# Implementing and Evaluating Your Trauma-Informed, Resilience-Oriented Innovations

Using the information and tools discussed in this toolkit to address targeted areas of need in a school does improve services. Areas such as special education and discipline processes immediately come to mind as ones that benefit from the implementation of trauma-informed, resilience-oriented approaches. Sustainable, lasting change that positively impacts the lives of the whole school community requires a larger vision and plan, the involvement of all stakeholders, ongoing evaluation, and strong leadership at all stages of implementation. Implementation and forward progress rely on data collection. Leadership takes on both the roles of leading and managing the cultural changes. Their involvement is significant to success throughout the entire process.[1]

The trauma-informed, resilience-oriented approach to schools is an innovation that requires a deep level of commitment and change management. It is an innovation or introduction of something new that often tweaks or changes an already existing program or process. It is not an initiative that ends on the last day of school in spring to make way for another initiative in the fall. The changes are a permanent shift in culture that do not replace previous processes. They increase the voice of the student and family, the emotional safety of the school, collaboration, inclusion, and engagement of all. Every area of school culture is assessed prior to the creation of plans. In this section, the discussion will focus on implementation action steps, ongoing evaluation, and the role of leadership in the process.
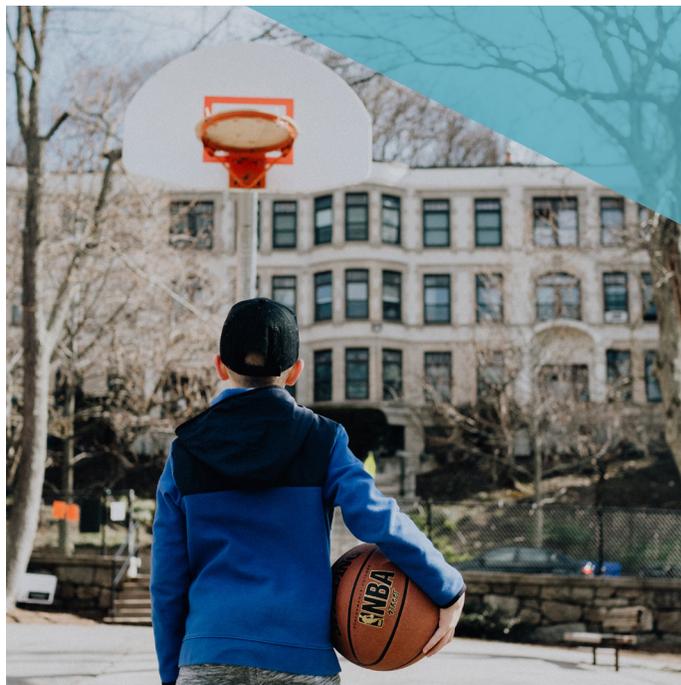
ACTION STEPS

» Establish a collaborative team to lead your trauma-informed, resilience-oriented schools initiative

» Engage in the implementation process

» Utilize a continuous quality improvement approach

IMPLEMENTATION TOOLS

» Implementing and Evaluation Your Program Professional Development Training Slide Deck

» Communicating about Your Trauma-Informed, Resilience-Oriented School Initiative

» Activities for Continuous Quality Improvement

» Trauma-Informed, Resilience-Oriented Schools Fidelity Assessment and Scoring Tool

Establish a Collaborative Team to Lead Your Trauma-Informed, Resilience-Oriented Schools Initiative

No one can lead or execute this initiative alone. A strong team composed of diverse stakeholders across the school community should be formed, and a team leader or co-leaders identified. While everyone in the school community will be involved in the implementation, this team will be the champions and coordinators of each activity. A recommended list of participants includes:

» School and district leadership

» Teachers from multiple departments

» Support personnel

» Classified staff

» Parents and families

» Community partners

» Students (no less than two)

It is recommended this team meet twice a month at the start of the initiative to set goals and action plans. As the initiative builds momentum, the number and frequency of meetings may change.

Trauma-Informed, Resilience-Oriented Leadership within the Implementation Process

Traditionally, school administrations have asked counselors and teacher leaders to take the helm of initiatives such as instituting trauma-informed, resilience-oriented principles, practices, and policies. However, administrative buy-in and commitment are critical to the successful implementation of an innovation that involves changes on all levels and in all areas of school practice. Administrators often help determine the make-up of the team leading the initiative. They can ensure the team is a diverse group of individuals representing different departments, grades, and groups in the school and that those chosen represent different cultures, races, genders, and viewpoints present in the district. The administrator should participate on the team, not serving as the team lead, but rather providing guidance, motivation, and support when things are not going well and celebrating and communicating the successes along the way. Having school and district leaders there demonstrates the importance of this work and the school's or district's commitment to it.

One pivotal role for administrators is to ensure that resources are available, including funds and time for assessments, training, tools, and people to implement the interventions and strategies. They secure time for professional development for all staff and remain committed regardless of competing priorities. Only a person with the power of this position can provide these resources, which are vital to the forward movement of the innovation.

Another important role for administrators is communication and messaging about this initiative to all stakeholders. Participating in the development of the vision and making sure that it aligns with the building or district vision is critical. Collaborating with that same team to develop an elevator speech about the benefits of implementing trauma-informed, resilience-oriented practices and the strategies for securing buy-in from all stakeholders, or individuals and groups with interest in the school is key to strengthening the innovation.

Engage in the Implementation Process

Working to adapt trauma-informed, resilience-oriented practices in your school or district is a process. It is not achieved overnight; it is a lifelong process of implementation. As you begin this work, your school will move through phases outlined by the Missouri Model's Developmental Framework pictured here.[2] The framework has four phases: Trauma Aware, Trauma Sensitive, Trauma Responsive, and Trauma Informed. Understanding these phases can help your team have realistic expectations around progress and create a strong vision for the future.

Trauma Aware → Trauma Sensitive → Trauma Responsive → Trauma Informed

Trauma Aware

A team, leader, staff, and everyone who is involved in the school setting learns about trauma, its impact, and how to address it in the school setting. Stakeholders are made aware of how and where to find additional information and are supported in further learning. Following training, conversations among staff include key terms and concepts. Staff members demonstrate curiosity and a desire to know more so they can improve their practices. A school team is formed that explores what this new information might mean for them and what next steps may need to be taken.

Trauma Sensitive

The school team explores the principles of safety, choice, collaboration, trustworthiness, and empowerment within their environment and daily work. There is widespread communication about what is learned to both families and staff through multiple communication channels. Through a self-assessment process, the organization identifies existing strengths, resources, and barriers to change as well as practices that are consistent or inconsistent with the principles. Leadership prepares the school or district for change and leads a process of reflection to determine readiness for change. The school and district begin to review tools and processes for implementation in the school. The school values and prioritizes the trauma lens; a shift in perspective happens. Trauma training expectations for all staff are established, including within new staff orientation. School and district leadership recognizes and responds to staff compassion fatigue and secondary trauma. Hearing stories of trauma and working tirelessly with students and colleagues impacted by trauma can lead to the development of compassion fatigue even when an individual has not personally experienced the trauma.

Trauma Responsive

School or district culture has begun to change, highlighting the role of trauma and resilience. At all levels, staff members begin re-thinking the processes, practices, routines, and infrastructure of the school. There is an integration of principles into staff behaviors and practices and into staff support. Changes to environments are made in the classroom as well as school-wide settings. The school and district have developed a ready response for crisis management that reflects trauma-informed values.

Trauma Informed

The school or district has made trauma-responsive practices the organizational norm. The model has become so accepted and so thoroughly embedded that it no longer depends on a few leaders. The school or district works with community partners to strengthen collaboration. Policies and procedures are revised and measured for fidelity to a trauma-informed model. Teachers and others involved with the school experience adequate support and say the culture is safe and supportive and that despite the

challenges, they enjoy working in the school. The organization uses data to inform decision-making at all levels. Training is promoted and made accessible to staff, including at new staff orientation. Ongoing coaching and consultation are available to staff on-site and in real-time. The business model including fiscal structures works to meet the need to address the needs of the school or district.
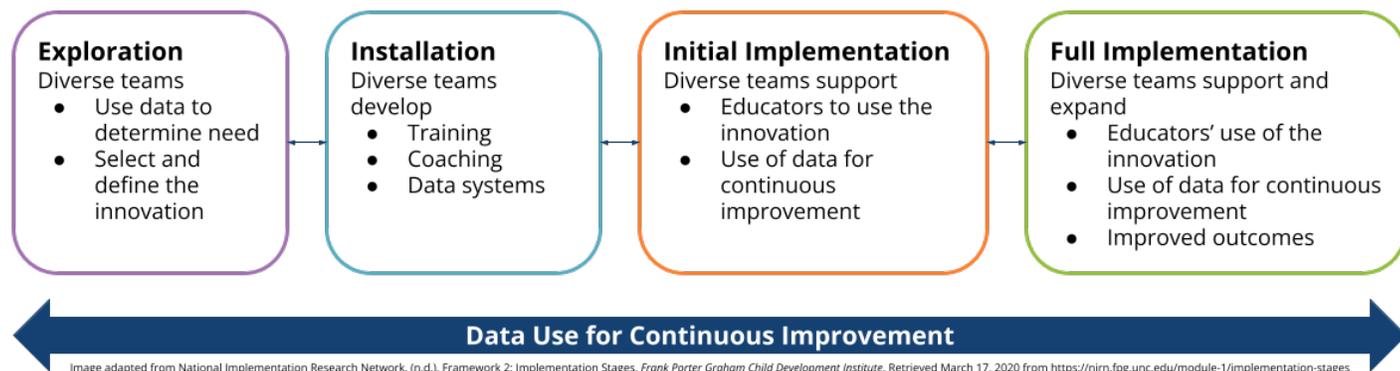
Understanding Phases of Implementation

The Missouri Model provides an overall picture of where schools are going to achieve a level of trauma-informed, resilience-oriented schools. However, it does not provide a step-by-step approach to start and continue the process. The National Implementation Research Network's (NIRN)[3] work in the field of education is focused on developing processes that support the selection, adoption, and sustained use of educational practices that are supported by evidence and have shown positive outcomes for students.[4] They have broken down the change process into a series of four stages. Along with their implementation tools, their implementation stages provide an excellent guide to a school team wanting to smoothly implement their trauma-informed, resilience-oriented innovation with success.

NIRN estimates it will take a team anywhere from two to four years to complete all implementation phases.

> 🧠 **Alternate Learning Strategy**
>
> Learn more about the National Implementation Research Network's framework.

Stages of the Implementation Process

Exploration
Diverse teams
- Use data to determine need
- Select and define the innovation

Installation
Diverse teams develop
- Training
- Coaching
- Data systems

Initial Implementation
Diverse teams support
- Educators to use the innovation
- Use of data for continuous improvement

Full Implementation
Diverse teams support and expand
- Educators' use of the innovation
- Use of data for continuous improvement
- Improved outcomes

Data Use for Continuous Improvement

Image adapted from National Implementation Research Network. (n.d.). Framework 2: Implementation Stages. *Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute.* Retrieved March 17, 2020 from https://nirn.fpg.unc.edu/module-1/implementation-stages

1. Exploration

During this stage a team considers the possibility of implementing trauma-informed, resilience-oriented school principles and practices in their setting by answering the following questions:

- » Where is the area of need?

- » What is the urgency of that need?

- » What resources will be needed?

- » What is the capacity of our team/staff/district to provide those resources and implement them?

These questions highlight the key decisions that need to be made before a school or district can effectively begin the change process. When a team decides to quickly implement one strategy or a quick training with no follow-up activities, the efforts are likely to fail. Rushing to "fix" problems in schools without thoughtful planning and careful attention to alignment with existing initiatives will result in unsustainable outcomes for students. More than that, it may make staff reluctant to continue

to engage in the process at all. Teachers often experience initiative fatigue, stating "we've already tried that, it didn't work for us" when asked to consider further innovation in strategies and practices.

To support this phase, consider using the Trauma-Informed, Resilience-Oriented Schools Fidelity Assessment and Scoring Tool to gather baseline information.

2. Installation

This phase includes the steps of creating a vision, setting up communication channels, and planning for ongoing communication with all stakeholders. This is when the team and leadership ensure that financial and human resources are in place to implement any plans they create, including professional development. Use the Communicating about Your Trauma-Informed, Resilience-Oriented School Initiative tool to create your vision and communicate it broadly.

Awareness training continues as staff members enter the district while deeper strategic training is provided to classroom teachers and support staff on specific interventions that have been chosen for implementation. Choosing the interventions and supports can be a difficult step. There are a variety of resources and places to look; in fact, it can be overwhelming. Consider gleaning practices from other sections of this toolkit as well as a few other sources listed below:

1. [Trauma-Informed Programs and Practices for Schools (TIPPS) Program Guide](#) from the University of Michigan School of Social Work

2. [Resources from the National Child Traumatic Stress Network](#)

3. [Trauma Sensitive Schools Initiative](#) from the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction

4. [Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative (TLPI)](#) from the Massachusetts Advocates for Children and Harvard Law School

As new strategies and programs are chosen, professional development and resources are provided so that staff members have everything they need to implement. The team examines policies and procedures to ensure they are in alignment with the trauma-informed, resilience-oriented principles and are implemented equitably.

3. Initial Implementation

When a school or district reaches this phase, the majority of teachers and practitioners in the school are using the practice or program that was identified in the goal(s). Data and feedback are available from that practice or program to inform decision-making and improve the implementation of the practice or program. Teachers and other practitioners are beginning to achieve fidelity and improve the quality of implementation efforts. The evidence shows that the implementation of the practice or program is feasible.

It is important to note that some practices within the school may be at the initial implementation phase while the school team is just beginning to introduce another practice. For example, a school may have instituted calming places for all students and space spots for students with more significant needs. These may be an accepted part of the school's process of addressing dysregulation. At the same time, they may be beginning the process of introducing restorative practices as a strategy that will replace their current punishment-oriented discipline program.

Many other activities can happen during this phase including the implementation of trauma-informed, resilience-oriented coaching in the school setting. Feedback drives the reassessment process on each specific goal.

4. Full Implementation

This is not achieved quickly. In this phase, a school has shifted its culture and thus its practices to be in alignment with the trauma-informed, resilience-oriented principles. Staff members describe their school as a calm and supportive place to work. Students and their families say that they feel like they belong and that the staff cares for them. This is a goal for a school team to push for, but not something that happens without resistance, regrouping, or reteaching.

Utilize a Continuous Quality Improvement Approach

Because trauma-informed, resilience-oriented implementation is a continuous process in which the team is striving to make decisions that will improve the work and outcomes for students and staff over time, it is important to use a continuous quality improvement approach. Often used in healthcare settings, continuous quality improvement is a process of incremental changes to processes and practices to improve the experience and efficiency of your program.[5] This approach encourages teams to collect and analyze data throughout implementation to discern what needs to be kept, changed, added, or stopped.

When data and outcomes are not what is expected, the team might have to look at their process to identify what is missing. Have they been communicating the vision to generate support among stakeholders? Are there those who do not understand the communication? Has staff development been effective? Are the resources necessary available to the staff and do they have the support they need to implement what they have been asked to do? If the answers to any of these questions lead a team to pause, then it is time to go back and address the missing link. This is a natural progression in an implementation process and will happen at some time to almost every team.

One strategy is to complete the Trauma-Informed, Resilience-Oriented Schools Fidelity Assessment every year and compare your data over time. This will allow you to see what your school or district does well and where you may need to focus your implementation efforts next. Be sure to communicate the results of the assessment, share depictions of the data over time, and publicize your next steps based on the data with all stakeholders.

The Activities for Continuous Quality Improvement tool includes a variety of activities to utilize with your team to practice this approach. Your team should meet consistently to review your implementation progress, review data, and assess what is working well and where your team should focus its efforts next. Continuous quality improvement does not consider unexpected outcomes as failures, but rather as an opportunity for learning and then moving forward. With the proper support, guidance, and resources a team of committed individuals can bring to life trauma-informed resilience-oriented practices in their school.

✸ Inclusion and Engagement Action Steps

» When gathering and reviewing data from implementation, it is critical to obtain feedback from a representative sample. Without input from diverse stakeholders' perspectives, your team runs the risk of maintaining and reinforcing unhelpful practices.

» Encourage participation in implementation. Your team might be leading the innovation, but everyone interested in being involved should be. Consider how and when you are meeting, planning, and seeking input to ensure everyone has an opportunity to participate.

» Rotate team membership to gather new perspectives. Eliminate barriers to participation by providing transportation, food, child care, and interpretation services. And, ensure each member's voice is respected and given equal weight. This will help reduce feelings of tokenism among participants as you seek to make your team more representative and inclusive.

REFERENCES

To return to your place in the toolkit, click the number of the endnote that you followed to this page.

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1   Minnesota Department of Education. (Revised 2019) Change Leadership -- A Guide for School Leaders. https://education.mn.gov/mdeprod/idcplg?IdcService=GET_FILE&dDocName=mde059459&RevisionSelectionMethod=latestReleased&Rendition=primary

2   MO Dept. of Mental Health and Partners. (2014). Missouri Model: A Developmental Framework for Trauma Informed Approaches.

3   National Implementation Research Network. (n.d.). Framework 2: Implementation Stages. Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute. Retrieved March 17, 2020 from https://nirn.fpg.unc.edu/module-1/implementation-stages.

4   National Implementation Research Network: Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute. K-12. https://nirn.fpg.unc.edu/focus-areas/71

5   O'Donnell, B and Gupta, V. (2020). Continuous Quality Improvement. StatPearls. Retrieved March 22, 2021 from https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK559239/.