Moving from traditional school-based therapy to engaging schools in building whole-system, trauma-informed schools.
Introductions

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Key Learning Objectives

- Describe key components of building a trauma-informed school in close collaboration with school staff

- Understand the importance of prioritizing school-staff wellness in establishing a trauma-informed school

- Provide an overview of implementation and sustainability as related to engagement & training of school staff, funding, and evaluation of trauma-informed schools
What we know about School-based mental health services

- Only 17% of children receive mental health services and of those children, 70% get the services AT SCHOOL.
- Reduces barriers
- Can increase consistency
- Improves collaboration with school staff and coordination of care
The scope of Aurora Mental Health Center’s School-based Services

- Serve Aurora Public Schools (APS), Cherry Creek Public Schools (CCSD), Bennett School District and Byers School District
- Partnership with APS for over 20 years and CCSD for 4 years.
- 32 clinical staff (10 bilingual; in last 7 years staff increased from 7 to 32)
- 1 bilingual case manager
- 8 interns
- 40 schools (Elem, Middle, K-8, K-12, High)
- Community College of Aurora and Futures Academy (alternative high school)
71% of students in APS are eligible for free and reduced lunch (HEARTS schools average over 90%).

Students from 131 countries, 133 languages. 37% of students are second language learners, with 86% of those speaking Spanish.

On time graduation rate: 55% compared to 76% for the whole state

Dropout rate: 2x as high as the state

African-American students, biracial students, and special education students are overrepresented in suspensions and expulsions

Aurora is a highly impacted community: poverty and violence
The Challenge:
Our traditional approach is not enough
Transforming the approach:
How do we continue to serve a highly traumatized community on a day-to-day basis in a way that is sustainable, healthy and also promotes positive systemic change?

Children who have experienced prolonged trauma do anything to survive. Not because they want to but because they need to.
Healthy Environments and Response to Trauma in Schools (HEARTS)

- Developed in 2008 at Univ. of Calif, San Francisco in partnership with SF United School District
- Multi-level comprehensive prevention and intervention program for children who have experienced trauma
- Focus on fostering well-being of students, staff, and parents through school-wide safe, culturally sensitive and supportive, trauma-informed environments
“...the aim is to increase teaching and learning time and reduce time spent on discipline. The ultimate goal is to help all traumatized students become successful members in their school communities.”

(Cole et al., 2005, p. 6)
What makes a school trauma-informed?

- **Recognition of the prevalence** of trauma
- **Recognition of the connection** between trauma history and the child’s behaviors: aggression, defiance, absenteeism, learning differences, withdrawal
- **Attention to triggers** that may be present in the school environment that can be activated in the course of the day
- **Building safety** in all situations (physical, emotional, and psychological)
- Use of **restorative practices** in discipline responses, to teach accountability, empathy, and repair
- **Awareness of and normalization of burnout** and **vicarious trauma** in our own experience

Seneca Center, California Foster Ed Summit (2015) and J.Lanin, Aurora Mental Health Center (2016)
Core-Guiding Principles of HEARTS

• Understand trauma and stress
• Establish safety and predictability
• Foster compassionate, dependable relationships
• Build self-management and interpersonal skills
• Practice cultural humility and responsiveness
• Facilitate empowerment
“Not every student has a significant trauma history, but the needs of those who do can define the success of the entire classroom.”

Souers and Hall (2016)

Trauma interferes with:

- Being present with a “learning ready brain”
- Chronic attendance problems, lower grade point average, higher risk of school dropout
- Behavioral problems (avoidant/withdrawing, disruptive/acting out, disengaged-going numb)
- Educator frustration, low job satisfaction, and burnout
Intersection of Race, Trauma, & Poverty: Cradle to Prison Pipeline

Poverty and Racial Inequity

Babies born into poverty:
- 1 in 3 Latino
- 1 in 2 African-American

APS suspensions:
- African-American 2.3x
- Latino 2.24 x

APS expulsions:
- African-American 2.5x
- Latino 2.29 x

Unaddressed trauma

More days of school absence
- African-American 2.5x
- Latino 2.29 x

Lower grade-point average

Higher risk of school dropout

Dropping out of school increases risk of imprisonment

Chance of being imprisoned in lifetime (if born in 2001):
- A Latino boy: 1 in 6
- An African-American boy: 1 in 3
The work of HEARTS: Shifting Perspective:

Intentionally Seek to Know our Students…

Change the paradigm from one that asks,

"What is wrong with you?"

to one that asks,

"What has happened to you?"

Provides **context**, fosters **compassion**, helps us maintain optimism about the future of the students and the school…

(from Wisconsin Dept. of Health Services www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/tic)

Structure of HEARTS

Tier I
- Student wellness classes
- Parent groups
- Training & wellness coaching for all teachers and staff

Tier II
- Educator Wellness
- Classroom Consultations
- Coordinated care meetings

Tier III
- Clinical services
Initial Discussions with School

- Initial meeting with Administration/Leadership Team
- Evaluation of school’s capacity for taking on trauma-informed work
- Setting clear expectations of the school and of HEARTS
- Memorandum of Understanding
Alignment

- HEARTS Training for Administration prior to all staff training
- All staff (not just teachers) receive HEARTS Training
  - Wellness is integrated into the training, not seen as something other
  - Trainings are split over several days
  - Trainings are interactive and experiential
Turn and Talk

Thinking of the schools where you work, how would you assess readiness for starting work to become trauma-informed? Where would you expect push-back or resistance from your school?
Integration

- Create an Advisory Team
- Build on existing structures of school
  - Mental Health Meetings, MTSS, Leadership Meetings, Staff Meetings
  - School Bulletin
  - Newsletters
- Engage and Provide Teacher Training and Consultation
- Open opportunities for Wellness Consultation/ Support
- Initiate Parenting Workshops and Groups
- Review of discipline practices / integration of restorative practices
- Plan Booster trainings based on content identified by staff
Wellness Corners in Classrooms
AuMHC HEARTS

- 10 schools throughout APS
- 1 school in Cherry Creek School District
- 14 staff (8 FTE)
  - 9 trainers/consultants, 4 educator wellness and 1 program evaluation
  - 13 staff have HEARTS FTE covered entirely by contracts with APS/CCSD and grants through The Denver Foundation and Kaiser Permanente
Trauma-Informed System: Core Guiding Principle

Resiliency & Recovery: Building Self-management and Interpersonal Skills

J. Dorado (2015), UCSF HEARTS, Child & Adolescent Services, UCSF/SFGH
Building Resilience: Personal Steps

ABC’s of Self Care

• Awareness
  – of one’s limits, resources, emotions
  – ability to self-reflect

• Balance
  – among personal and professional activities
  – input vs. output
  – limit setting

• Connection
  – to one’s inner self, to others, and to something “larger” (e.g., spiritual)

(Gusman & Swales, National Center for PTSD)

J. Dorado (2015), UCSF HEARTS, Child & Adolescent Services, UCSF/SFGH
The Tree of Contemplative Practices

www.contemplativemind.org
Compassion Satisfaction

How do you remind yourself, during those stressful moments, why you do this work?
Wellness
Compassion Satisfaction

- Pleasure one derives from being able to do one’s work well (Stamm, 2009)
- Pleasure in helping others through work
- Positive feelings about colleagues
- Positive feelings about contributing to work setting and/or to greater good of society

Human beings are hard-wired for connection and compassion
Compassion Fatigue & Burnout

“The cost of caring for others”

• The profound physical, emotional and physical erosion that takes place when helpers are unable to refuel and regenerate

• Caused by nature of the work, workplace stressors and workload

• Often factors are outside of one’s control

• Onset tends to be gradual

- Excerpts from The Compassion Fatigue Workbook by Francoise Mathieu
Stressed Eric  Burnt out Eric

(Eric was too tired to pose for this cartoon, apologies)
Vicarious/Secondary Trauma

Others’ trauma experienced becomes one’s own

- Change in worldview
- Symptoms parallel PTSD
- Revised in DSM-V as diagnosable under PTSD
- Onset can be sudden and acute
- NOT A SIGN OF WEAKNESS

Pearlman and Saakvitne (1995)
Vicarious Resilience

"What we learn from those we help on their own healing journey"

- Learn from how to overcome and transform traumatic experience
- Develop appreciation and perspective for our own lives
- Gain a more realistic worldview
- Increased empathy and compassion
- Greater feelings of efficacy and commitment to one's own work
Practices to Foster Resilience as Helpers

- Self-Awareness
- Actively cultivate hope, optimism, compassion satisfaction, meaning making
- Practice accepting complexity and ambiguity
- Holistic self-care (mind-body-spirit)
- Maintain clear boundaries and honor own limits
- Foster connection – self, others, something larger
Self-Care While Speaking with Traumatized Students

• Stay PRESENT in the moment (but keep in mind your own boundaries)
• Monitor and identify your emotions
• Affirmations to yourself
  – “This is not my trauma”
• Active mindfulness – be present and oriented
• Relaxation breathing
• Grounding exercise
How can teacher wellness activities be integrated into your school?
Teacher Wellness Room
Take 5 for Teachers
Strategies to support teacher wellness

- Incorporating staff wellness into the entire school culture
- Book clubs facilitated by HEARTS staff
  - Fostering Resilient Learners, Trauma Stewardship, Mindful Teaching and Teaching Mindfulness: A Guide For Anyone Who TeachesAnything, Reaching and Teaching Students That Hurt
- Yoga groups facilitated by HEARTS staff
- Mindfulness
- Dedicated time for wellness activities on Professional Development days
- Teacher wellness room
- Wellness Retreats
- Wellness days/ Wellness week
  - Gift of Time
  - Gratitude Challenges
Program Evaluation of HEARTS
Importance of Program Evaluation

- Trainings: Pre-evaluation, Post-evaluation, ARTIC survey
- ARTIC (Attitudes Related to Trauma-Informed Care) completed quarterly
- End of year all staff evaluations
- Evaluations completed at the end of trainings / during meetings to increase participation.
- Quarterly meetings scheduled with Administration and Advisory Team
Consultation and Wellness
(2016-2017 Year End Survey)

- 30% of HEARTS survey respondents utilized at least 1 HEARTS consultation
  - Of those, approximately 80% rated the consultation as “somewhat” or “very helpful”
- 53% of HEARTS survey respondents participated in educator wellness activities or individual wellness sessions
  - Approximately half of respondents rated their level of self-care as “above average” or “excellent”
- 60% of HEARTS survey respondents rated their job satisfaction level as “above average” or “excellent”
- 65% of HEARTS survey respondents rated their burnout level as average or above
AuMHC HEARTS Program Evaluation Data

2016-2017 Year End Survey (Teacher & staff self-report from 10 HEARTS schools):

- Knowledge about trauma and its impact on children ($t = 18.24$, $p < .001$)
- Understanding about trauma-sensitive classroom strategies ($t = 18.46$, $p < .001$)
- Knowledge about burnout and vicarious trauma. ($t = 16.102$, $p < .001$)
- Use of trauma-sensitive practices ($t = 17.10$, $p < .001$)
- Use of restorative practices (e.g., Connection Circles) ($t = 13.31$, $p < .001$)
Percentage Change in Discipline Referrals (Year 1 to Most Recent Year of Implementation)
Percentage Change in Suspensions
(Year 1 to Most Recent Year of Implementation)
Percentage Change in Chronic Absenteeism (Year 1 to Most Recent Year of Implementation)
The goal of HEARTS is to foster trauma informed, safe and supportive schools that promote school success and wellness for all in the school community.

- 80% of survey respondents reported that HEARTS did “moderately well” or better at reaching this goal.
- 47% reported that HEARTS did “extremely well” at reaching this goal.
AuMHC HEARTS Program Evaluation: Qualitative Data

2016-2017 Year End Survey: Teacher & staff self-report from 10 HEARTS schools

- “Better classroom behaviors and more student engagement in lessons”
- “Better self-care among staff. Less blowing up at students”
- “Fewer incidents of kids being restrained. Fewer incidents of police coming to intervene”
- “Less stress within teachers and better strategies to support students”
- “A focus on compassion as a starting point when dealing with challenging individuals”
- “Restorative conversations happening more often instead of reactionary consequences”
Sustainability and Funding

- Administration and staff buy-in - building strong partnerships
- Respecting teachers’ limited time
- Train-the-trainer model
- Increasing teacher wellness
- Responsive and adaptable to feedback
- Collecting data for program evaluation
- Creativity in Funding
  - Community partnerships, grants, partnering with school-districts, government contracts
“Resilience research makes clear that protective factors in one setting have the power to compensate for risks that may be present in other settings.”

(Bonnie Benard, 2003)
Transforming Trauma

A trauma-informed system understands how chronic stress and trauma affects human beings AND creates safe and supportive care environments that foster strength and resiliency, so that everyone in the system can develop, grow, and thrive.
Thank you for all that you do!
Resources

HEARTS Website: www.heartsaurora.com

National Child Traumatic Stress Network: www.nctsn.org

Helping Traumatized Children Learn: traumasensitiveschools.org

ACES Too High: acestoohigh.com

Lives in the Balance: livesinthebalance.org

Mindful Schools: www.mindfulschools.org


