



An Action Agenda to Support Students and Educators Experiencing Trauma

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Preface

This vignette is based on anecdotes from educators and education leaders across the Appalachia region. It is intended to illustrate the current challenges in the region related to supporting students and educators experiencing trauma.



As a middle school teacher in a rural school district of West Virginia, I encounter both the beauty and the devastation, the resilience and despondency, and the achievements and heartaches of our region and our families every day. I see some children walking to school in neighborhoods teeming with people dealing drugs, syringes on the streets, and people who misuse drugs huddled in encampments. I teach many students who are disengaged, angry, and sad. The only remedies I have at hand are school nurse visits or office discipline referrals. Often my principal resorts to suspending students, especially for violent behavior, because she doesn't want to risk the safety of staff or other students. Some of my students return to homes with little to no adult supervision, fending for basic needs like clean clothes, solid meals, medical attention, and transportation. I do my best to show them compassion while also communicating high expectations and hope, so that they may have a chance succeed. I provide standards-based instruction—as well as school materials and snacks with money from my own pocket—even when they lash out or withdraw. When I come home to my own family, experiencing our own financial hardships, I can't seem to shake the emotional weight of the day. Will my students be safe tonight? Will they come back to school tomorrow? What can I do?

Introduction

Students and educators in Appalachia and across the nation face multiple sources of traumatic stress, spanning from the opioid epidemic to violence against people of color to the COVID-19 pandemic. Substance misuse in the Appalachian region has gradually increased over the past two decades (Moody et al., 2017), and the region’s opioid misuse rates exceed national averages (Meit et al., 2017). Parental opioid misuse has been associated with deleterious outcomes for children across multiple domains, including lower cognitive and academic performance, poorer social functioning and interpersonal relationships, and increased risk of developing a range of mental health disorders, such as internalizing and externalizing behavior disorders and substance use disorders (Peisch et al., 2018). Educators experience their own personal stress as well as secondary (or vicarious) trauma from daily exposure to students’ traumas; adult symptoms of traumatic stress—detachment, hopelessness, fatigue, distraction—erode educators’ abilities to instruct and support students, and impact their own emotional and physical health.

Recognizing that communities are imperiled by the opioid epidemic and other traumatic experiences, the Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Appalachia at SRI International established the Cross-State Collaborative to Support Schools in the Opioid Crisis (CCSSOC) in 2019. CCSSOC members include leaders from state and local education agencies, community-based organizations, and universities across Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia who work to address the trauma-related consequences of the opioid epidemic in schools. In so doing, they have identified other high-priority needs that students and educators face in the broader context of community opioid misuse, such as trauma associated with COVID-19 and social and racial injustice.

CCSSOC members share an urgent and increasing awareness of the prevalence of trauma among children and youth (Finkelhor et al., 2015) and the devastating impacts of chronic trauma on individuals’ development and functioning throughout the lifespan (Perfect et al., 2016; Porche et al., 2016). They also recognize the inequities inherent in current school disciplinary systems, such as the disproportionate use of exclusionary discipline on students of color and students with disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, 2018), and the tendency for educators to misinterpret

and punish students for behaviors that could be potential symptoms of trauma, which exacerbates rather than addresses trauma (Chang & Davis, 2009). CCSSOC members are inspired to support the countless teachers across the region who bring their creativity, passion, and commitment to support their students. Likewise, they are inspired by community members—families, mental health providers, youth-serving organizations—who are partnering with their local schools to help students thrive. While the region is struggling with various levels of trauma, its residents are demonstrating their commitment to giving their children a better future.

This action agenda and related [Trauma Support for Schools Virtual Summit](#) are the culmination of CCSSOC members' collaboration across two years. The action agenda highlights ongoing high-priority needs in addressing the consequences of trauma in schools. The Summit provided a venue for a larger community of interested stakeholders to share input on the agenda and explore resources, spark ideas, and establish connections to expand the commitment to use research, data, and evidence-based practices to address the needs.

Vision

CCSSOC members have a shared vision for how things could be—for how a well-coordinated and multi-tiered, culturally inclusive, trauma-informed system of support could equitably serve the children and families of Appalachia and beyond. The vignette below—a re-imagined system based on evidence-based practices—is based on two years of collaboration with CCSSOC members, who have generously shared numerous perspectives, stories, and ideas.

In my middle school community in rural Appalachia, we celebrate and honor the beauty, resilience, and achievements of our diverse staff, students, and families. We share strong and engaging relationships with each other and with our partners in health, social services, and law enforcement agencies. Our school team is aware when circumstances change in our communities or with our families. To help the school team better support students, emergency responders automatically notify us when traumatic events such as drug overdoses, gun violence, or immigration raids occur, and social services notify us when children have been relocated to kinship or foster care. Our school administrators make sure teachers know when families are in crisis and have the tools and resources to accommodate students' needs. We receive ongoing professional development and encouragement to practice daily self-care routines to combat our own stress and reduce burnout; to deliver instruction and routines that are productive, predictable, and interactive; and to identify and refer students and families for additional resources and support, as needed. My principal champions trauma-informed care, and she has developed efficient systems to access meaningful data, consult with and refer students to community-based providers, invest in interventions based on student and staff strengths and needs, and monitor the equity of services provided such as by examining potential biases that hinder inclusive learning environments for all students, and the outcomes achieved. We resist punitive approaches to discipline and focus on trauma-informed approaches, and teachers are working hard to stop excluding students from instruction—instead of sending students to the office, we use de-escalation and restorative techniques to help all students feel welcomed and included in the classroom. Educators and counselors are ready and able to mobilize as a team to assess students' emotional well-being, make available accommodations to increase comfort and engagement in school, and collaborate with family members and community partners to provide

supports that help our children and families build resilience, heal, cope, and persevere through life's challenges.

With this vision in mind, CCSSOC members, with support from REL Appalachia staff, set out to share, learn, and build the capacity for state and local leaders identify, select, and implement evidence-based practices that enhance students' and educators' ability to manage and cope with trauma (e.g., social-emotional skills). In doing so, CCSSOC members focused on strategies that would promote inclusive and equitable practices for the delivery of trauma-informed services and supports, and, therefore, increase the likelihood of equitable positive outcomes for students and educators. Further, CCSSOC members emphasized that data-based decisionmaking should guide the delivery and continuous improvement of trauma-informed care at the local and state levels, with systems in place to evaluate effectiveness and identify inequities in access to and benefits from practices and programs.

Across two years of work together, CCSSOC members identified high-priority needs in promoting equitable outcomes and building the capacities of school communities to help all students succeed in school and life. While CCSSOC members built their understanding of ways to address student and educator trauma and are applying what they learned, they also identified unmet needs in their communities, potential strategies to address these needs, and actionable steps they and others can take to continue moving forward. They also discussed ways to more deeply engage with different sectors beyond education, and to engage more purposefully with community members to strengthen policy and practice. This action agenda lays out these ongoing unmet needs, actions, and opportunities and reflects CCSSOC members' commitment to use research, data, and evidence-based practices to address high-priority needs and challenges educators and students face during this historic time, as well as in the future. The four research and practice strategies constituting this agenda (exhibit 1) provide specific and meaningful actions that researchers, educators and mental health service providers, and stakeholders can take to address community concerns, accelerate support, and focus resources equitably on combatting the consequences of trauma in school settings, to ultimately improve the behavioral, social-emotional, and academic outcomes of all students. Each high-priority need includes critical opportunities to promote equitable dissemination and access to evidence-based resources that

should be considered when implementing researcher, education and mental health service provider, and community and family stakeholder actions.

Exhibit 1: Four research and practice strategies to address high-priority needs



Appendix A of this document includes a worksheet template and example worksheet to aid researchers, education and mental health service providers, and community and family stakeholders in identifying high-priority needs within their own context and planning next steps to address those needs.

Research and Practice Strategies

Strategy 1: Implement practices and programs that address student and educator trauma, and evaluate implementation and outcomes.

Schools can change the trajectory for students and educators experiencing trauma with well-implemented practices and programs that effectively address the consequences of trauma, are responsive and appropriate for diverse populations, and are feasible to implement (Atkins et al., 2010; Chafouleas et al., 2018). Such practices and programs, when organized and coordinated through a multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS), can help build resilience and teach critical skills and behaviors to all students (Tier 1), provide targeted supports for students who exhibit trauma symptoms (Tier 2), and intervene with tailored support for students and educators who have intensive needs (Tier 3).

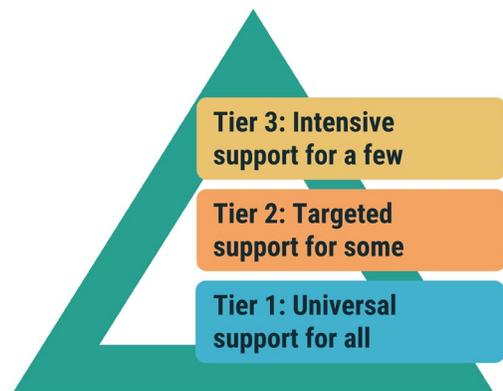


Exhibit 2: MTSS Tiers

Trauma-informed programs are often organized in an MTSS framework. Evidence-based practices and programs should populate each tier.

Unfortunately, there is limited evidence on the effectiveness of trauma-informed programs and practices across the three MTSS tiers (see exhibit 2). CCSSOC’s [Menu of Trauma-Informed Programs for Schools](#) lists existing trauma-informed supports that are grounded in research. The resource identifies four school-based programs that address Tier 1 needs, five programs that address Tier 2 or Tier 3 (or both) needs, and four programs with elements that address needs across all three tiers. Only five of these programs showed evidence of effectiveness at the “promising” level, and none met more rigorous standards that require a causal study design. Further, only a handful of existing research studies address the issue of secondary traumatic stress (STS) and well-being of educators (Berger et al., 2016; Essary, 2013; Hydon et al., 2015) or explore strategies to address teachers’ personal trauma (Honsinger, 2018). This means we lack a full understanding of whether these practices for students and educators achieve intended outcomes, for whom they achieve these outcomes, and factors that facilitate their implementation.

Given the limited resources of schools and the critical role schools play in combatting the consequences of trauma, researchers, educators and mental health service providers, and stakeholders need to invest in evaluating programs that can maximize benefits to students and educators. Below are suggestions for concrete actions for each group to pursue to address high-priority needs related to the rigorous evaluation of trauma-informed practices and programs, and additional considerations for all to support, champion, and implement to ensure equitable outcomes.

High-Priority Need: School-based practices and programs that are effective in addressing the social, emotional, and behavioral consequences of trauma for students and educators.

Importance	Researcher Actions	Educator and Mental Health Service Provider Actions	Family and Community Stakeholder Actions	Equity Considerations
<p>Due to limited resources, it is important for schools to help identify and invest in strategies with evidence of effectiveness that will benefit students and educators from their communities.</p>	<p>Evaluate school-based trauma-informed practices and programs for students and educators at each tier of MTSS using rigorous and credible scientific methods to build out the menu of evidence-based practices and programs accessible to school staff.</p>	<p>Invite researchers to support you and your colleagues to identify promising practices at each tier of MTSS, shape research questions, and frame the data collection, analysis, and findings with attention to diverse populations and contexts relevant to your school and community.</p> <p>Engage in evaluation activities, such as reviewing protocols or participating in focus groups and surveys, to ensure evaluations meet your school’s needs and inform improvements in practices and programs,</p>	<p>Ask for practical information about the evidence base for school practices and programs and whether the programs have evidence of effectiveness for different student and educator populations. Participate in evaluation studies of practices and programs.</p>	<p>Design evaluation activities to identify systemic, sociocultural, and political inequities in access to and benefits from the practices and programs. For example, some groups may have biased influences over decisions made by political bodies, such as school boards.</p> <p>Incorporate community and family voice and input into research and evaluation planning.</p> <p>Include minoritized groups or those who are not typically represented (e.g., students who identify with multiple cultures) in data collection, interpretation, and dissemination.</p>

High-Priority Need: Practical information on how to implement evidence-based practices that address trauma to maximize the benefits to students and educators.				
Importance	Researcher Actions	Education and Mental Health Service Provider Actions	Family and Community Stakeholder Actions	Equity Considerations
<p>Evidence should be informed by practice and translated to actionable steps for practitioners, including information about cost and implementation, and presented in ways that professionals and family and community members with diverse backgrounds and expertise can understand and use.</p>	<p>Examine fidelity of implementation, dosage, cost, and sustainability of evidence-based practices to assess their viability and associated benefits. Translate research findings for diverse audiences and contexts for practical application. Create tools (for example, rubrics) to document the core components, conditions, and practices that support fidelity of implementation and positive student and educator outcomes, as well as those factors that create barriers or biases in accessing programs and practices at the school and classroom levels. Partner with practitioners to provide technical support and disseminate resources that build understanding of how to assess evidence and evidence-based practices.</p>	<p>Partner with researchers to implement evidence-based practices and programs in practicable and sustainable ways for your school community. Help to translate evaluation results and implications to actionable and feasible solutions for your local contexts. Document successes and challenges in implementing practices to promote improvement and sustainability.</p>	<p>Ask for information about the practicality of implementing evidence-based practices and programs in your local context. For example, inquire about time and effort required of caregivers/families. Advocate for effective and culturally inclusive approaches to address trauma that meet the needs of and produce meaningful outcomes for all students and educators.</p>	<p>Include minoritized groups in the design and development of technical support products and dissemination. Consider how different communities will access research and evidence, and tailor outreach and support. Consider your school and/or client populations and engage different groups in conversations (e.g., focus groups, PTA meetings) about their perspectives, needs, and experiences with relevant programs and practices.</p>

Strategy 2: Create well-coordinated and data-informed systems of supports for students and educators experiencing trauma.

Coordination, collaboration, and support among key stakeholders is critical to effectively address high-priority needs for supporting students and educators. Well-coordinated and data-informed systems of support that can accurately identify and monitor student and educator well-being and trauma symptoms, support the selection of appropriate interventions, and coordinate support among school staff, community partners, and other stakeholders enable schools to provide comprehensive trauma-informed services. Such systems require strong infrastructure and resources to support their use, including organizational capacity and tools to collect and use data, knowledge and access to trauma-informed practices and programs, and communication and coordination protocols to establish clear roles and ensure seamless support between various school-based services, staff, and intervention tiers.

School staff can collect and use data from multiple sources to identify students and educators who have been exposed to trauma or exhibit symptoms of traumatic stress that may impact their well-being. For example, school leaders can conduct climate surveys and social-emotional learning (SEL) assessments to examine and foster positive learning environments, and school counselors can administer emotional and behavioral assessments to identify individuals in need of targeted or intensive services. In a well-coordinated, data-informed approach, school staff also effectively use referral protocols to access and coordinate services at different tiers or intensity levels. For example, teachers refer students in need to school counselors, school counselors provide guidance to teachers about how to support students experiencing trauma in the classroom, and administrators put structures in place to provide trauma-informed support in collaboration with other child-serving organizations, such as community-based mental health clinics.

Resource Spotlight

[Using Data to Support Students Experiencing Trauma](#) presents information about types of data to assess student trauma, who can use the data, and how to use the data.

[Selecting the Right Interventions to Support Students' Mental Health Needs](#) provides considerations for choosing school-based interventions.

To systematize and sustain the use of trauma-informed practices and programs, researchers, education and mental health service providers, and family and community stakeholders should promote the appropriate use of data to identify and monitor practices and individuals’ needs, support the appropriate selection of trauma-informed practices and programs, and create mechanisms for collaboration and coordination across school staff and mental health service providers. Below are suggestions for concrete actions for each group to pursue to address high-priority needs related to creating a well-coordinated, data-informed system of supports for students and educators experiencing trauma, and additional considerations for all to support, champion, and implement to ensure equitable outcomes.

High-Priority Need: Data-informed approaches to identify and monitor student and educator needs and disparities in access and support.				
Importance	Researcher Actions	Education and Mental Health Service Provider Actions	Family and Community Stakeholder Actions	Equity Considerations
The systematic collection and use of data on student and educator well-being and traumatic stress can support early detection and intervention for trauma and uncover disparities in access to support and services.	Help school communities document and monitor program implementation as well as characteristics and outcomes of students and educators experiencing trauma with appropriate and accurate methods and easy-to-use tools, including valid and reliable assessments to identify traumatic stress for both students and educators.	Implement or participate in schoolwide data collection and analysis activities to identify and monitor student progress, monitor effective implementation, and measure outcomes. Identify appropriate tools to routinely collect and analyze data on student and educator needs as well as services and interventions provided. Provide or participate in professional development to build staff capacity to use data and evidence to inform practice as well as apply practices that maintain individual privacy and rights to informed consent.	Understand and ask questions about the types of data collected in schools and how they are used, and participate in regular data collection activities, such as parent surveys of school climate and culture. Learn about rights relevant to data collection and procedures used to maintain student and family privacy. Insist on transparency, including access to summary results over time, to support community trend-monitoring.	Use data collection, analysis, and reporting methods that minimize racial and cultural bias and are adequate in identifying the strengths and needs of students and educators from diverse backgrounds and cultures. Disaggregate data by student subgroup to identify potential disparities in instructional, disciplinary, and other behavioral practices and access to services. Consider the need for changes in practices and policies, in addition to individual student and educator interventions.

High-Priority Need: Support for schools in selecting trauma-informed practices and programs that meet student and educator needs, account for contextual factors, and adhere to school resource and capacity constraints.

Importance	Researcher Actions	Education and Mental Health Service Provider Actions	Family and Community Stakeholder Actions	Equity Considerations
<p>To address individual and schoolwide student needs, schools need to select programs most likely to maximize benefits while leveraging their resources, matching their context, and meeting student and educator needs identified from valid, reliable, and unbiased data.</p>	<p>Assist practitioners in selecting trauma-informed practices and programs by considering the characteristics of student and educator subgroups within practitioners’ communities, internal and external mental health resources, costs, and the cultural inclusivity and sensitivity of approaches.</p>	<p>In selecting trauma-informed practices and programs, assess current needs, efforts, and resources, and select practices and programs that best fit local and classroom-level needs and context and have the strongest level of evidence.</p>	<p>Support schools in gaining a deeper understanding of the strengths and needs of students and educators, to help identify what practices and programs best match your school community.</p>	<p>Consider the varying challenges that different and multiple populations within school communities face. For example, while many students might experience trauma related to the opioid epidemic, minoritized students might also experience trauma related to racism and/or other forms of discrimination.</p> <p>For children living in poverty, certain programs or practices may not be suitable or appropriate, even if they are evidence-based, and collaborations with family and community stakeholders to identify other approaches may be needed.</p>

High-Priority Need: Clear roles and responsibilities, and coordination mechanisms for school staff responding to trauma.				
Importance	Researcher Actions	Education and Mental Health Service Provider Actions	Family and Community Stakeholder Actions	Equity Considerations
<p>A coordinated system of supports—one that connects various school-based services, staff, and intervention tiers—requires a clear understanding of roles, responsibilities, and decision points, as well as strong communication.</p>	<p>Examine the implementation and impact of referral, coordination, and communication systems that support comprehensive and cohesive systems of trauma-informed support.</p>	<p>Create and/or understand your role in communication, coordination, and referral protocols that ensure seamless and comprehensive supports at all levels of intervention intensity for students and educators experiencing trauma.</p>	<p>Confirm roles in the delivery of trauma-informed practices and programs and ask how to access information, stay involved, and get help when needed.</p>	<p>Consider the strengths that different members of the school community bring, and assign roles that empower staff, families, and community members—especially those from minoritized backgrounds.</p> <p>Use efficient, effective, and inclusive strategies to communicate with and involve all communities, such as through parent liaisons, elders, faith-based partners, and other cultural/community ambassadors.</p>

Strategy 3: Build the capacity of school staff to implement trauma-informed practices and programs.

For trauma-informed practices to permeate the instruction and operations of school communities, all school staff should engage in foundational and ongoing professional development. Most educators and school-based mental health providers, however, have received no training in trauma or trauma-informed practices (Chafouleas et al., 2016; Splett et al., 2013; U.S. Attorney General, 2012). According to the U.S. Attorney General’s National Task Force on Children Exposed to Violence (2012), the greatest challenge to implementing trauma-informed supports is the scarcity of professionals with expertise to provide support to students experiencing trauma.

Adopting a schoolwide approach requires all staff to understand trauma’s impact on individuals and communities and to implement practices that prevent and reduce its negative effects on learning and development (Chafouleas et al., 2016). Without proper training, school staff may misinterpret a student’s behavior and symptoms of traumatic stress. In fact, an adult’s uninformed response to students’ symptoms can trigger and exacerbate their trauma.

This agenda highlights trauma-informed supports for educators throughout and specifically calls attention to addressing educator well-being as a necessary ingredient to building capacity to support students experiencing trauma. In addition to feeling overwhelmed, stressed, and burned out from the daily rigors of teaching (Greenberg et al., 2016; Johnson et al., 2005), educators often face the emotional burden of supporting students and families experiencing trauma (Roche & Strobach, 2019). Many teachers suffer from secondary traumatic stress (STS) (Borntrager et al., 2012; Motta, 2012), also referred to as vicarious trauma or compassion fatigue, which is often experienced by those in the helping professions who work with individuals who have suffered from trauma.

Resource Spotlight

[Common Trauma Symptoms in Students and Helpful Strategies for Educators](#) can

be used in training educators on the common symptoms of trauma and strategies for working with students who exhibit trauma symptoms.

For trauma-informed practices and programs to become standard practice, all school staff need adequate preparation, training, and ongoing coaching and to proactively address educator well-being and STS. Below are suggestions for concrete actions for researchers, educators and mental health service providers, and stakeholders to pursue to address high-priority needs related to building the capacity of school staff to implement trauma-informed practices and additional considerations for all to support, champion, and implement to ensure equitable outcomes.

High-Priority Need: Training and coaching for all school staff in implementing trauma-informed practices and programs.				
Importance	Researcher Actions	Education and Mental Health Service Provider Actions	Family and Community Stakeholder Actions	Equity Considerations
The knowledge, capacity, and buy-in of all school staff is essential for implementing trauma-informed practices and programs.	Partner with institutions of higher education, professional associations, and teacher mentorship programs to develop, implement, and evaluate training and professional development programs to support the adoption of trauma-informed practices and policies.	Provide and/or participate in routine and ongoing professional development for all school staff (including administrators, school counselors, teachers, resource specialists, nurses, bus drivers, cafeteria staff, janitorial staff, aides, and other support staff) for implementing trauma-informed practices and policies; provide tools and coaching supports for continued learning, practice, and improvement outside of formal training; and embed support for trauma-informed practice in routine activities, such as staff meetings and classroom observations. Regularly review and update training and support to maximize relevance to the school community (i.e., consistent with the needs, culture, and existing school initiatives and practices).	Identify and share how schools can leverage the strengths, resources, and assets of your diverse community to prepare and support educators and educators-in-training.	As part of training, explicitly address the role of implicit bias in influencing perceptions and decisionmaking around the identification of trauma needs and the implementation of trauma-informed practices and programs.

High-Priority Need: Practices and programs to support educator self-care and well-being, and mitigate secondary traumatic stress (STS).				
Importance	Researcher Actions	Education and Mental Health Service Provider Actions	Family and Community Stakeholder Actions	Equity Considerations
<p>To engage and involve educators in supporting students experiencing trauma, school leaders must support educators' well-being and address their STS.</p> <p>Supporting educator self-care can increase teacher physical and mental well-being, improve instruction, reduce turnover, and increase teacher attendance.</p>	<p>Assist practitioners in selecting well-being practices and STS interventions that are evidence-based and culturally inclusive.</p> <p>Evaluate the implementation of practices and programs provided to educators and the associated benefits to educator health and well-being.</p>	<p>Provide structured support and protected time for educators and other school staff who address student trauma to engage in self-care and building their professional network, such as by establishing a wellness program, providing professional development on self-care and well-being practices, providing mentorship and expanding professional social networks, and helping staff monitor possible STS symptoms.</p> <p>Review data on educator retention, turnover, attendance, and burnout to identify potential patterns and disparities in educator wellness; use the data to inform educator support activities.</p> <p>Identify community partners to whom you can refer educators for targeted or intensive support.</p>	<p>Suggest culturally responsive and inclusive ways to support educators' well-being.</p> <p>Spend time in classrooms, with educators, and encourage schools to implement educator wellness initiatives.</p> <p>Support educators in connecting with community providers to promote their health and well-being and address potential STS.</p>	<p>As requested or as appropriate, create inclusive and safe spaces for educators to share their experiences of trauma and find support in each other, while reducing the risk of retraumatization.</p> <p>Ensure that teachers from minoritized backgrounds feel safe and supported within the school community.</p> <p>Support an environment that destigmatizes educators who seek support for their own well-being and mental health.</p>

Strategy 4: Engage partners in addressing student and educator trauma.

With strong family and community stakeholder support, as well as through effective partnerships with mental health and youth and family support service professionals, school staff can accurately identify needs and strengths, broaden available resources and funding, and build and sustain the capacity to address student and educator trauma. Collaborative partnerships with community-based mental health, social service, health, child welfare, and juvenile justice agencies are essential components of trauma-informed systems (Lawson, 2016). These partnerships can provide both a range of trauma services as well as critical training for educators developed and delivered by experts skilled at facilitating discussions on difficult and sensitive topics (Luthar & Mendes, 2020). When school-community partnerships are genuinely collaborative and mutually beneficial, both school and community team members expand their knowledge, capacity, and networks of support.

Including families as partners is essential to implementing effective and culturally inclusive trauma-informed supports. Engaging families in the creation of trauma-informed systems can help to build trust and buy-in for the use of trauma-informed practices and interventions and help to extend these practices to the home environment. Families can provide important cultural and contextual information to shape the delivery of trauma-informed services. Schools and educators that build strong relationships with families can leverage those connections to collaboratively address adverse life experiences and associated trauma for students (National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2017). For example, school staff (and community partners) can help teach caregivers about the negative effects of stress and trauma on children and provide them with strategies to create a sense of safety and help children develop effective coping skills.

Resource Spotlight

[Community-School Collaboration to Address Opioid-Related Trauma](#)

provides information for school and community stakeholders to make the case for school-community collaborations and guide collaborative efforts.

By leveraging community-wide expertise and capacity, researchers, educators and mental health service providers, and stakeholders can build schools that comprehensively support educators, students, and families. Below are suggestions for concrete actions for each group to pursue to address high-priority needs related to engaging partners in addressing student and educator trauma, and additional considerations for all to support, champion, and implement to ensure equitable outcomes.

High-Priority Need: Partnerships to bring trauma expertise and services into schools.				
Importance	Researcher Actions	Education and Mental Health Service Provider Actions	Family and Community Stakeholder Actions	Equity Considerations
By collaborating with other sectors in the community, school staff can increase their capacity and resources and contribute to positive impacts on a range of student and educator outcomes.	<p>Support practitioners in assessing needs and mapping resources to identify partners and engagement strategies that are necessary and appropriate for meeting the needs of students, educators, and families.</p> <p>Examine factors that support successful collaboration and sustainable partnerships to provide trauma-informed supports for students and educators.</p>	<p>Form effective school-community partnerships to support the delivery of services to students and educators, especially services that require specialized knowledge, such as cognitive behavioral therapy.</p> <p>Clarify roles and responsibilities with identified partners and develop a partnership agreement that includes plans for communication, coordination, and data sharing.</p> <p>Develop an efficient and effective referral system so that community partners can offer complementary expertise and services that are vital to trauma-informed support, such as substance misuse and physical health interventions.</p>	Collaborate with schools to identify potential partnerships, such as with local employers or social services, that can enhance services and outcomes for educators and students.	<p>Establish clear expectations between partners about the use of culturally inclusive practices.</p> <p>Identify partners that represent and have experience working with your school populations.</p>

High-Priority Need: Empowerment of families to share their voices and engage in trauma-informed practices and programs.				
Importance	Researcher Actions	Education and Mental Health Service Provider Actions	Family and Community Stakeholder Actions	Equity Considerations
<p>Families provide important cultural and contextual information to shape the delivery of trauma-informed services, and family engagement extends trauma support from school to home.</p>	<p>Identify promising and evidence-based family engagement strategies, and support schools in applying those strategies to trauma-informed practices and programs.</p> <p>Use language that is free of labels, judgement, and jargon when conducting research with families. Consider families’ perception of the words “trauma” and “trauma-informed” and how that might shape their engagement.</p>	<p>Invest in understanding the assets of families and your community and the vital role they can play in supporting students and the school.</p> <p>Engage families in developing shared understanding and goals to support trauma-informed practices. Consider families’ perception of the words “trauma” and “trauma-informed” and how that might shape their engagement.</p> <p>Connect families experiencing trauma with community service providers to extend support beyond the school.</p>	<p>Engage in planning for trauma-informed practices and policies for the whole school and for individual children.</p> <p>Provide advice about powerful and culturally meaningful approaches to strengthen children’s coping skills and resilience.</p>	<p>Develop a strengths-based approach to addressing trauma, with an emphasis on understanding the assets of families and communities—particularly those from minoritized backgrounds—and the vital role they can play in supporting students and the school.</p> <p>Conduct targeted outreach to invite and facilitate all families’ engagement.</p>

Conclusion

This action agenda proposes a vision and path forward for a broad coalition of partners to bring inclusive, equitable, and evidence-based supports to students and educators experiencing trauma and transform outcomes in the Appalachian region. Recognizing that every community member has a role in carrying the strategies in this agenda forward, CCSSOC encourages readers to share this document with school and community partners, identify one or more strategies to pursue, and commit to action.

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Appendix A: Worksheet Template and Example

This worksheet accompanies the REL Appalachia Cross-State Collaborative to Support Schools in the Opioid Crisis (CCSSOC) *Action Agenda to Support Students and Educators Experiencing Trauma*. The Action Agenda includes four overarching strategies; within each strategy the Action Agenda identifies high-priority needs and provides specific and meaningful actions that researchers, educators and mental health service providers, and family and community stakeholders can take to combat the consequences of trauma in school settings, ultimately improving the behavioral, social-emotional, and academic outcomes of all students.

After reviewing the Action Agenda, you can use the worksheet template on pages 26 and 27 as a first step in identifying high-priority needs in your context and planning next steps to address those needs, including identifying strengths you already have and challenges you may face. You can also review an example of the completed worksheet on pages 28 and 29. For additional materials to guide you through using a continuous improvement approach to identify priorities, select practices and programs to address your priorities, implement your selected practices and programs, and monitor and improve outcomes, feel free to review resources like the REL Appalachia [Continuous Improvement Facilitators' Workbook](#) and [Slide Deck](#).

Step 1: Planning

- Identify the highest-priority need in your context.
- List this need at the top of table 1.
- Complete table 1 by identifying the strengths you bring and challenges you may face in addressing this need, as well as the stakeholders you will need to partner with to address the need.

Step 2: Implementation

- Within the identified high-priority need, review the action steps under the role most aligned with your position.
- Consider your strengths and challenges in undertaking each action, including the cost, feasibility, potential impact, current partnerships, and opportunities for success.
- Select one action step and list it at the top of table 2. Complete table 2 to create an individualized action plan to guide your implementation of the specific action.

Table 1: Identify high-priority need

Need: _____

Planning <i>How ready am I to address this need?</i>	
Strengths: What and who do I already have in place to address this need?	
Challenges: What are potential challenges to addressing this need? What structural and historical factors might be barriers to overcome when addressing this need?	
Key players to involve: Who will I collaborate with to address this need? Are there certain voices missing from the planning process?	

Table 2: Identify an action step

Action: _____

Implementation	
<i>What are the steps I need to take to complete this action?</i>	
Immediate (within the next month)	
Medium-term (by the end of the school year)	
Long-term (in the next three years)	

Table 1 example: Identify high-priority need

Need: *Training and coaching for educators in implementing trauma-informed practices and programs.*

Planning <i>How ready am I to address this need?</i>	
Strengths: What and who do I already have in place to address this need?	<i>My district has many skilled employees that are trained in this field and we also partner with great community organizations.</i>
Challenges: What are potential challenges to addressing this need? What structural and historical factors might be barriers to overcome when addressing this need?	<i>Training is typically district-wide, concentrated at the beginning of the school year, and not ongoing or embedded at the school level. Identifying and protecting time and sustaining staff buy-in for training and support throughout the school year has been a challenge.</i>
Key players to involve: Who will I collaborate with to address this need? Are there certain voices missing from the planning process?	<i>District liaisons, school administrators, counselors, the school nurse, community partners, educators, office staff, cafeteria staff, and PTA members.</i>

Table 2 example: Identify an action step

Action: Provide and participate in routine and ongoing professional development for all school staff (including administrators, school counselors, teachers, resource specialists, nurses, bus drivers, cafeteria staff, janitorial staff, aides, and other support staff) for implementing trauma-informed practices and policies; provide tools and coaching supports for continued learning, practice, and improvement outside of formal training; and embed support for trauma-informed practice in routine activities, such as staff meetings and classroom observations.

Implementation	
<i>What are the steps I need to take to complete this action?</i>	
Immediate (within the next month)	<i>Meet with district liaison and school administrators to discuss how to embed ongoing training into the school calendar/schedule.</i>
Medium-term (by the end of the school year)	<i>Engage school staff in providing input on the types and mechanisms for training and coaching that would be most useful. Create a series of training and coaching supports (workshops, mini sessions, consultations, etc.) at regular intervals throughout the school year.</i>
Long-term (in the next three years)	<i>Implement the training and coaching supports and review data on the implementation and outcomes of trauma-informed practices to identify ways to improve the training and support for teachers.</i>