

PRIORITIZING TEACHERS

Importance of Self-Care and Adult Social and Emotional Competencies

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The National Comprehensive Center

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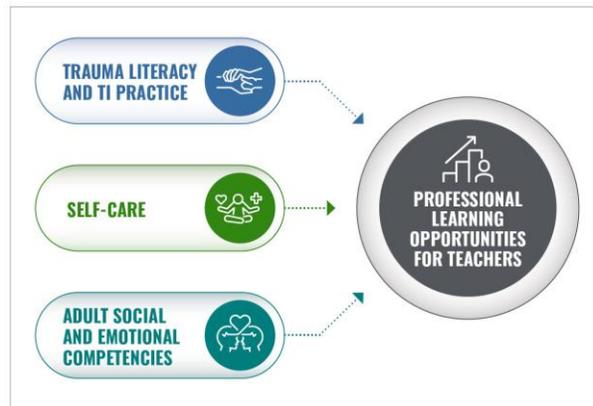


Introduction

It is critical that states and districts support teachers by addressing their mental health and social and emotional needs, as well as by increasing their capacity to manage and teach students in the aftermath of COVID and its accompanying stressors. In order to create a supportive, trauma-informed classroom, it is imperative that instructors not only identify and deal with their own stress but also regularly engage in self-care.

The focus of this brief is on the professional development (PD) for teachers as part of implementing trauma-informed (TI) approaches in schools ([Brief #2 – Becoming Trauma-Informed](#)). The brief highlights two critical components of these PD trainings—self-care, and adult social and emotional learning competencies, commonly referred to as “adult SEL” (Exhibit 1)¹. The goal of the brief is to provide education practitioners at the school, district, and state level with the critical components needed to develop a tailored approach to conducting PD.

Exhibit 1: Components of PD for teachers within a TI implementation framework



Why Is Self-Care an Important Component of PD for Teachers?

- » In addition to the challenges of teaching during the pandemic, teachers have had to deal with their own stress and anxiety, as well as dealing with student disengagement and stress;
- » [Educator stress](#) can lead to burnout, career dissatisfaction, and teacher turnover, resulting in negative consequences for students (Greenberg, Brown, and Abenavoli, 2016, cited in Turner 2016). Between May and October 2020, the proportion of K-12 educators seriously worried about burnout increased from about 25% to 57% (see [Kaufman and Diliberti 2021](#));
- » Teachers who have experienced secondary stress stemming from interacting with students exposed to trauma talk with students less; are less likely to model prosocial behaviors (behaviors intended to help others) and coping strategies; and have classrooms that rate lower on emotional climate, organization, and instructional quality ([Irvin 2012](#); [Jennings 2014](#)); and
- » Students learn better in safe, supportive environments (see [Brief #2](#)). The same is true for adults. Supporting educators in dealing with stress can lead to a more positive classroom environment in their classrooms as well as increase teacher retention ([Luthar and Mendes 2020](#)).

¹ To know more about trauma literacy and TI practices, please see [Brief #2 here](#).

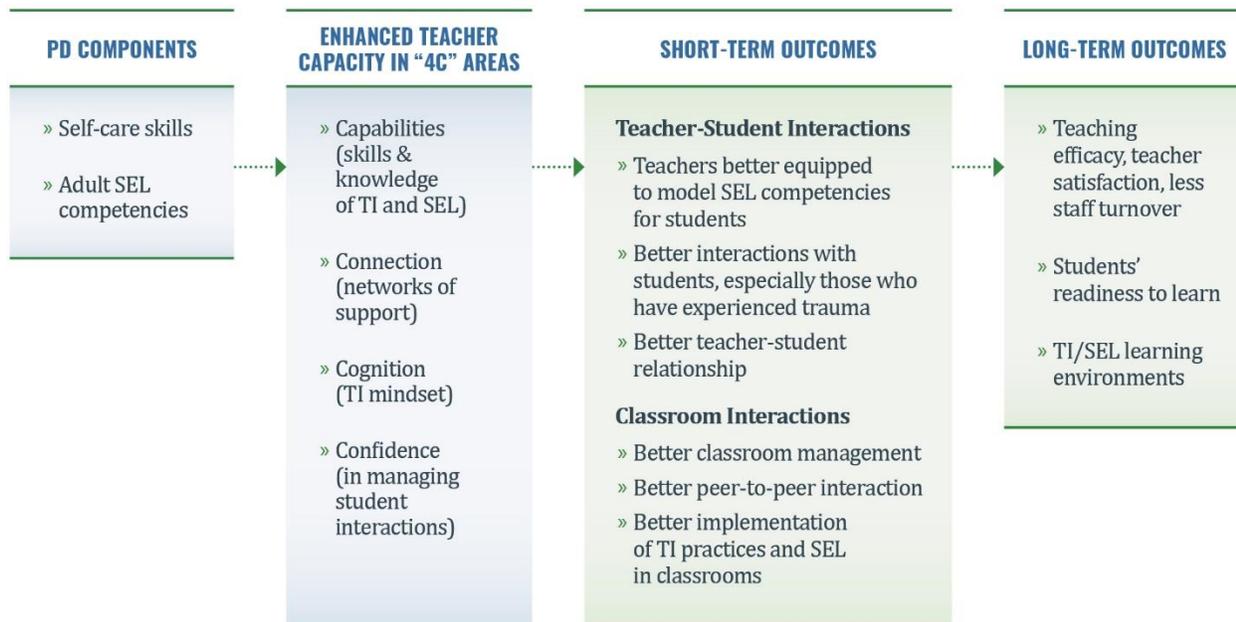


Why Is Adult SEL an Important Component of PD for Teachers?

- » Teachers’ social and emotional competence has a significant effect on student achievement and classroom climate ([Jennings and Greenberg 2009](#));
- » Teachers model social and emotional skills ([Martinez 2015](#)), intentionally or not, which shapes the learning experience of their students ([Lopez and Berger 2020](#));
- » Teachers with strong social and emotional competencies are better able to build strong relationships with peers and students, and remain regulated under duress, each of which is a component of safe and supportive TI classrooms ([Schonert-Reichl 2017](#));
- » Teachers who are trauma-informed organize their classrooms and provide emotional and instructional support in ways that are associated with a high-quality classroom climate ([Oliver 2018](#)); and
- » Social and emotional competency helps teachers to engage students in learning, demonstrate patience, listen attentively, and maintain their composure during challenging student encounters ([Jennings and Greenberg 2009](#); [Kunter et al. 2013](#)).

Because these SEL competencies are not typically taught in PD courses or teacher preparation programs (there are a few exceptions, like the coursework offered at [San Jose State University in California](#)), it is important to foster such competencies for teachers’ occupational well-being as well as supportive classroom environments (see Exhibit 2).

Exhibit 2: Potential short- and long-term outcomes of fostering self-care and adult SEL competencies within PD for teachers



Sources: [Mapp and Bergman 2019](#); [Jones, Bouffard, and Weissbourd, 2013](#); [Committee for Children 2021](#); [Reyes et al. 2012](#)



Conducting PD as Opportunities for Active Learning and Reflection

Below are a few “to-do’s” of PD centered on fostering self-care and adult SEL competencies. There are several models of PD training. This brief focuses on directly providing training to the teachers and does not include coaching or train-the-trainer approaches. Direct PD training can be augmented through other delivery methods and experiences such as workshops, conferences, online courses, webinars, professional learning communities, and coaching support.

Build consensus before rolling out the PD

It is important to have a shared understanding among stakeholders about the need for and usefulness of staff PD in improving outcomes for teachers and students before you roll out the PD:

- » Provide opportunities for all stakeholders to give input on the vision, mission, and plans for the overall effort;
- » Recognize that the perceived fit/alignment between the PD training with the school norms and expectations for teachers can influence the buy-in from teachers for the training;
- » Get baseline data from education staff that is tailored to your school/district (e.g., from an [educator self-assessment](#)) to show the importance of this work and potential benefits; and
- » Align objectives of the PD to the needs of the specific staff (e.g., instructional staff, mental health counselor, school nurse).

Structure the PD to maximize learning

In order to maximize the effectiveness of professional development for staff, please take into consideration these strategies:

- » Include ongoing professional learning communities as part of the school- and district-wide PD trainings; include practical application of skills and problem-solving experiences using current issues raised by teachers;
- » Be flexible and tailor the format of PD; combine in-person and online participatory learning events with asynchronous online and other distance learning approaches that do not require teachers to take time off;
- » Keep in mind developmental considerations when teaching student-focused supports and strategies, even while allowing for the same foundational information for teachers across the grade levels;
- » Partner with district and community behavioral organizations or [university-based clinics](#) to provide the trauma training for school staff; for schools in remote locations, this can be accomplished through virtual learning platforms;
- » Establish an [ongoing training program](#) to accommodate new teachers or teacher substitutes, which takes into account the rate of teacher turnover in some schools;



- » Make sure to include time for follow-up and coaching, as they are important components of PD, and which ideally are differentiated based on the teacher’s experience and prior exposure to TI and SEL and the needs of the student population being served;
- » Consider taking a tiered implementation approach ([MTS-PD](#)). A district roll-out requires a lengthy commitment; once all schools have trained their staff at a basic level, develop a plan for targeted and individualized PD within the yearly school improvement plan; and
- » Track training participation and attendance; evaluate how teachers use the strategies learned as part of the PD in their classrooms; get feedback from students.

Most important, PD around trauma and SEL needs be centered on equity, often in the form of self-reflection and awareness of how this may affect the way teachers view and approach students, as well as students’ own experiences of historical trauma and access to resources. Such self- and social awareness may help teachers understand how their cultural beliefs and unintentional biases can have an impact on teaching and [disciplinary practices](#) (McIntosh et al. 2018) ([CASEL 2020](#); [Leadership for Equity Assessment & Development](#) n.d.) .

What Can States and Districts Do To Promote PD?

PD needs to be a systematic, ongoing process with monitoring for success and progress. State education agencies, districts, school administrators, and teachers each have a role to play in establishing these systematic supports and making the PD impactful. Here are a few action steps that states, districts, administrators, and teachers can take.

State Actions

1. Provide a [central repository](#) of online resources that span the components of PD mentioned in this brief;
2. Foster interagency connections to leverage supports and resources for statewide synchronous and asynchronous online PD training;
3. Provide protected time and incentives for TI-focused PD (e.g., use CEUs or professional growth points or pay stipends that are an allowable expense under ESSER funding);
4. Develop policies that incentivize teachers’ attendance at training; and
5. Require trauma-literacy, TI practices, and adult SEL in teacher precertification programs.

District Actions

1. Foster interagency connections to leverage supports and resources for districtwide PD training;
2. Explicitly include practices that promote or support TI SEL in teacher evaluation systems;
3. Provide guidance to schools on how to integrate PD training into existing training for student support initiatives;
4. Create a process to continually assess the effectiveness of PD; and



5. Host learning collaboratives to share best practices and strategies to address PD challenges across schools and contexts.

School Administrator Actions

1. Formulate a plan for rolling out the PD training;
2. Consider a multiphased approach to PD offerings that accounts for the different roles, responsibilities, and knowledge and skills of staff;
3. Work with the school district to devise incentives and accountability for teacher attendance;
4. Partner with local community behavioral organizations or university-based clinics to provide the PD; and
5. Provide ongoing support to teachers to practice what they have learned.

Teacher Actions

1. Request and attend PD training;
2. Supplement PD training with online self-education modules on self-care and adult SEL;
3. Ensure the availability of self-referral and student referral forms for counseling services;
4. Request feedback from administrators, peers, and students on adult SEL and classroom management techniques; and
5. Implement and/or advocate for TI SEL school and district policies.

In summary, states, districts, and schools must renew their focus on teachers and other school staff by fostering well-being and building teachers' capacity to engage in trauma-informed pedagogy as they navigate the challenging roles they will face in the classrooms in the coming years. Applying some of the principles in this brief will foster environments where adult SEL and self-care for educators are genuine priorities, and learning opportunities are provided for staff. Both systematic and systemic approaches are required to ensure the well-being of school staff—a critical need to be addressed in the upcoming years.

Please refer to the additional resources below on the topic of self-care and adult SEL for school staff.

Additional Resources

| Resource | Description |
|--|---|
| Michigan Virtual - Courses for educators about SEL | Free virtual courses for educators that focus on TI support and SEL |
| The Science of Happiness | Indiana's Science of Happiness (free online course) |



| Resource | Description |
|--|--|
| Panorama Teacher and Staff Survey | A survey tool for administrators to collect professional feedback from teachers and staff |
| Educator Wellness Toolkit: Leading a School with Wellness at the Forefront | Toolkit for educators to support self-care and to create safe and healthy relational environments (Indiana) |
| Incorporating Trauma Informed Practice and ACEs into Professional Curricula - a Toolkit | PD curriculum from the Philadelphia ACEs Task Force (PATF) |
| Teacher Well-Being Measure | A validated 8-item self-report rating scales for measuring teachers' job-specific well-being |
| Mental Health America: Prioritizing Self-Care | Worksheet designed to help people understand and manage self-care |
| Social Emotional Engagement – Knowledge & Skills (SEE-KS) Instructional Manual & Materials | Professional learning approach designed to bring a positive school climate into the classroom and lesson planning |
| Second Step® SEL for Adults | Second Step® SEL for Adults, a new K–12 professional development program (two modules are currently available, with two more set to be available by early summer 2022) |
| Trauma - Midwest PBIS Network | Training information and materials for teachers from Midwest PBIS network |
| Texas Project Restore | A series of training videos on trauma-informed practices and self-care designed to support teachers. |

