Trauma-Informed, Resilience-Oriented Schools Principles Assessment Questions

The trauma-informed, resilience-oriented approach to organizational change is built on the core principles of safety, trustworthiness, voice and empowerment, peer support, collaboration, and inclusion and engagement. A trauma-informed, resilience-oriented school creates a culture and climate that reflects all of these principles in every interaction, all physical settings, relationships, and actions for students, families, staff, and the broader school community.

Utilize the following questions to begin the conversation about the principles and identify strategies to create a more trauma-informed, resilience-oriented school culture.

1. Safety

Ensuring physical, academic, social, behavioral and emotional safety in the school community

Guiding questions:
- To what extent do the activities and settings in school ensure the physical and emotional safety of students, families and staff?
- How can settings be modified to ensure this safety more effectively and consistently?

Specific questions:
- Consider physical and emotional safety when answering each of these questions. This requires the team to have a common understanding of emotional safety.

Building and grounds:
- How safe is the area around the outside of the school's building?
- How safe are areas within the building—hallways, restrooms, locker rooms, cafeterias, and offices?
- Are entrances to the buildings monitored continually while students are entering and exiting and during the school day?
- Are doors locked or open?
- Are sidewalks and parking areas well-lit?
- Are the buildings and grounds well-lit for students and staff staying after school hours?
- What measures are in place to ensure safety after hours? Are security personnel present?
- When a student or parent arrives, are directions to the main office clear?
- Are directions to specific locations within the school provided clearly?
- What signs and other visual materials are there? Are they welcoming? In the languages spoken in the school community?
- How would you describe the reception and waiting areas, classrooms, and other spaces? Are they inviting?
- Are restrooms easily accessible? Are there signs indicating their location?
- How are students welcomed each day?
- Are the needs of LGBTQ+ students, staff and family considered regarding all environments, including bathrooms, in the school?

In the classroom:
- Is there adequate personal space for individual students within the classroom?
- Do students receive clear explanations and information about each task and procedure? Are the rationales made explicit?
- How are specific learning goals and objectives made clear?
- Are staff attentive to signs of student discomfort or unease?
- Do staff understand these signs in a trauma-informed way?
- Are staff respectful of students concerns and needs in the curriculum they share, their directions and comments?
- What events have occurred indicating a lack of safety—physical or emotional (e.g., arguments, conflicts, assaults)? What instigated these incidents? What alternatives could be put in place to minimize the likelihood of their recurrence?

Parents and families:
- When connecting with families, is there sensitivity to potentially unsafe situations (e.g., domestic violence)?
- Are parents and families involved in their own student's educational planning and school-wide initiative planning?
- When families join planning sessions for their students or school-wide initiatives, are they welcomed and considered equal members of the group?

2. Trustworthiness

Maximizing trustworthiness through task clarity, consistency and interpersonal boundaries between individuals, groups and all members of the school community

Guiding questions:
- To what extent do the school's activities and settings maximize trustworthiness by making the tasks clear, ensuring consistency in practice, and maintaining appropriate boundaries?
- How can supports be modified to ensure that tasks and boundaries are established and maintained clearly and appropriately?
- How can the school prioritize honesty and transparency?

Specific questions:
- Do the teachers and other adults provide clear information about academic work, social functions, and all other supports provided within the school including goals, expectations, and procedures?
- Do staff understand the difficulties that students impacted by trauma have in building relationships? Students may lie about incidents until they truly trust a person.
- How do teachers and other adults maintain professional boundaries with students?
- How does the school ensure that relationships between staff and students are professional?
- How does the school communicate reasonable expectations regarding behavior and completion of schoolwork?
- What steps does the school take to avoid confusion for student and family?

- Is communication ongoing, positive and clear between school professionals and students and their families?
- Are students involved in development of their academic learning plans, Individual Educational Plans, health and safety plans, social and emotional regulation plans and behavior plans?
- Does student feedback allow them to indicate they feel safe in a specific teacher's classroom or working with a specific staff person?

3. Student Voice and Empowerment

Maximizing student and family input, choice and control

Guiding questions:
- How can activities and services be modified to facilitate experiences of empowerment and the development or enhancement of the student?
- How can learning and social experiences be modified to ensure that student experiences of choice and control are emphasized?

Specific questions:
- How much choice do students have over how they will engage in learning including when, where, and with whom the learning is provided (e.g., time of day or week, classroom vs. home)?
- Does the student choose communication methods with a teacher, student support or administrative staff member (e.g., by phone or text, in person, one-on-one, in front of a class, in a small group)?
- Do students and families with lived experience have significant advisory voice in the planning and evaluation of school safety, processes, and practices?
- Does the school build in small choices that make a difference to students and families (e.g., asking, "When would you like me to call? Is there some other way you would like me to reach you or would you prefer to get in touch with me?")
- How much control does the student have over starting and stopping support (both overall service involvement and specific times)?
- Are all students informed about the choices and options in the learning process? Is there a check for understanding about those choices and options?
- To what extent are the individual student's learning styles and choice of demonstration of learning given weight?
- What message do students receive – 1) they have to "prove" themselves in order to "earn" a relationship with a trusted staff member? Or, 2) they are accepted for who they are despite their behaviors and actions?
- Does the teacher communicate that classroom procedures and activities are a privilege over which the student has little control?
- Will students receive negative consequences for exercising choices? Are these necessary or arbitrary consequences?
- In academics as well as other school activities, how are each student's strengths and skills recognized?
- Does the program emphasize student potential and growth?

- Are all students encouraged and supported to participate in activities that may seem beyond their capability?
- For each contact, how can the student or family member feel validated and affirmed?
- How can each contact or service be focused on skill-development or enhancement?
- Does each contact aim at two endpoints whenever possible: 1) accomplishing the given task and 2) skill-building on the part of the student?

4. Collaboration

Facilitating collaboration and sharing power

Guiding questions:
- To what extent do the school's activities and settings maximize collaboration and sharing of power between staff and students?
- How can teachers modify learning activities to ensure collaboration and power-sharing?

Specific questions:
- Do students have a significant role in planning and reviewing their supports, academic plan and personal goals?
- How are opportunities for collaboration built into the school's activities?
- Do educators communicate respect for the student's life experiences and history?
- In individual student planning, goal setting, and the development of priorities, are students' preferences given substantial weight?
- Are students involved as frequently as feasible in any planning meetings?
- Are student priorities elicited and then validated in formulating the plan?
- Does the school cultivate a model of doing "with" rather than "to" or "for" students, staff and families?
- Does the school communicate a conviction that the student and their family is the ultimate expert on their own experience?
- Do support staff and case managers identify tasks on which both they and the students can work simultaneously (e.g., information-gathering)?

5. Peer Support

Providing help and support to each other, for both students and staff

Guiding questions:
- To what extent do the school's activities and settings maximize a student's access to support from peers?
- How can activities be modified to ensure that collaboration and power-sharing are maximized?

Specific questions:
- Do students have access to peer support programs?
- Is peer-to-peer interaction facilitated by a school counselor, social worker or other adult training in peer support programs?
- Are peer helpers trained in the areas of communication and helping skills?
- Do trainer peer helpers provide academic or educational support?
- Are trained peer helpers available to assist new students in the school?
- Do teachers and staff have space to share challenges with each other without judgment or fear of repercussions?

6. Inclusion and Engagement

Practicing inclusion, seeking to prevent discrimination, and celebrating the unique aspects of our school community

Guiding questions:
- To what extent do the school's activities and settings prioritize inclusion for all students regardless of their country of origin, race, ethnic background, economic standing, disability, language, religion or other pieces of their identity?
- How can activities and services be modified to ensure that all students have access, are included and receive fair and equal treatment?

Specific questions:
- Do all students have access to all materials, staff and physical settings needed for them to achieve success in their school work and activities?
- Are all informational documents and advertisements available in the primary languages of all students and their families?
- As needed, are translators available for parent/guardian conferences, IEP meetings, and other meetings related to student academic progress?
- How are differences in culture, religion, and family priorities considered and respected?
- Do all students have access to the digital/electronic equipment they need to participate in instruction, whether it is virtual or face-to-face?
- Are students and their families involved in decision-making processes regarding their educational programming including decisions about the time of meetings, programming and personnel involved in an individual's educational programming?
- Are all students provided with opportunities to learn social and emotional skills and acceptable behaviors within the school setting?
- Are programs such as restorative practices, Conscious Discipline, Collaborative Problem Solving or trauma-informed Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports provided to all students in the school regardless of their identity and personal culture?
- Do families and students receive information about meetings, programs, changes in schedules and individuals involved in their education in a timely fashion? Are meetings and schedules flexible to meet family schedules?
- Are they given time to consider options and make meaningful decisions?

- Do policies, protocols and processes that are responsive to the racial, ethnic and cultural needs of individuals served recognize and address historical and community-based trauma?
- Do staff use appropriate language when speaking to or writing about students based on their race, ethnic background, country or origin, economic standing, disability, religion or other important components of their identity?
- How are staff encouraged and supported to practice their culture, religion, spirituality, and traditions?
- Are staff, teachers, and administrators encouraged to understand their own implicit biases and supported to address them in a safe way?