

Trauma-Informed Programing in Schools



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A **trauma-informed school system** (pre-school – 12th grade) is one in which **all** school administrators, staff, students, families and community members involved with the school **recognize** and **respond** to the potentially negative behavioral, relational, and academic impact of **traumatic stress** on those within the school system including children, caregivers, teachers, and other school staff, as well as on the school as a system.



The school system provides trauma awareness, knowledge, and skills as part of **the fabric of the school** organizational culture, practices, and policies and **act in collaboration** with all those who are involved with the child, including students' families, community agencies, leaders, and law enforcement, **using the best available science**, to facilitate and support the recovery and resiliency of the school community.

National Child Traumatic Stress Network



TIPS mission: The mission of the TIPS program is to assist schools as they seek to **infuse trauma informed practices** within their school environment. This includes interactions between students and staff, policies, approaches to discipline, and **how staff think** about the students within their building. The TIPS program recognizes that it is incredibly challenging work to support youth impacted by trauma and seeks to **assist educators** being as prepared as possible, personally and professionally.



Within a trauma-informed school setting, youth who have experienced trauma are:

- Seen as **hurt kids** rather than bad kids
- Are held **accountable** for their actions
- Feel **safe** within the school setting (emotionally and physically)
- Are identified and **triaged** into appropriate services
- Are better able to **learn** once trauma issues have been addressed
- Have **decreased behavioral problems** as trauma issues are addressed.



Help students reach their full potential by:

1. Partnering with families and strengthening traumatized children's **relationships** with adults in and out of school
2. Helping children modulate and **self-regulate** their emotions and behaviors
3. Enabling children to reach their **academic** potential.

Helping Traumatized Kids Learn





- Educators engage students in **non-coercive** ways
- Educators refrain from use of threats or authoritarian expectations
 - Ineffective when students are already in flight/fight/freeze mode
- Educators function as a **secure base** of learning and comfort within the classroom



“Instead of **exploring** the world so that we can grow, develop, and engage fully in our lives – using what I’ve called the “learning brain” – the brain of a PTSD victim shifts to hypervigilance and a fight-flight state – a
“survival brain.””

Julian Ford



- Survival states of mind:
 - Hypervigilant
 - Numb
- Survival behaviors
 - Fight
 - Flight
 - Freeze
 - Surrender
 - Cry for help



- Seemingly innocuous stimuli provoke extreme survival-motivated responses
- Schools can be full of potential trauma triggers



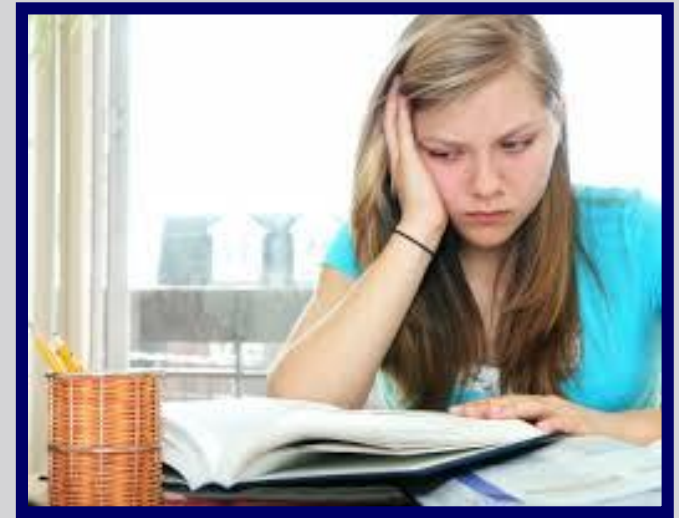
Traumatized youth experience academic difficulties associated with...

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MoACTS
Missouri Academy for Child Trauma Studies



- Learning and retrieving new verbal information
- Social and emotional communication
- Problem solving and analysis
- Sequential memory/organization
- Cause-and-effect relationships
- Perspective taking
- Attentiveness to classroom tasks
- Regulating emotions
- Executive functioning
- Academic engagement





- Reactivity and impulsivity
- Aggression
- Defiance
- Withdrawal
- Perfectionism
- Regression
- Traumatic reenactment
- Somatic complaints
- Tension reduction behaviors (“MUPS”)



To Promote a Regulated Classroom: Regulate Yourself! Remember...

DO: Go Low and Slow

Low

- Lower your body
- Lower your voice, both in volume and pitch
- Lower the complexity of your language; speak in short sentences using simple words; don't ask a lot of questions; don't preach

Slow

- Slow your own heart rate and breathing rate
 - Slow down your rate of speech; pause between sentences
 - Slow down your movements; if you must move quickly, do so in full view of the child
 - Slow down your agenda; it takes as long as it takes
- Bolick, 2001

DO NOT: Eat the TACOS!

- Threaten
- Argue with or contradict
- Challenge
- Order or command
- Shame, blame or disrespect



Guest, 2008



Talking Points:

- **Hurt kids not bad kids** → kids are still responsible, we have to think differently about them.
- Responding to children in a trauma-sensitive manner is the responsibility of **ALL** building staff.
- We are not asking everyone to be “therapists”
- You can never be trigger-free in a school context

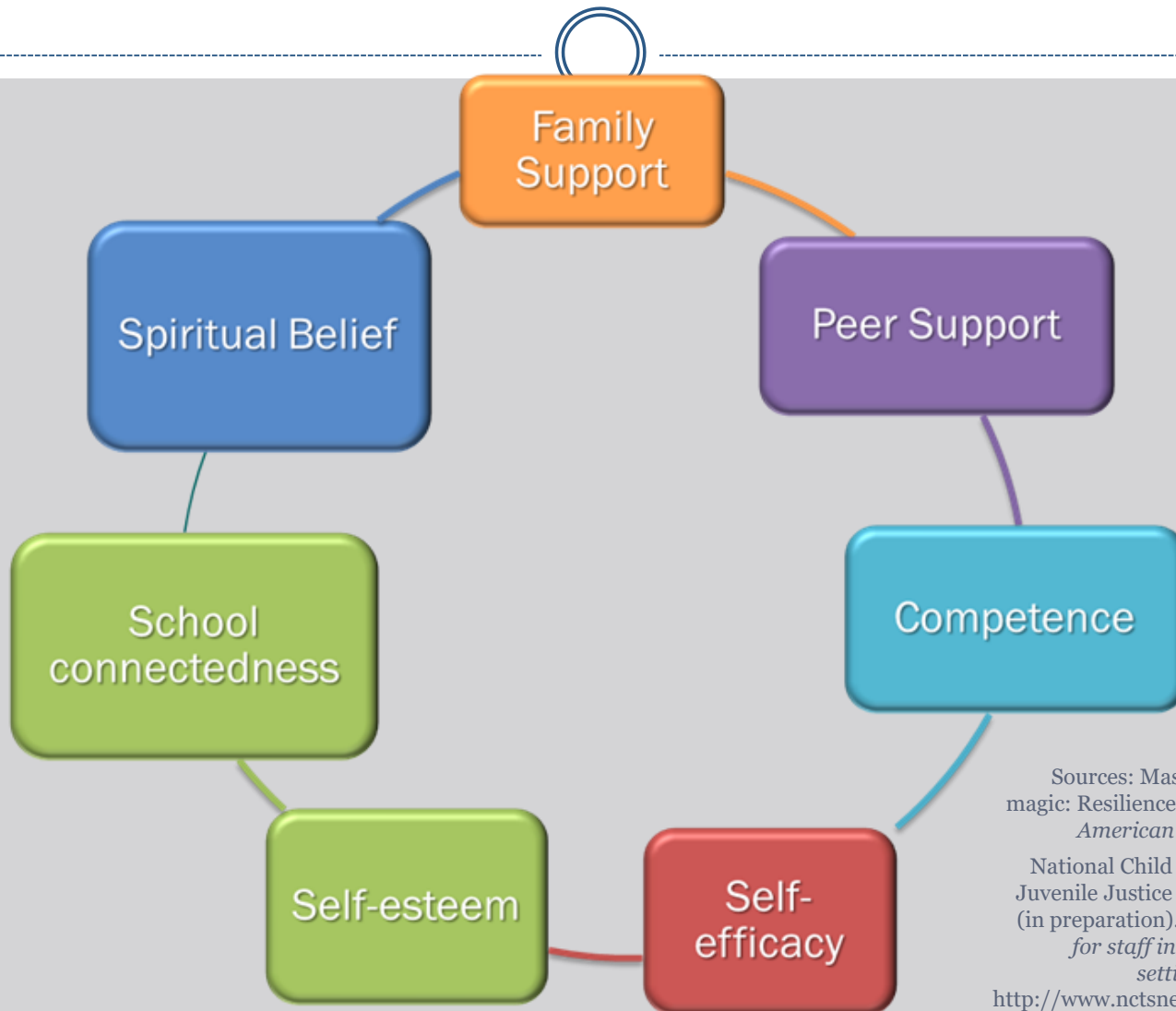
Activities:

- Trigger Identification
- Practice talking to students about triggers
- Case consultation as needed



“A pattern of being able to positively adapt in past or present adversity”
(Masten, 2001)

Factors that Enhance Resilience



Sources: Masten, A. S. (2001). Ordinary magic: Resilience processes in development. *American Psychologist*, 56, 227-238.

National Child Traumatic Stress Network, Juvenile Justice Treatment Subcommittee. (in preparation). *Think trauma: A training for staff in juvenile justice residential settings*. Will be available from <http://www.nctsn.org/resources/topics/juvenile-justice-system>



Key Factors Common to Resilient Children

1. Strong relationship with a adult caregiver/mentor figure
2. Solid ability to regulate emotions and behaviors
3. Sense of competency (e.g., academic achievement)

A school response that includes:



**Caring
Counselor**



**Talented
Teacher**

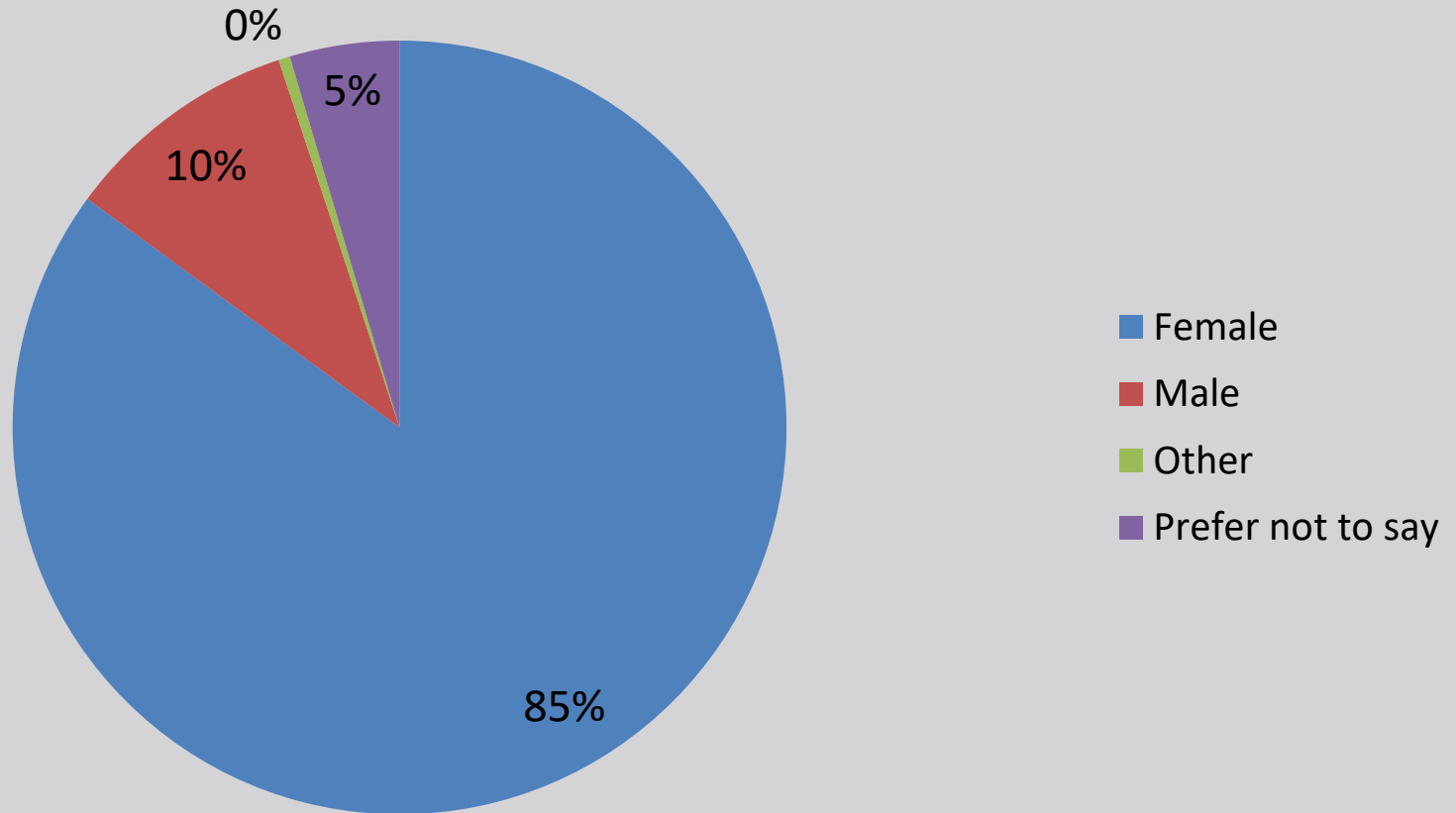


**Savvy
Social
Worker**

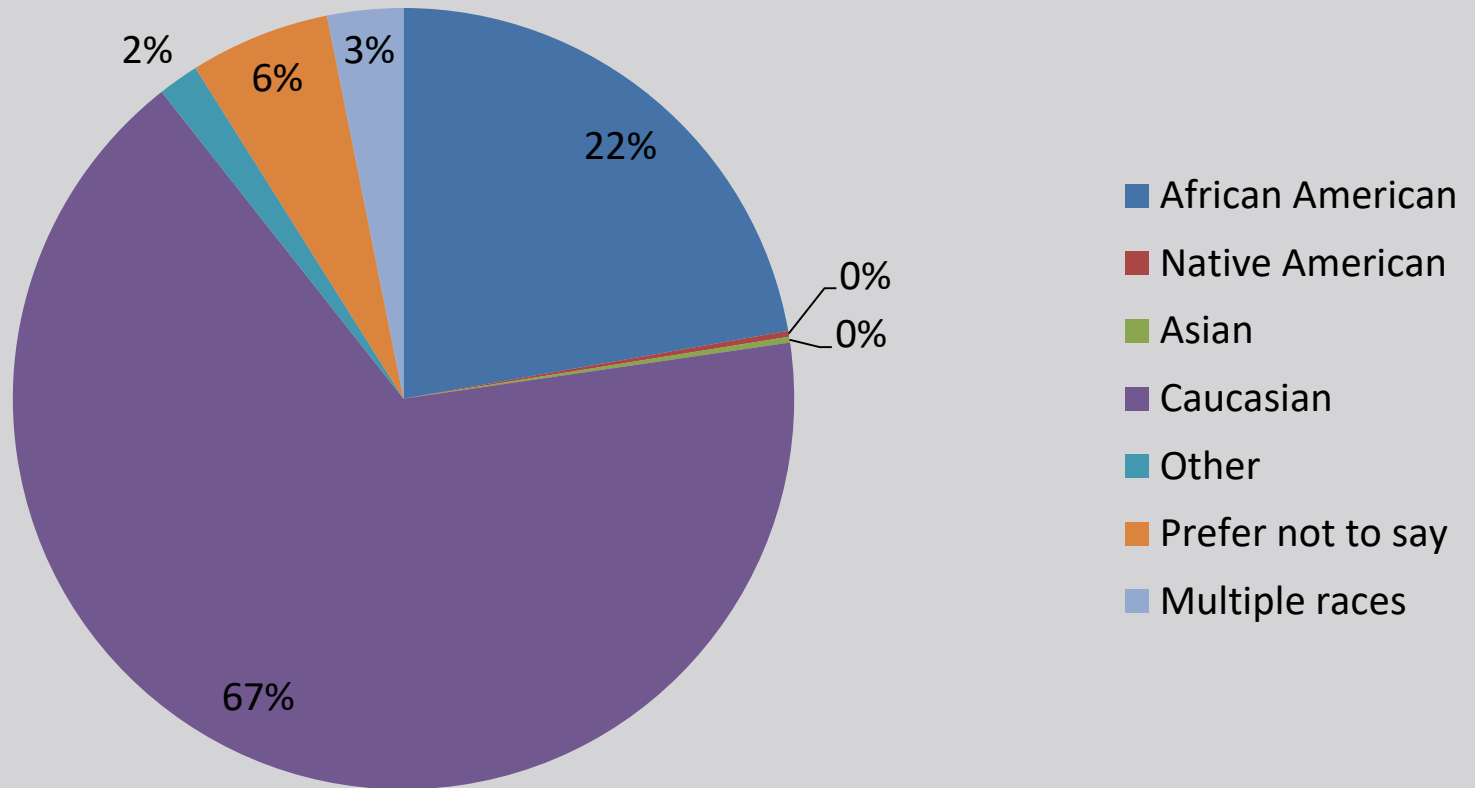
Trained School
Staff

- Collaboratively monitor Robert, Ben, and Raul
- Recognize the trauma responses and triggers
- Help the youth communicate their needs to building staff
- Link youth to community services to address those needs
- Partner with the families as needed

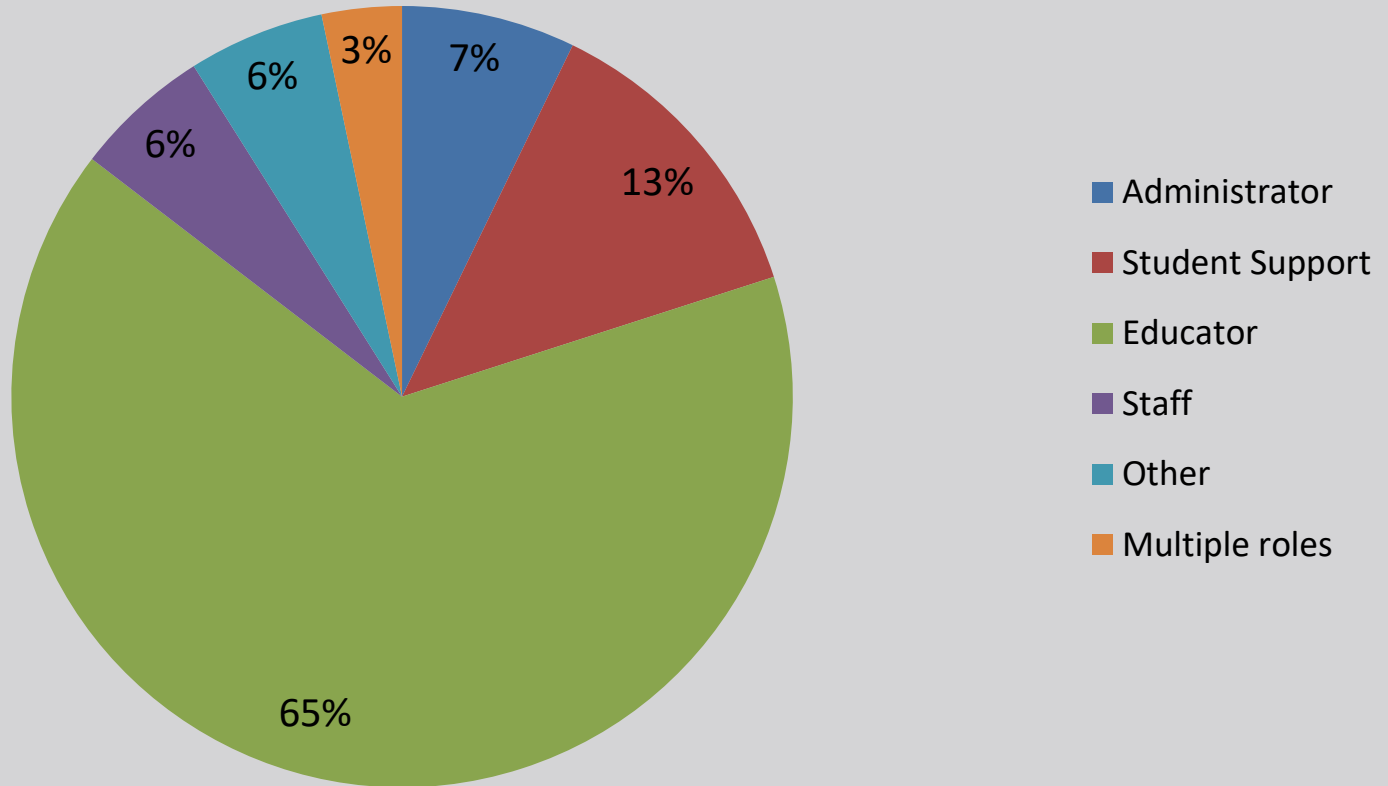
What is your gender?



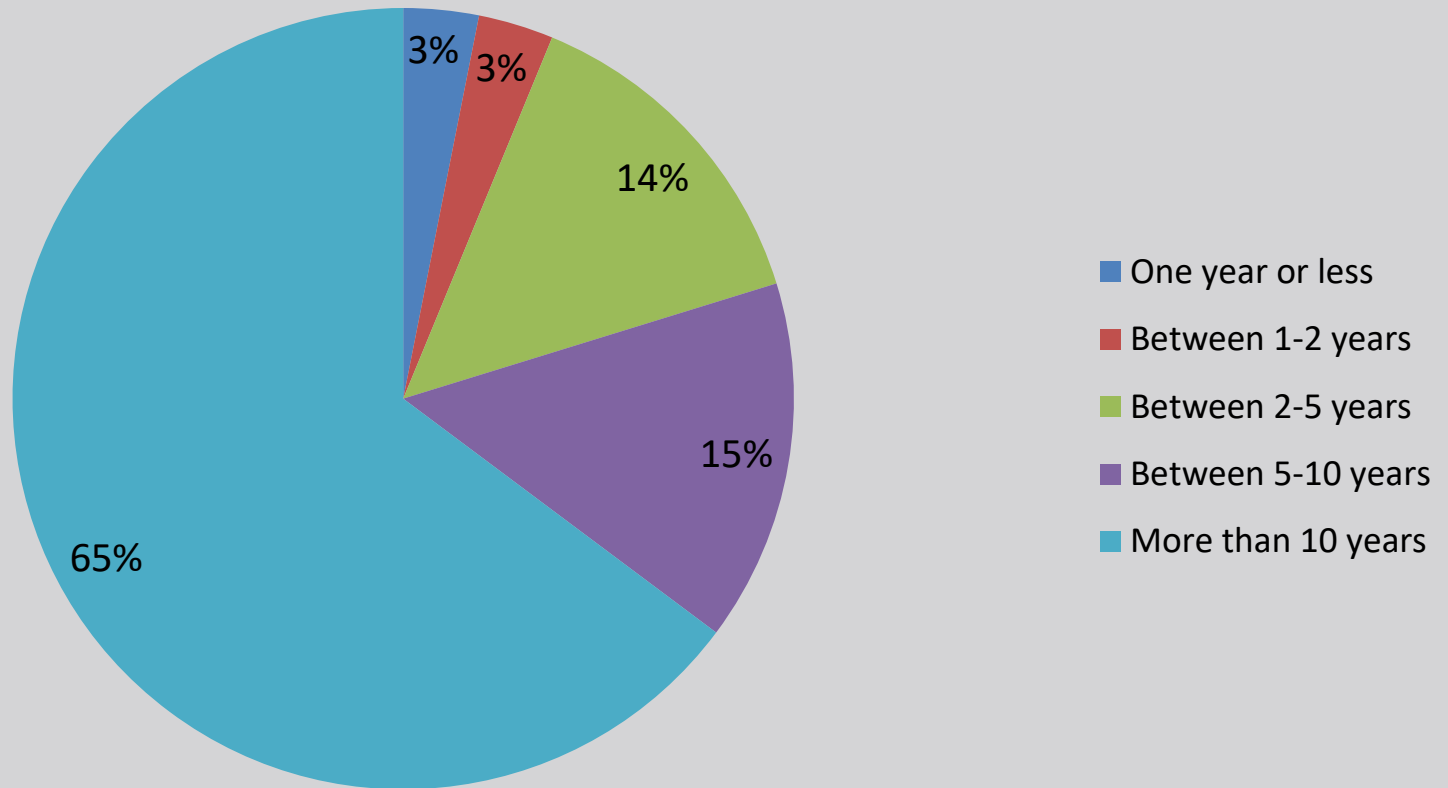
What is your race?



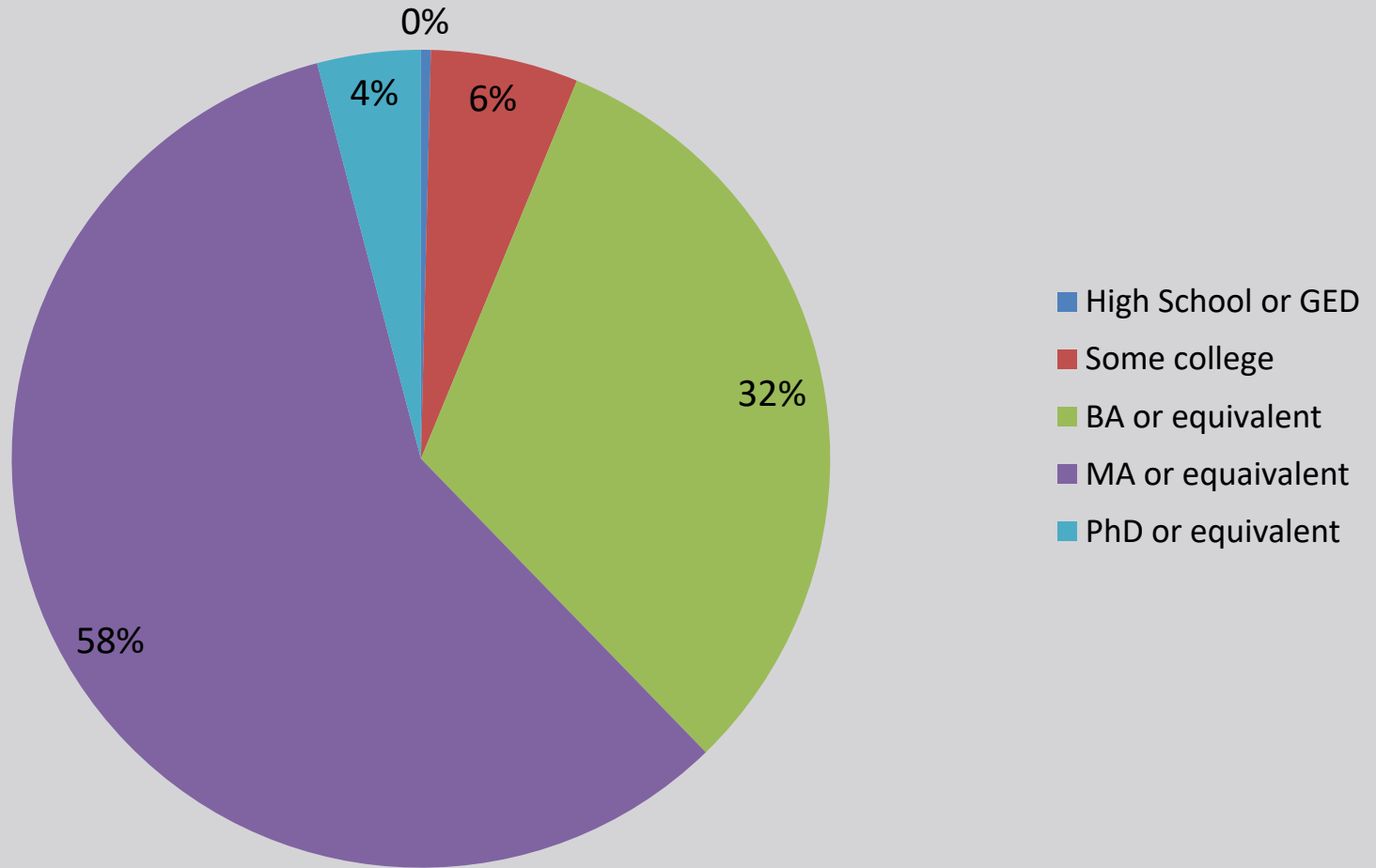
What is your professional position?



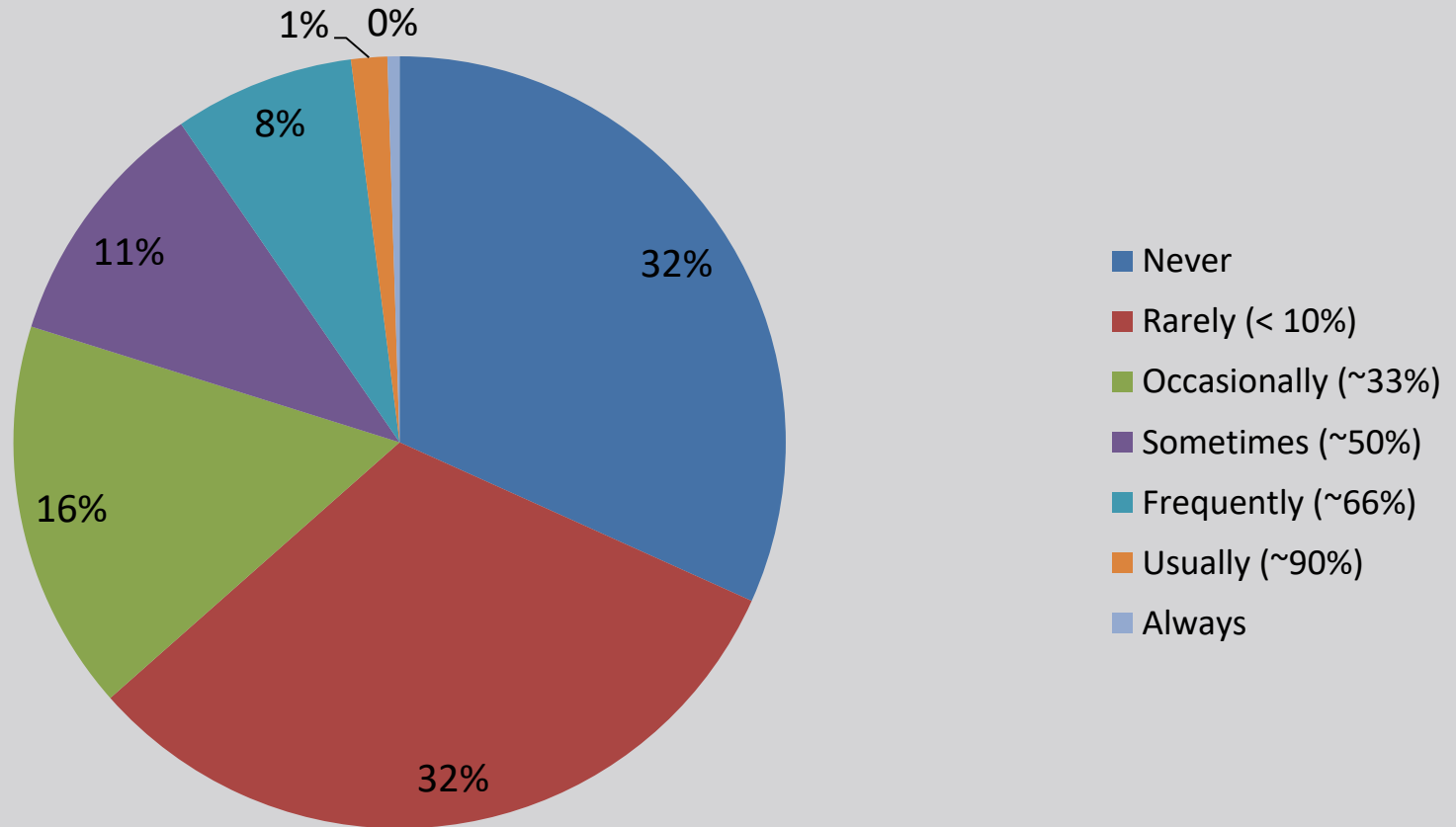
How many years have you been working in a school setting?



What is the highest level of education you have completed?

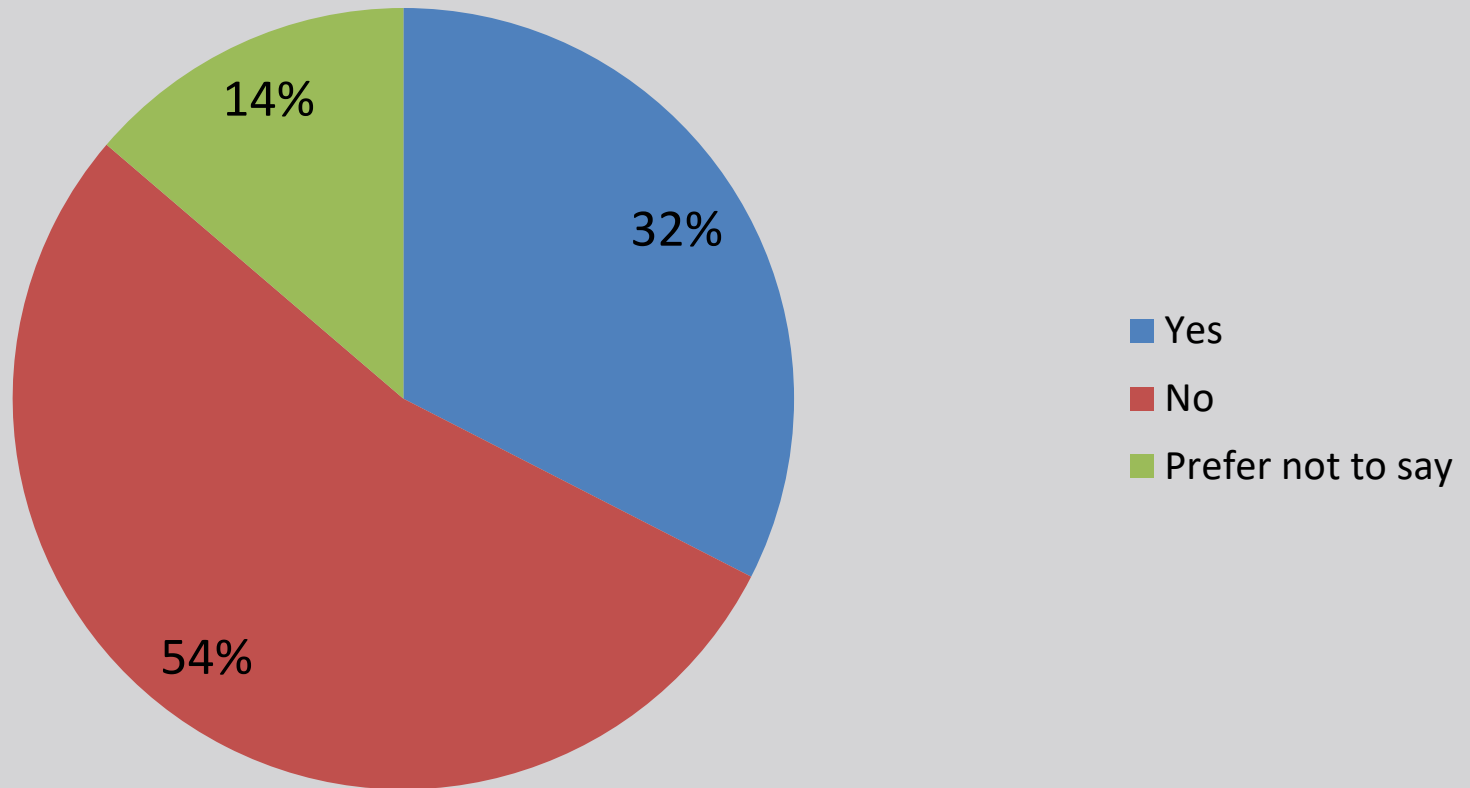


How often have meetings included discussion of Trauma-Informed care?



Would you consider yourself a trauma survivor?

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In the past six months, how many students have you personally reported to the child abuse and neglect hotline?

- **283** total reports from 413 school staff

In the past six months, how many students have you referred to outside agencies for trauma related services (not including hotline reports)?

- **474** total referrals from 411 school staff



Attitudes Related to Trauma-Informed Care Scale (0-7)

- Underlying causes of problem behaviors $M= 5.12$
- Responses to problem behaviors $M= 5.35$
- On-the-job behavior $M= 5.43$
- Self-efficacy at work $M= 5.42$
- Reactions to the work $M= 5.42$
- Personal support of TIC $M= 5.24$
- System-Wide support for TIC $M= 4.99$

- Organizational barriers
- Intervention barriers
- Individual barriers





- The tendency to see trauma as a home problem rather than a school problem.
- Misplacing blame on students or parents (whether intentionally or inadvertently)
- The personal impact on staff of dealing with these issues including feelings of helplessness and behaving overwhelmed
- Balancing individual student needs within the needs of the class as a whole and
- Lack of skills and resources of handling trauma

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Remember . . .for any barrier



- There are probably at least SOME instances where the problem has been solved (e.g., does the problem happen all the time?)
- When are the exceptions to the problem?
- What exactly, needs to be different? What would that look like?
- How would our school be different if _____ didn't happen?
- What is the first SMALL sign that your building is making progress?
- Consider too, what is working and how can you do more of it?



- Establish a sense of urgency
- Create the guiding coalition
- Developing a vision and strategy
- Communicating the change vision
- Empowering employees for broad based action
- Generating short term wins
- Consolidating change and producing more change
- Anchoring new approaches in the culture

Heath & Heath, 2010

Trauma Informed Programing in Schools (TIPS) – Building Consultation

Training Topics

Recognizing and Preventing Trauma Triggers within the School Environment	Discussion of the differences between internal, external, and interpersonal trauma triggers. Practice identifying these triggers with youth in their building, developing strategies and goals within the building for preventing triggering situations.
TRAUMA-INFORMED RESPONSES WITH TRIGGERED STUDENTS	Strategies to respond to crises within the school from a trauma-informed lens, role-play scenarios for staff to practice de-escalation techniques, strategies for “debriefing” following these incidents in order to help prevent future situations.
Physical and Psychological Safety within the School Environment	A brief overview of challenges related to physical and psychological safety within the school environment. Practice using a trauma-informed safety plan for the school environment, practice sending signals of care rather than signals of threat to youth.
The Impact of Trauma on the Brain and Learning	A brief overview of the difference between typical brain development and brain development for youth impacted by trauma. Group activities related to how altered brain development due to trauma impacts learning and behaviors within the classroom.
Engaging with Challenging Caregivers	A brief overview of the inter-generational cycles of trauma. Strategies for engaging with challenging caregivers who may be mistrustful of the educational system, reducing caregiver anxiety, and building a collaborative relationship with caregivers.
Self-Care for Caring Adults	This session will provide an overview of the challenges associated with self-care that arise in those working with youth impacted by trauma. Direct practice of and concrete strategies related to mindfulness and self-care will be discussed.
Trauma Informed Classroom Management	This session would teach building Staff a collaborative-problem solving approach to addressing classroom management issues and would involve Staff learning and practicing skills to help create a more positive and relaxed classroom environment.
Trauma Informed Classroom Procedures and Practices	This session would teach building Staff a collaborative-problem solving approach to addressing classroom structures that help create a more positive, relaxed classroom environment and trauma informed classroom.



- **Macro-level** : large scale changes/processes at an organizational level.
 - Generally would be a “whole school” type of change.
 - Within TIPS, these are the PD sessions.
- **Micro-level** : small scale change processes, happening during face-to-face interactions between two people.
 - Within person change
 - Within TIPS, these are informal delivery of the TIPS content and information, that we call, “microventions”.



- Microventions are daily, intentional, interpersonal interactions, grounded in trauma-informed principles, that help to shift the social and cultural norms within an organization.
 - Part of the structure of the TIPS program.
 - Designed to be flexibly implemented, as needed.
 - Increase buy-in from colleagues
 - Help translate PD content → daily work.
 - Are the **HARD** part of the TIPS model, and arguably the **MOST IMPORTANT**.

Why Might we Avoid Microventions?



- We often lack a “script” for how to handle these situations.
- We don’t want to harm our relationships with colleagues.
- We don’t want to “overstep” our roles.
- Bystander effect
- We are exhausted ourselves . . .
- Why else?



“The continued use of program components & activities for the continued achievement of desirable program & population outcomes...beyond their initial funding period”

--Most “popular” definition in 125 articles of a literature review

Stirman, Kimberly, Cook, Calloway, Castro, & Charns (2012). The sustainability of new programs and innovations... Implementation Science



- ✦ Research suggests new programs should focus on:
 - Leadership involvement
 - Training & fidelity monitoring
 - Continued financial support
 - Intervention adaptation



- Administration buy-in is essential
 - “Top-down”
 - Lead by example
- Build cohesive change teams
- Use existing programmatic structures
 - Coordinate existing services
- Identify systemic barriers
 - Staff coverage challenges
 - Low resources
 - Budget deficits



- Identification of implementation barriers
 - Systemic
 - Idiosyncratic
- Formative and summative evaluation studies
 - Quantitative data
 - Qualitative data
 - Behavioral observations
- Sustainability
 - District integration
 - Cultural shift



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