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Improving Trauma-Informed Practices in a School System

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Improving Trauma Informed Practices in a School System

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Capstone Project: A School Improvement Plan

Northwestern College, Orange City, Iowa

Abstract

According to research, trauma informed practices have faced disconnect when educating stakeholders who work directly with individuals who have faced a variety of traumatic events. With such disconnect, staff in the school systems have been unable to stay educated on the different resources available and training on best practices used. Administrators being present and working together to provide more effective professional development to help both students and staff who are directly impacted by trauma and trauma informed practices. Current research has supported the lack of knowledge and increase of teacher burnout when working with individuals who have faced adversity. A school improvement plan has been set in place to educate and support all stakeholders working with students who have experienced trauma. This allows a deeper understanding of the interventions and supports in place at the school(s) to improve students' survey scores and success rates.

Keywords: trauma informed practices, stakeholders, interventions, surveys, burnout, trauma, adversity, supports

Table of Contents

Abstract.....1

Introduction.....2

Literature Review.....3

Site Profile14

 Community Characteristics.....14

 School District Characteristics.....14

 School Building Characteristics.....15

 Student Portfolio & Performance.....16

 Curriculum, Instruction, & Assessment.....17

 Professional Development Practices.....18

Needs Assessment.....19

Data Analysis21

 Data Summary21

 School Strengths21

 School Challenges.....22

 Assessment Options22

Action Plan.....23

 Purposed Improvement Plan.....23

 Impact on Teaching and/or Learning.....24

 Alignment to Research.....24

 Summary.....25

Implementation of School Improvement Plan26

 Intro.....26

 Timeline26

 Role Clarifications and Assignments.....27

 Progress Monitoring.....27

 Limitations28

Conclusion29

References.....30

Appendix.....31

Improving Trauma Informed Practices in a School System

Social Emotional Learning has become one of the top developmental needs in school systems today (Lee et.al, 2023). Students face adversity and as educators, we do not always know what goes on beyond the walls of the school. As students enter the education system, they come from all walks of life. Coming from different backgrounds, experiences, and cultures, make them who they are. The problem is students come to school each day to become successful individuals in the world, and with an immense need for resources, in which the education system continues to lack. With limited resources, students begin to release their emotions and teachers/staff are not always equipped to handle what behaviors arise. Some of the specific behaviors shown are hitting, kicking, screaming, swearing, etc. “Emotions can facilitate or impede children’s academic engagement, work ethic, commitment, and ultimately, school success” (Durlak et. al, 2011). The phrase *behavior is a form of communication*, has become commonly used across the board when trying to put in place support for students. Although we know students are using specific behaviors to communicate what they are feeling, what is important is how we as educators respond and how we advocate for students beyond the behavior.

Being able to identify and meet students’ needs on an individual basis is very important and without the necessary resources, educators are unable to. As Balin, 2022 states, equity is important in education because it begins with creating structures supporting students based on their social-emotional needs. Each students’ needs are met based on an individualized requirement. With the change and increase in resources available and providing equity across the whole system, we see an overall rise in students of all socio-economic statuses, cultures, and backgrounds (Balin, 2022; Durlak et. al, 2011).

Providing a safe space for students and educating school staff on trauma-informed practices is the purpose of this school-improvement plan. Being able to provide the resources and help with follow-through and implementation in the school setting will increase both the staff and student morale. Providing resources, professional development, and hands on learning will allow teachers to understand the importance of trauma-informed practices and how to support students in the classroom. Findings from this study will educate teachers and administrators of the benefits of the practice and how to best implement and incorporate it into the classroom. As the educator, supporting staff and students in the school system is the primary goal.

Importance of Social Emotional Learning

It is safe to say education has evolved from what it used to be. Some view it as a more complex change, but with the way the world is today, it should be constantly evolving, and educators should be adjusting to those changes as needed. The Center on the Social Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CSEFEL) has determined the development of social emotional skills early on in life (0-5 years of age) is as imperative as it is when children are forming close and secure adult and peer relationships, experience, regulate, and expressing emotions in ways remaining culturally and socially appropriate. This also allows children the freedom to explore and learn about their environments (Ashdown & Bernard, 2012).

The CASEL (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning) states core social and emotional competencies are important for the success and well-being of children. These competencies are self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (Ashdown & Bernard, 2012). Each of these components are essential for children who are entering the school systems as they will help them become

successful on a social-emotional level. Ashdown and Bernard implemented the You Can Do It! Early Childhood Education Program (YCDI) and the results indicated YCDI had a statistically significant positive effect on levels of social emotional competence and well-being for the preparatory and grade 1 students. It also showed a reduction in problem behaviors (externalizing, internalizing, and hyperactivity problems) for the grade 1 students, and an increase in reading achievement (decoding text) for the lower achieving grade 1 students. In the research conducted by Ashdown and Bernard, it has proven the most successful SEL approaches focus on social skills and emotional development on a daily basis, using a systematic, intentional approach for teaching and acknowledging the skills.

Durlak et al. (2011) conducted a study, and the results showed the impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning, therefore social emotional learning results in positive behavior. The study found compared to controls, students demonstrated enhanced SEL skills, attitudes, and positive social behaviors following intervention and demonstrated fewer conduct problems and had lower levels of emotional distress. (Durlak et al., 2011).

Core Components of Trauma-Informed Practices

Children are often blamed for their actions, disregarding the social and emotional challenges they may face or any past traumas they have endured. They are often instructed to behave a certain way without being provided the tools and support to do so. Trauma-informed practice is an approach recognizing and responding to the impact of trauma on students' behavior, learning, and overall well-being.

Social emotional learning is crucial to assist all students who are dealing or have dealt with trauma. Voith et al. (2020) researched a social emotional curriculum (The Peace Program) to be implemented in multiple schools in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The importance of this research was not only the implementation of the curriculum but the acceptability of it as well. The findings determined the program helped students come up with peaceful solutions to classroom problems and the program received overwhelming positive feedback from teachers and administrators who described it as “half hour of peace”. Facilitators scored in the high range for communication and trauma informed communication. Students in private schools demonstrated higher levels of concentration/attention compared to public schools. Grade 1 demonstrated the largest gains for emotional competence while grade 4 showed the greatest decrease.

In the study by Ballin (2022), 33 staff members were assigned to work with 200 students to connect trauma-sensitive schooling and social emotional development. Teachers and students participated in interviews about trauma as well as experiences they have had outside of school. The research took place at a Wellington elementary school. Instead of implementing a curriculum in the classroom, it became a whole school approach. According to the findings, Wellington’s trauma-sensitive design elements created avenues for students to develop SEL skills. These intentional structures and systems included staffing, design of classrooms and other internal spaces, and schoolwide routines. One avenue to creating equity in education is intentionally designing schooling for student success inclusive of the students’ lived experiences. In order for trauma-informed practices to be successful teamwork among staff members is needed.

Similar findings were uncovered by Reibergs et al. (2018) when researching ways to address trauma in schools. Two approaches were determined to support mental health prevention; a social emotional learning curriculum and school-wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS). Direct instruction on emotion identification, emotional regulation, and social problem-solving is essential for students to succeed. Pennequin et al. (2020) research shows metacognitive experiences are related to solving everyday problems. Therefore, it is important to explicitly teach students social emotional skills to be able to solve problems throughout their day to day lives.

Impact of Trauma-Informed Training

Not only does social-emotional learning impact students, but it also impacts their stakeholders. As Kim et al. (2021) stated, approximately half of new teachers in the USA leave the profession of teaching within the first five years due to burnout. Both job satisfaction and emotional exhaustion are two main components of why the teacher burnout rate is so high. Research has been conducted by Kim et al. (2021) with a total of 112 educators, 45 who were recruited from the pilot and intervention schools and 41 who were recruited from comparison schools. (Kim et al., 2021). Adversity affects students daily, and due to the high number of students who face childhood trauma and adversity, paired with the lack of resources and training available to teachers, could be a rising factor to the burnout and stress of teachers.

Without adequate resources and programs in place, teachers are not set up for success when students who face trauma daily become dysregulated. As important as it is to have adequate training, when it is not available, the teacher must move forward. With proper training,

teachers would be able to identify underlying causes of behavior before they become unmanageable. With proper training, teachers would learn how to respond in an appropriate manner in which helps de-escalate a situation vs. escalate the individual more (Kim et al., 2021). Kim et al. (2021) state the importance of building staff capacities to positively impact adversity-affected children in a trauma-informed school is by implementing educational training and professional development opportunities to those who are directly impacted.

Managing troublesome behavior in the classroom is also a major contributor to the teacher's stress and exhaustion. Several educators after the study was conducted, noted mindfulness components of the MindUP mission and sufficient (two years or more) training had contributed to their heightened awareness and sensitivity to viewing student behaviors through a trauma lens.

We are failing teachers by not providing resources in an efficient and timely manner, especially when there are resources available we are not aware of. With research being conducted, this provides qualitative and quantitative evidence of how we can better support educators in the future. Once all options are exhausted per say, they feel hopeless and lose sight of the 'why' along with low self-efficacy, enthusiasm, and job satisfaction (Kim et al., 2021). With continued research and training, we could provide teachers with more resources like MindUP and other mindfulness/social-emotional focuses, to help understand students through trauma lens', which would in return increase the teacher's self-efficacy, enthusiasm, and job satisfaction.

The Role of Mindfulness

Dalal (2018) takes the approach of putting educators in the shoes of students. He states with the fast-paced world in which we live in, results in behaviors leading to anxiety, stress, and depression. As defined by Merriam-Webster, mindfulness is the practice of maintaining a non-judgmental state of heightened or complete awareness of one's thoughts, emotions, or experiences on a moment-to-moment basis. Dalal (2018) defines it as “being in the now.” Mindfulness in the classroom can be as simple as calming them down before an activity by taking deep breaths or as complicated as discussing their emotions and how it can affect their learning both short-term and long-term.

Mindfulness is about teaching children to become aware of their emotions and teaching mindfulness in the classroom can be imperative to setting students who are adversity-affected up for success. By living in such a fast-paced world, behaviors such as anxiety, stress, and depression have been on a rise. As children and adults, we at times can take for granted our mental, emotional, and physical well-being (Dalal, 2018). Teaching mindfulness allows teachers to become more aware of each of those components. Dalal states if parents and teachers start teaching children at a young age, they set them up to make healthy choices. Being able to teach individuals to be physically active and spending time to be in the here and now, will allow them to grow and find a balanced lifestyle. Schools who are willing to implement mindful education are progressive thinking schools who recognize the socio-emotional challenges students face in the world and are willing to make a difference. As Buddha says, “Living 24 hours with mindfulness is more worthwhile than living 100 years without it” (Dalal, 2018).

Integrating a mental health prevention program could help benefit those students who are impacted by such adversity (Thierry et al., 2022). With students spending most of their time in school, it has become a large topic of conversation of how to implement SEL and mindfulness into not only education but integrating it into the classroom. Not only will this aid in helping with teacher burnout, but it provides students with tools to help them when they are distressed or dysregulated. A qualitative research study was conducted by Thierry et al. and had participants ranging from administrators, teachers, and selected community members. This is based in an elementary school located on the edge of a residential area facing major intersections. In the study, the general capacity indicator showed strengths in the teachers' openness to implementing and following through with new programs and collaborative decision-making processes (Thierry et al., 2022). School leaders had some exposure to introductory SEL training, but none of the teachers had received professional development based on social-emotional learning or mindfulness. Support for SEL was proven to be lacking as there were no identified staff members at the school who were identified to support the effort, therefore there was no follow through with programs put in place.

As a way to implement and support fidelity in the school, the school added a reflection room as a safe space for students who needed to regulate their emotions and work through what was bothering them. With this, it allowed teachers to build rapport by gaining a deeper understanding of the situation and maintain the relationship with the students while solving problems in the classroom (Thierry et al., 2022). The school also implemented 'social emotional challenges' as a core indicator in the multi-tiered system of support to the MTSS process, along with reading and math indicators to assess students' social-emotional competence, while using

standardized tools. As a result, school leaders found the visit to an SEL model school and observing trauma informed SEL and mindfulness strategies in action was an effective approach to professional development, enabling teachers to better connect with the practices and make immediate changes in their practices (Thierry et al., 2022).

Mindfulness helps students develop essential skills for emotional regulation, attention, and self-awareness. By incorporating mindfulness in the school curriculum, students learn to manage stress, improve focus, and enhance their overall well-being. Dariotis et al. (2017) conducted qualitative research on a mindfulness yoga program in a low-income upper elementary school. The universal school-based mindfulness program used yoga-based body movements and breathing to promote body movements. The results of the research showed qualitative data highlighting communication as an important factor for motivating teachers to support program delivery and to promote classroom skills use. Teachers participating in the study reported the importance of bringing yoga instruction into the classroom. Mindfulness in schools empowers students with lifelong skills supporting their mental health, emotional resilience, and overall success in and beyond the classroom.

MindUP is a neuroscience approach teaching children the skills they need to regulate their stress and emotions, form positive relationships and act with kindness and compassion towards others. MindUP has been helping children around the globe develop mental fitness necessary in becoming successful at school and throughout their lifetime (Maloney et al., 2016). The mission of MindUP was created as a response to individuals who are experiencing childhood aggression, anxiety, depression, and suicide. It is made up of a team of experts focusing on four pillars: neuroscience, social-emotional learning, positive psychology, and mindful awareness.

These pillars are grounded in an evidence-based approach and can provide support for stakeholders. Maloney et al., (2016) has conducted a study and reports evidence indicating the positive impact MindUP has had: 86% of children reported they were able to boost their well-being, 88% of children use it at home, and 83% of children indicated improvements in prosocial behaviors.

Children who have received MindUP have shown better stress regulation, improved academic performance, were more social and liked by their peers, enhanced tools and strategies for self-regulations, demonstrated positive effects on reducing aggression and stress, and had an increase in optimism and happiness (Maloney et al., 2016). Research states the students who completed the MindUP program compared to their peers who had not completed it had an increase in improved attention, improved stress physiology (measured by cortisol), improved peer ratings of kindness, pro-socialness, and peer acceptance along with improved academics. With more programs like this being implemented in a school system, there could be a huge increase in behaviors and ability to regulate across the board with all adversity-affected individuals.

Social emotional learning, mindfulness, and trauma-informed practices are all interconnected and essential in supporting the well-being and development of students. There are multiple resources available for social emotional learning and mindfulness, but more research is needed for trauma-informed practices and the implementation of these practices in a school setting. In addition to needing further research, supporting stakeholders such as administrators and teachers is essential. With additional support, the higher the chance there is a decrease in teacher burnout and an increase in fidelity and equality.

School Profile

Located in northwest Iowa, the Sioux City Community School District (SCCSD) currently serves approximately 14,455 students and ranks in the top 20% of all 1,221 schools in Iowa (Public School Review, 2023). The Sioux City Community School District serves the educational needs of students in the area. It is one of the largest school districts in the state, encompassing multiple elementary, middle, and high schools. The Sioux City Community School district is made up of twenty schools grades PK-12. There are fourteen elementary schools, 3 middle schools, 3 high schools, a separate preschool initiative building and one career academy (educational service center campus). Students attend the SSCSD from the surrounding Siouxland area. In the Sioux City Community Schools there are over 2,000 staff members serving students with 926 being teachers providing a student teacher ratio of 16:1. (Public School Review, 2023). It is important to note there are 11 full time counselors on staff as this school improvement project focuses on trauma-informed practices. At this time, counselors only serves students K-12 excluding PK.

Student & Community Characteristics

Students in the Sioux City Community Schools are 44% White; 35% Hispanic; 8% Black; 6% are two or more races, 3% are American Indian, 3% are Asian, and 1% of students are Hawaiian. (Public School Review, 2023). About 49% of students in the Sioux City Community Schools are female while 51% of students are male. Approximately 67% or 2/3 of the students are on free- and reduced lunch, 14.1% have an individualized education plan, 15.7% are English learners, and 47.4% have a Low Socio-Economic status. The districts minority enrollment is at

50%. (US News and World Report, 2023). The school district's graduation rate is at 90% which has increased over the years. (Public School Review, 2023).

Sioux City, Iowa, where the SSCSD is located has a population of 85,081. (Census Reporter, 2021). In Sioux City, there are 32,000 houses with a median household income of \$59,435 leaving 14.7% below the poverty line. The median age of individual's falls around 34.8 with a number of 2.6 persons per household and 55% are married couples. (Census Reporter, 2021).

Sioux City, Iowa, offers a vibrant and diverse range of attractions, making it an appealing destination for residents and visitors alike. With its rich history, cultural amenities, and natural beauty, the city has something to offer for everyone. Sioux City, Iowa, provides a variety of activities and attractions catering to the interests of children and families, making it an ideal destination for family-friendly experiences. The city has several recreational areas offering multiple opportunities for outdoor fun such as; city parks, splash pads, community swimming pools, biking/walking trails, tennis courts, golf courses, sledding parks, sand volleyball courts, baseball/softball fields, etc. As for indoor family fun there are several other attractions the city has to offer; public libraries, children's museum, art museum, sports facilities, events center, restaurants, etc. (City of Sioux City, Iowa, 2023).

Sioux City is a city offering a unique blend of qualities making it a great place to live or visit. One of the standout features is its strong sense of community. Sioux City residents take pride in their city and actively participate in community events and initiatives. Sioux City is known for its welcoming and friendly residents who embody the Midwestern hospitality, making it an inviting and inclusive place to be.

Mission and Purpose

The Sioux City Community School District's mission "exists to educate students to believe in their talents and skills, achieve academic excellence, and succeed in reaching their full potential." (Sioux City Community School District, 2023). The educational philosophy of the Sioux City Community School District is to prepare students for success. "Our purpose is to effectively utilize community resources to provide students the maximum opportunity for life success. We are committed to the individual development of skill sets enhancing their knowledge, optimize potential, and build character through personal accountability. Our goal is to challenge our students, empower our staff, and visibly communicate our progress. Our achievements are the results of high standards, clear expectations, and timely benchmarks. Our vision is to develop citizens who are prepared to succeed in a changing world. We must learn from our history and positively embrace the challenges of the future. Our commitment is to celebrate our diversity and leverage our cultural, social, and community resources while embracing changes to enhance student learning. Our responsibility is held within our stakeholders; our students, parents/guardians, educators, and the community as a whole. We must encourage participation, empower our educators, and openly celebrate our teaching opportunities and successes."(Sioux City Community School District, 2023).

Student Performance

Around 15,000 students make up the Sioux City Community School District. The data presented for the school improvement project is based on overall school academic achievement over many growth and percentage areas. The SSCSD in the assessment for Participation in English Language Arts is above the state average of 97.85 by 98.63, and in the assessment for Participation in Mathematics the SSCSD is above the state average of 97.59 by 98.4. In average

school achievement for English Language Arts, the state average was 50 and the SSCSD scored 47.43, and in the average school achievement for math, SSCSD scored below the state average of 50 by 47.9. The state average for Conditions for Learning Composite is 41.67, and SSCSD scored right below at 35.16. (State of Iowa, 2023).

Parent Involvement

Parent involvement is highly recommended in the Sioux City Community School District. It is recommended parents participate as fully as possible in their children's education. Collaborative efforts between teachers, school staff, and parents are vital to ensuring student success. There are multiple resources on the district website for parents to utilize to help their children be successful. Throughout the year, schools in the district offer family events to ensure a sense of belonging in the schools and community. It is encouraged parents attend conferences at least once a year to better understand their child's education and collaborate with staff on best practices in supporting their students. Parents are a child's first teacher and therefore the Sioux City Community School District believes in the importance of strong parental involvement.

Current Student Learning Goals

Sioux City Community Schools use District and Iowa Core Standards to ensure all students, kindergarten through twelfth grade, meet or exceed expected learning outcomes at every grade level. By following these standards, the District ensures students develop critical-thinking, problem-solving, and analytical skills needed to be successful now and into the future.

SSCSD preschool staff use the early childhood curriculum as a framework for facilitating children's growth in all areas of development. All children are seen as individuals; therefore, staff provides modifications and adaptations to ensure the success of each child. The classroom

environment is set up to encourage play, which is the most important process through which young children learn. The early childhood staff feels families play an important role in their child's educational success. Ongoing, open communication is vital. It is essential families actively participate in their child's education.

No matter what learning supports a student may need, the Sioux City Community School District fulfills the learning needs of all students. Enhanced learning supports are available for English language learners, students with special needs, and talented and gifted students. (Sioux City Community School District, 2023).

Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment & Professional Development

Offering strong academic programs ensures levels of high achievement and skills to prepare individuals for college and career readiness is what the SCCSD offers. Student achievement, like many other schools, is one of the top priorities for the district. Focusing on higher levels of student achievement allows individuals for continuous improvement and uses leadership at all levels of the organization. One of the focuses is high-quality professional development including the use of collaboration to focus on the implementation of differentiated instruction throughout the district and state of Iowa. Another focus is instructional methodology as a means of bringing about a higher level of student success and achievement. Instructional strategies will be strengthened through high-quality professional development and instructional coaching for effective teaching practices in the classroom with integrity and fidelity and follow through with the things learned both in professional development and instructionally.

The way the district implements formative and summative assessments to measure the success of their students are as follows. Measuring and assessing students on what they know,

understand, and can do which aligns with the content and skills in each of the subject areas.

Using a data-driven approach helps with making decisions related to the engagement of student academic progress including data gathered through common formative and summative assessments, the Iowa Assessments, other classroom-based assessments, and the use of technology in the classroom.” (Sioux City Community School District, 2023).

The Sioux City Community School District uses standard-based grading in Transitional Kindergarten through 6th grade. A standards-based grading system measures a student’s proficiency on grade-level standards. Therefore, it allows for students who were struggling at the beginning of the year to demonstrate mastery of content by the end of the year (Sioux City Community School District, 2023). SCCSD preschool staff utilize an early childhood curriculum to support children's overall development. They view each child as an individual and make necessary modifications and adaptations to promote their success. The classroom is designed to foster play, which is crucial for young children's learning. The staff recognizes the significance of family involvement in a child's educational journey and emphasizes ongoing and open communication. Active participation from families is considered essential for their child's education (Sioux City Community School District, 2023).

To support positive behavior in the schools, the SSCSD has begun implementing a district wide approach of utilizing the components of the curriculum, CHAMPS. CHAMPS provides teachers with supportive tools to help them plan and prepare their classroom. Each school in the district also utilizes the PBIS (Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports) and adjusts their goals and mission statement in a way best suiting their school. For example, one of the schools in the district utilizes “PAWS” as their PBIS approach. PAWS is an acronym for “I will have a POSITIVE attitude, I will ACT respectfully and responsibly, I will WORK with

others, and I will put SAFETY first.” These are all specific behaviors educators seek throughout the school day and reward the students once these actions are sought out by a teacher or other staff member. If the student is acting in a way not representing those stated above, it gives the teacher or staff member the opportunity to reteach and fix the behavior. PBIS is a comprehensive approach focusing on meeting the social, emotional, and behavioral needs of students. It operates on a three-tiered approach encompassing preventive measures and interventions and can be utilized for students in a whole group, small group or individually. (Sioux City Community School District, 2023).

The SCCSD has 30 counselors throughout the district who are there to support students. These counselors are spread between all the elementary, middle, and high schools in the district. Both the middle and high schools have one counselor per grade level. For example, the freshman class has one school counselor for the entire class. In addition, the Sioux City Career Academy has one dedicated counselor. The school counselors follow a curriculum to provide students with knowledge for acquiring and using life skills. The elementary school counselors take their curriculum and go once a month to each classroom and teach guidance. These lessons are geared towards the school’s values and align with the district requirements. Middle and High school counselors also provide individual and small group counseling along with scheduling and career readiness.

Each school offers professional development weekly as an opportunity to extend learning throughout the school year and summer. Every Monday, students are dismissed an hour early so teachers can collaborate with each other as well as learn new content/address issues across the school. The school district also allows a variety of opportunities for staff to continue their

education by attending conferences or other external professional development across the state of Iowa and beyond (Sioux City Community School District, 2023).

Needs Assessment

Engaging in a school improvement project focused on trauma-informed practices is crucial for several reasons. Trauma can have a significant impact on students' academic performance, emotional well-being, and overall development. By implementing trauma-informed practices, schools can create a safe and supportive environment acknowledging and addressing the unique needs of students who have experienced trauma. This approach emphasizes empathy, understanding, and resilience-building, promoting better mental health and reducing barriers to learning. By recognizing and responding to trauma, it can help students feel more secure, allowing them to focus on their education and thrive academically. (Nadeem et al., 2021).

Trauma-informed practices benefit not only students but also the entire school community. Educators, staff, and administrators can benefit from professional development and training on trauma-informed practices, enabling them to better understand the effects of trauma and respond appropriately. This knowledge equips them with the skills to recognize signs of trauma, implement supportive strategies, and create a culture of compassion within the school. By promoting trauma-informed practices, schools can cultivate a positive and inclusive environment where all members of the community feel valued and supported. Ultimately, a school improvement project centered on trauma-informed practices has the potential to enhance student well-being, academic success, and overall school climate. (Kim, et al., 2021).

The Sioux City Community School District prioritizes the education of its staff on the significance of social-emotional learning and its impact on students. However, a noticeable gap exists regarding the provision of comprehensive guidance on effectively supporting students who

have experienced trauma. To address this critical need, the district should commence by implementing a robust professional development program for all staff members, specifically focusing on trauma-informed practices. Equipping teachers with a thorough understanding of trauma and appropriate approaches to addressing it is fundamental to their ability to effectively support their students' holistic well-being and educational progress. By investing in this essential training, the district can lay a strong foundation for creating a safe and supportive learning environment by recognizing and responding to the unique needs of traumatized students. After providing professional development on trauma-informed practices, the next step in creating a comprehensive approach involves implementing and integrating these practices into the daily operations and policies of the school district.

Data Analysis

Analyzing the data around the mental health and wealth of students in the Sioux City Community School District has become a main priority to understand the impact trauma is having on students from the range of lower, middle, and higher education. Gathering data from the MySAEBRS survey and the Conditions for Learning survey taken by students throughout the year is a great start to gear professional development and continue to educate students and staff on how to better aid students for their success.

MySAEBRS is a universal screener to assess student risk for social-emotional and behavioral problems in students ranging from grades 2-12 as students in kindergarten and 1st grade have not reached the developmental stage required to engage in cognitive insight (Illuminate Education, 2022). MySAEBRS is grounded on a model which states a student's success in school is not only related to his or her academic achievement but also success within a broad range of domains. MySAEBRS contains one broad scale and three subscales to measure

students' social-emotional competencies. The three domains are interrelated with the CASEL framework's five core SEL competencies. (Illuminate Education, 2022).

Each student is asked a variety of questions and they rate each question based on a Likert scale ranging from never to almost always. Some questions are as follows: I argue with others, I have trouble waiting my turn, and I participate in class. Each student has control of how they answer their questions, and the results are collected and the administrators and school counselors in each school are able to see the results. In the Sioux City School District, the screener is only conducted in grades 4-5 in Elementary and then conducted in all upper level grades.

MySAEBRS is administered by using a computer or tablet. FastBridge which is where the screener is accessed through recommends not administering the screener until the student have been in school for at least six weeks, as it gives students the opportunity to adjust to the setting and new routines (Illuminate Education, 2022).

As data was collected from each of the schools in the SCSSD, for the purpose of this research, the data comes from an elementary school in the Sioux City Community School District. Focusing on one classroom in particular was a fourth-grade classroom with a wide spectrum of demographics. There are ELL students, TAG students, and students who are on IEP's. When looking at the data from the fall to the spring, there is an obvious increase in some areas and a decrease in others. In a classroom of 22 students, 13 male and 9 female; 17 Caucasian, two Hispanic, and three Somalian. Three students in this classroom are ELL students, three are TAG students, and two are on IEP's. Being asked the same questions, you will see below in the Appendices the results from fall 2022 to spring 2023 for students in the specific fourth grade classroom. With the data retrieved from just one class, it allows administration and counselors to follow up with students who are high risk. These students are determined by how

they answer each question, and the screener will notify the stakeholders by showing exclamation points by their names. If there are two exclamation points, the student is at high risk in more than one subcategory and is in need of a check-in within 48 hours of the screener being conducted (See Appendix A).

Action Plan

Throughout the text, it has been identified there are important themes when it comes to implementation of trauma-informed practices. As trauma-informed practices have been utilized as an approach in which it recognizes and reasons the impact of trauma is based on the students' behaviors, learning, and overall well-being. Other areas interconnected with trauma-informed practices are social emotional learning and mindfulness. These are essential in supporting the well-being and development of not only the students but the staff as well.

As there are an abundance of resources available for social emotional learning and mindfulness, there are a lack of resources for trauma-informed practices. More research is needed to educate others on the definition of trauma-informed practice and what it is used for. The more research done, the more prepared stakeholders will be with the implementation of the practices being used in a school setting. The Sioux City Community School District must take action to educate and inform all staff and students on the importance of trauma-informed practices and how the implementation of these practices will benefit students and their well-being in the present and future.

Beginning in August 2023, the district will require teachers to attend professional development centered on trauma-informed practices once a month. The district needs to educate staff on the practices before expecting to see success in the students. Equipping teachers with a thorough understanding of trauma and the appropriate interventions to use when addressing it, is

fundamental to their ability to support their students' holistic well-being and educational progress with success. By investing in the mandatory training, the district can lay a strong foundation for creating a safe and supportive learning environment by recognizing and responding to the unique needs of traumatized students. In order to integrate trauma-informed practices on a daily basis, a comprehensive approach is necessary. To achieve the most effective results, it is essential the district prioritizes ongoing professional development, provides support for implementation, and continually assesses the impact of these practices on students' well-being and academic success. With the educational standpoint and follow through, the hope is to see a dramatic increase in the students' success and well-being, for those who are impacted directly and those who are not.

The first step is to conduct a survey to understand the current level of knowledge and awareness of trauma-informed practices among staff. Being able to identify areas where additional training and support are needed is important in the overall success of implementing trauma-based interventions. After data is collected, it is important to set goals for the professional development sessions. The first goal is all staff will be able to understand trauma, its prevalence, and the potential effects it will have on students' behavior, learning, and emotional well-being. Second, is to help staff recognize signs of trauma in students and understand various triggers may affect their behavior. Third, is to develop strategies to create a safe, welcoming, and supportive school environment minimizing potential triggers and promotes emotional safety. The fourth goal is to equip staff with techniques to help students build resilience and coping skills, while fostering emotional regulation and self-care. The final goal is to provide

educators with trauma-informed strategies to adapt their instructional practices to the unique needs of students who have endured trauma.

Taking the collected data from MySAEBRS and the Conditions for learning survey will also help aid in the above goals. When administration is looking at what to cover in professional development to help better educate the staff, they can use the live data to show educators the demographics of students in each school. In the Sioux City Community School District, each school has demographics unique to them. Being able to foster the ideas of others based on the students' needs will be vital when implementing professional development and the implementation of practices based on their population. It is important to utilize research-based strategies founded to be successful such as MindUP which was mentioned above and other successful strategies. Being able to provide teachers who are doing direct instruction throughout the day with evidence of successful interventions, will only allow them to buy into the techniques more and the more willing they will be to implement them in their classrooms.

The data gathering does not end there. Taking information and data from before the implementation will help show if the new interventions and strategies are being found successful in the classroom. With the follow-through administration will have, the data will not be skewed if all educators are performing at the same level of knowledge and follow through. Once you continue gathering data, you take the information and utilize it to make a stronger foundation for future research, interventions, or strategies. With the additional information and continued research on trauma-based practices, there could be a skyrocket of success with those students who have endured trauma in the past or present. They will then learn how to be successful when they are dysregulated and will be able to advocate and get help when needed. Starting from a young age, will only help them become more successful in the future. The change starts now.

Implementation of School Improvement Plan

This school improvement plan can be implemented as soon as the resources become accessible and are ready to be put into action. Once the resources are available, professional development can begin during the 23-24 school year with the implementation beginning slowly throughout the year as content has been received. The goal would be full implementation with trauma-informed practices by April 2024. Below in Figure 1 is a timeline which lays out the steps in getting the school improvement plan into place.

Figure 1

Date:	Topic:	Implementation in Classroom:
September 2023	Understanding Trauma – introduction to trauma	Teachers will begin to implement trauma-sensitive practices by establishing clear expectations and incorporating mindfulness exercises.
October 2023	Recognizing Signs of Trauma- Identifying signs and de-escalation techniques.	Recognize signs of trauma in students and address behavioral challenges.
November 2023	Build Resilience and Coping Skills-	Promote social emotional learning and emotional regulation strategies.
December 2023	Collaboration – Techniques for effective communication with students, families, and coworkers.	Communicate regularly with families, coworkers, and students to establish a supportive environment.

January 2024	Trauma-informed practices- Differentiated instruction and individual support strategies (MindUp)	Teachers will adapt their lessons to fit the needs of all learners incorporating MindUp.
February 2024	Addressing Secondary Trauma Stress – Promote self-care and social emotional well-being.	Teachers practice self-care techniques to manage their stress while supporting students who have experienced trauma.
March 2024	Evaluate and Reflect on Practices- collect and analyze the data	Teachers engage in self-reflection and evaluate the impact of trauma in the classroom.
April 2024	Cultivate a Trauma-Informed School Culture- Build a school wide commitment to trauma-informed practices.	Teachers contribute to fostering a trauma-informed school culture.
May 2024	Celebration	Share input on trauma informed practices and celebrate successes.

All individuals in the Sioux City Community School will receive the professional development calendar. The professional development will take place the first Monday of every month and the duration will be an hour and a half. This training will allow for success in supporting students and staff on trauma-informed practices. The district will also receive materials from the MindUp program to implement throughout professional development.

Different individuals come into play when putting this school improvement plan into place successfully. The school board must approve the content for professional development. Administrators must receive training on how to present the content before the school year and funding must be available to allow for resources to be available for staff members to utilize. Throughout the school year, ongoing support, coaching, and follow-up sessions will be provided to ensure success with the implementation of trauma-informed practices in the classroom.

To monitor success of trauma-informed practices, administrators will be asked to complete informal and formal observations throughout the classrooms. In doing so, they can identify if they seem to be working, if there are areas needing to be addressed, as well as what is not working. Administrators can provide feedback on how to best move forward. Success will also be monitored through surveys. Students will receive a survey to gather feedback on their experiences of trauma-informed practices. Teachers will do a self- assessment to gather their take on trauma-informed practices and identify areas of growth. Below in Figure 2 is the survey administered to students on trauma-informed practices. Figure 3 is the teacher self-assessment on the implementation of trauma-informed practices.

Figure 2

Questions	Response to Questions		
How familiar are you with the term “trauma-informed practices?”	Do not understand at all	Understand somewhat	Completely understand
Do you supported at school when it comes to understanding your emotions and feelings?	Not supported	Somewhat supported	Very supported
Overall, how much do you feel like you belong at your school?	Do not belong at all	Belong somewhat	Completely belong

How often do you feel safe and comfortable sharing your thoughts and concerns with your teachers?	Almost never	Sometimes	Almost all the time
Do you know what to do at school if you have a problem or feel upset?	No I do not	I'm not sure	Yes I know what to do
Have you learned any strategies at school to help you feel calm and relaxed when you are upset?	No I have not	I'm not sure	Yes I have
Do you think trauma-informed practices have made school a better place for you and your friends?	No it hasn't	Sometimes	Yes it has

Figure 3

1 = Strongly Disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Neutral 4 = Agree 5 = Strongly Agree

1. I understand the concept of trauma-informed practices and its relevance to my role as an educator. _____
2. I make an effort to create a safe and supportive classroom environment where students feel valued and respected. _____
3. I have a good understanding of how trauma can impact students' behavior, learning, and emotional well-being. _____
4. I actively listen to my students and validate their feelings and experiences. _____
5. I implement trauma-sensitive teaching strategies, such as providing flexibility in assignments or classroom routines when needed. _____

Trauma-informed practices will be reviewed frequently and educators will continue to be educated on new ways to support those who have been affected by trauma.

Conclusion

Providing support and understanding of trauma informed practices has become imperative in school systems. Throughout the research and findings provided above, it has supported just how important the implementation of the practices are. The plan of improvement is beneficial to care for not only students, but staff who have also been directly impacted by trauma. A common theme found throughout this research topic was the inadequate training to those who are working with students who are experiencing trauma on the daily. Providing the support and correct training gives educators the tools in their toolboxes to support and build autonomy in their classrooms and school.

Social Emotional Learning has become one of the top developmental needs in school systems today (Lee et.al, 2023). Throughout the years, social emotional learning has also become a necessary topic of conversation in school systems. The way society has evolved, educators have not been able to keep up with and/or stay educated regarding the topic. Newer educators are beginning to hear about SEL more in school, but experienced educators do not receive information first hand.

The research has shown social emotional learning, mindfulness, and adequate professional development for educators/staff/students is imperative to help provide support for students experiencing trauma. It does not just stop at education though, it goes as far as educating all stakeholders involved in the impacted individual's life.

Getting administration involved can be a strong foundation to getting the individuals being impacted the help they need. Communication and strong professional development can better prepare students, teachers, and other staff members working with students. This can be in regard to building rapport, to being able to successfully de-escalate students when they are feeling heightened emotions. With the additional training, the percentage of success should sky

rocket and those who are experiencing the trauma will have a sense of understanding and feel heard.

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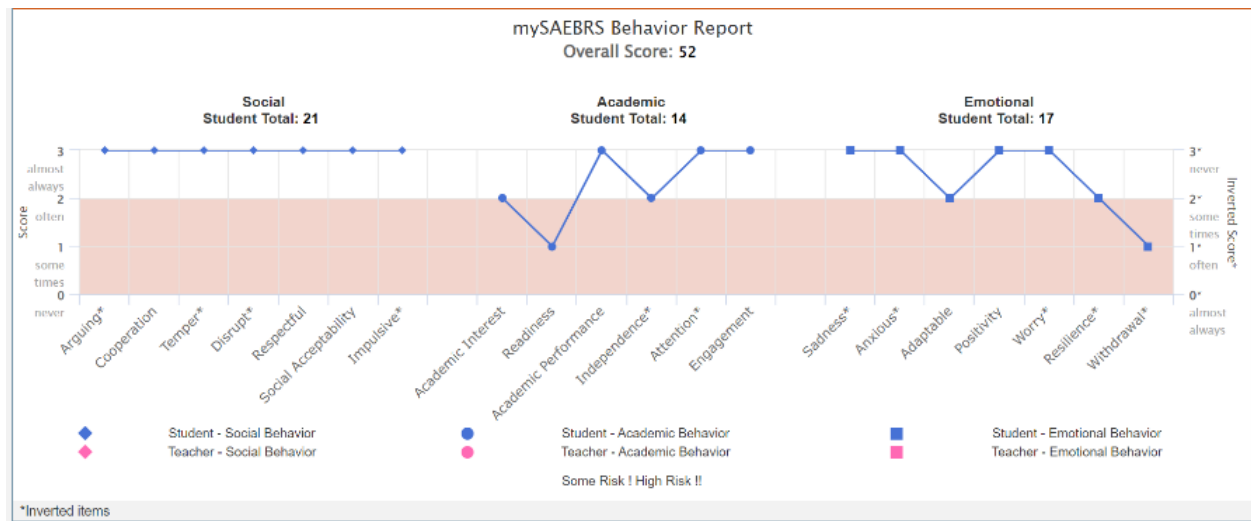
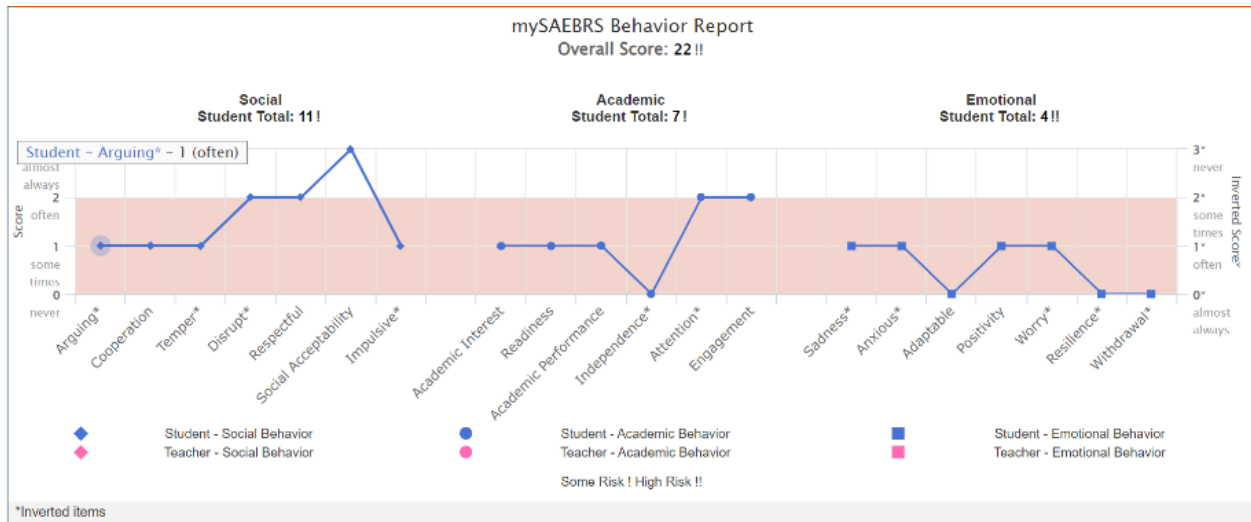
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Appendix A

Students are surveyed at the beginning of the year to assess where their needs are based on social, academic and emotional well-being. Their answers are formulated into a graph shown below. The counselors in each school assess each student’s data and follows up with the students who are flagged high risk. Below you will see a student who is high risk and a student who is not.



At mid-year, students are then re-assessed based on the same questions as at the beginning of the year. The data is looked at again by the counselor and they check in with the students who are

flagged high risk. Below you will see the same students from Appendix A. You will see the student who was previously high risk had increased in their scores and the second individual had decreased but was not flagged high risk. This still gives the counselor data to look at to see the difference from beginning to mid-year when students have gotten the hang of the school routine and other factors.

