



**Our Children
Our Families**
Council San Francisco



HEALSf

DECEMBER 2020

**HEAL SF: EARLY EDUCATION
PILOT**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Prepared by
Trauma Transformed



Executive Summary

Background

Research linking adverse childhood experiences and exposure to toxic stress and trauma (including racial trauma), clearly demonstrates the need for trauma-informed approaches to education and learning. A growing body of evidence suggests that school improvement efforts cannot happen without considering the impact of school climate and culture, and yet, investments too often focus on practices or initiatives that do not address climate, culture or how to create systemic transformation.

Trauma-informed approaches to education are not new. Over the past five years, resources have been invested in the city-wide adoption of evidence-based trauma services, training, workforce development courses, and other supports. San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) was, in fact, an early national leader in adopting school-wide approaches to trauma-informed care and education through implementation of the [UCSF HEARTS](#) (Healthy Environments and Response to Trauma in Schools). Early efforts, though siloed, produced positive outcomes (Dorado et. al, 2016) but the momentum and structures to sustain early positive outcomes largely collapsed under competing demands and rising educator workforce stress. SFUSD is often perceived to be “resource-rich, but poorly coordinated” and oftentimes our most well-intended initiatives fail to benefit students and schools due to an over-investment in practice change and under-investment in capacity and culture-building.



Given that a safe and supportive school climate and culture is linked to positive student outcomes, it is critical that educators understand how to create and sustain such environments. While numerous initiatives have made their way into our school communities to build safer, supportive climates and cultures [trainings through First 5, stipends offered to SFUSD educator to mitigate high housing costs, Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support (PBIS) coaches, social-emotional learning curricula, etc.], these strategies often overlook the health of our curricula delivery system, namely our educators. While some practices and behaviors may change, many efforts have failed because they do not produce lasting changes to school climate and culture. To provide a metaphor, without a functioning syringe, the best medicines cannot buffer against illness or provide a cure. Like other professionals in demanding roles, teachers may experience depleted energy and increased stress or "burnout." Physically and emotionally exhausted teachers struggle to sustain strong relationships with students (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

Executive Summary (cont'd)

Shared Struggles, Shared Fates

In March 2020, three months into our project, we experienced the abrupt closure of our schools and transition to remote or distance learning. Students and educators alike faced uncertainty and the sudden loss of critical resources that schools offer to meet concrete needs, in addition to academic instruction, such as food, medical/dental, crisis, childcare / after school care, books/library lending, arts, sports. Educators lost access to tools and relationships that supported instruction. In the closing of schools, the COVID-19 pandemic revealed how much we rely on schools as centers of care, belonging, connection, and community.

Though trauma-informed approaches are needed now more than ever, educators face unprecedented tests to adapt trauma-informed practices to distanced settings. The loss of resources and the increase in stressors has implications for our school communities and our ability to recover from these pandemics - COVID-19, racism, and climate crisis. As with students, so it goes with educators - learning is just harder for many on the screens. The loss of connection, central to mitigating stress and healing, impacts not only students but educators as well.

Physically distanced, Socially connected

Through our assessment activities and COVID adaptations support educators and school sites in their adoption of trauma-informed schoolwide supports and culture change, it became evident in summer months that a robust re-design of our approach and strategies to focus on building cultures of connection and care in remote environments would be critical to supporting not only COVID response, but also for readying schools for their critical role in COVID recovery and renewal.

“

Trying to implement trauma-informed practices without first implementing trauma-informed (school) wide culture is like throwing seed onto dry land.

”

-Dr. Sandra Bloom

Heal SF: Early Education Pilot

The Heal SF: Early Education Pilot program, led by [Our Children, Our Families \(OCOF\) Council](#), was designed to harness the coordinating capacities of OCOF to assess, strengthen, align, and sustain the many investments into trauma-informed school transformation within SFUSD. Early stakeholder meetings identified The SFUSD Early Education Department (EED) as a key partner after realizing that while many schools have adopted trauma-informed school wide supports, early education sites did not benefit in the same ways as K-12 in similar initiatives. While investments have focused on training early educators to understand and adopt trauma-informed care (TIC) strategies, the capacity of our early educator workforce to incorporate and sustain these approaches requires similar investments and resources. In an effort to strengthen the capacity of our early education department and educators, Trauma Transformed partnered with OCOF in 2019 as part of this Early Education Pilot in SFUSD.

Executive Summary (cont'd)



Trauma is historical, structural, political, intergenerational, interpersonal, and embodied. So then must be our healing.

-Kanwarpal Dhaliwal, RYSE Center



Project Goals and Selected Accomplishments

Goal 1: Establish multi-level leadership team and structures of accountability

- Identified members of a multi-level implementation team to oversee the project, reduce siloed efforts and develop communication pathways.
- Designed project management goals, tools, timelines, tasks and responsibility agreements.
- Developed COVID-19 adaptations to grant activities and coordinated with school site administrators and educators to respond to school site and district priorities, as well as challenges.

Goal 2: Build partnership with early education and identified pilot school sites

- Conducted site tours and visits at all three identified sites with principals and site administrators.
- Developed marketing materials and coordinated Open Houses at Junipero Serra Annex* to introduce the project and build community with early educator teams at each site.

Goal 3: Assess school and educator readiness, needs, and resources

- Created and submitted materials to IRB for survey questions, data collection protocol.
- Created and revised focus group** questions, marketing materials, protocol and flexible data collection to accommodate staff schedules and comfort levels
- Participated in meeting with staff from all three pilot sites to better understand the resources, challenges, and opportunities at each school in order to map resources

Goal 4: Provide direct school site interventions to address gaps and strengthen readiness and resources

- Developed learning materials, TIP sheets, and webinar to help staff better understand pandemic stages, how they might be affected, and how they could support children and families
- Developed resources and provided individual check-ins and coaching for EED staff and leaders
- Contracted to provide staff with virtual, asynchronous trauma-informed training tailored for educators, based on feedback, and developed supplemental materials
- Developed and implemented 5 tailored convenings for staff to strengthen their sense of connection and belonging during shelter in place, as well as increasing their ability to use individual and collective care to strengthen existing resilience and reduce impacts of stress.

*Open Houses scheduled at McLaren Early Education School (EES) and Las Americas EES were canceled due to Shelter in Place orders.

**Surveys and focus groups were postponed to Year 2 in light of the pandemic and staff availability.



The adult trigger checklist activity was fantastic. As an educator I find that I don't always self reflect as I am so busy with prepping, planning, teaching and communicating with families. Taking the time to complete the checklist will prompt me to self reflect on how certain behaviors trigger my emotions and response. As I become aware of my triggers I can find ways to learn more about the child's behavior and how to appropriately respond to them.

- Melissa, Preschool teacher Junipero Serra

