scheduled basis and include input from a diverse representation of their students, families, and community members to advocate for the needs of all students.
- 2) **Professional Development** – Professional development is critical for all school staff, including leaders. Educators must be provided the opportunity to build skills that enhance their capacity to create trauma-informed learning environments. A few examples of professional development topics to consider include: increasing behavioral health literacy by enhancing understanding of the prevalence and impact of trauma; understanding of and explicit instruction of comprehensive social-emotional skills; techniques for strengthening relationships between students and adults; alternatives to punitive disciplinary practices; and strategies for engaging families in the educational process including problem solving.
- 3) **Access to Resources and Services** – Evidence-based resources and access to services in and out of the school building are critical for a trauma-informed school. Trauma-informed schools utilize universal, targeted, and intensive interventions to support the academic, behavioral, and social-emotional needs of all of their students. Identifying and coordinating with school-based and community resources is essential to meet the needs of all students. Local, state and national resources can be used to support students to fully engage in the school community. Equally important are resources that support all staff and provide them with the opportunity to discuss students' needs confidentially and to reflect on how their work is affecting their personal lives.
- 4) **Academic and Nonacademic Strategies** – In a trauma-informed school, students are viewed holistically. Relationships with adults and peers; self-regulation of emotion; attention and behavior; and physically, social, emotional and psychological safety are all directly related to their ability and engagement in learning. Clear, explicit communication and routines that provide predictability help ensure the classroom is a place where children feel physically, socially, emotionally and psychologically safe and therefore have space to focus on excelling academically.
- 5) **Policies and Protocols** – In order to ensure a school-wide trauma-informed environment, educators must review the policies and protocols that are responsible for day to day activities and logistics of the school. Some examples of policies and protocols that schools often review as they become trauma-informed include: discipline policies; communication procedures; and safety planning.
- 6) **Collaborations with Families** – Schools work to make families and caregivers feel welcome and understands the important role they play in their student's education. Positive collaboration can be facilitated by ensuring educators are culturally and linguistically responsive in their communication and differentiate family engagement practices such as how information is shared, as well as when and where events are held to meet diverse family needs.

Process for Becoming a Trauma-Informed School

As stated by the NCTSN, the process of becoming trauma-informed is an essential component of the education system in order to maintain the critical mission central to all schools, academic achievement. Trauma-informed schools recognize that trauma affects staff, students, families, communities, and systems. Therefore, organizational support, partnerships, and capacity-building are essential. The following illustration was designed to empower schools to identify opportunities and overcome the perceived barriers to success (Cole, 2013).



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