

Designing a Trauma Sensitive Approach to Student Conduct Policy within the Virginia Tiered Systems of Supports (VTSS)

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Session Objectives

- Identify how trauma relates to what is often labeled as student misbehavior/discipline in school.
- Categorize behavior by related social emotional learning skill and the effect of the behavior on school climate.
- Identify levels of administrative response appropriate for specific categories of behavior within a tiered system of supports.

Learning Brain Vs Survival Brain



How does trauma manifest in school?

- Academic problems in memory, language development, and writing
- Academic failure
- Apprehension or avoidance of people, situations or places
- Poor relationships with others or loss of relationships
- Difficulties with attention, impulsivity and self-regulation
- Chronic absenteeism
- Use of drugs or alcohol
- Disruptions in eating/sleeping/self-care

What does trauma look like in the classroom?

- Anxiety, fear and worry
- Inattention or hypervigilance
- Angry outbursts
- Irritability with peers, teachers, events
- Increased somatic complaints
- Impulsivity
- Avoidance

What is behavior?

A response of an individual or group to an action, person, environment or stimulus

Behavior can be observed and measured

BEHAVIOR IS FEEDBACK FOR US.....

Behavior is communication

What we see: Behavior

What we don't see:
What's under the surface



Student Behavior: What's under the iceberg?

Negative Effects of Suspension

“Frequent out-of-school suspension does not produce better learning environments, deter future misbehavior, or stimulate effective parental involvement.” Instead, suspension and expulsion:

- **place students at risk for dropping out;**
- **are being applied disproportionately to students with disabilities and African American students;**
- **fail to address the underlying reasons for the behavior;**
- **do not consider the social-emotional development or environmental influences;**
- **decrease academic engagement;**
- **decrease academic achievement; and**
- **for some, create a pathway to prison rather than to college and a career.**

[Climate Change: Implementing School Discipline Practices That Create a Positive School Climate](#)

Implicit Bias

EQUALITY VERSUS EQUITY



In the first image, it is assumed that everyone will benefit from the same supports. They are being treated equally.



In the second image, individuals are given different supports to make it possible for them to have equal access to the game. They are being treated equitably.



In the third image, all three can see the game without any supports or accommodations because the cause of the inequity was addressed. The systemic barrier has been removed.

How do we address trauma induced behavior in schools?

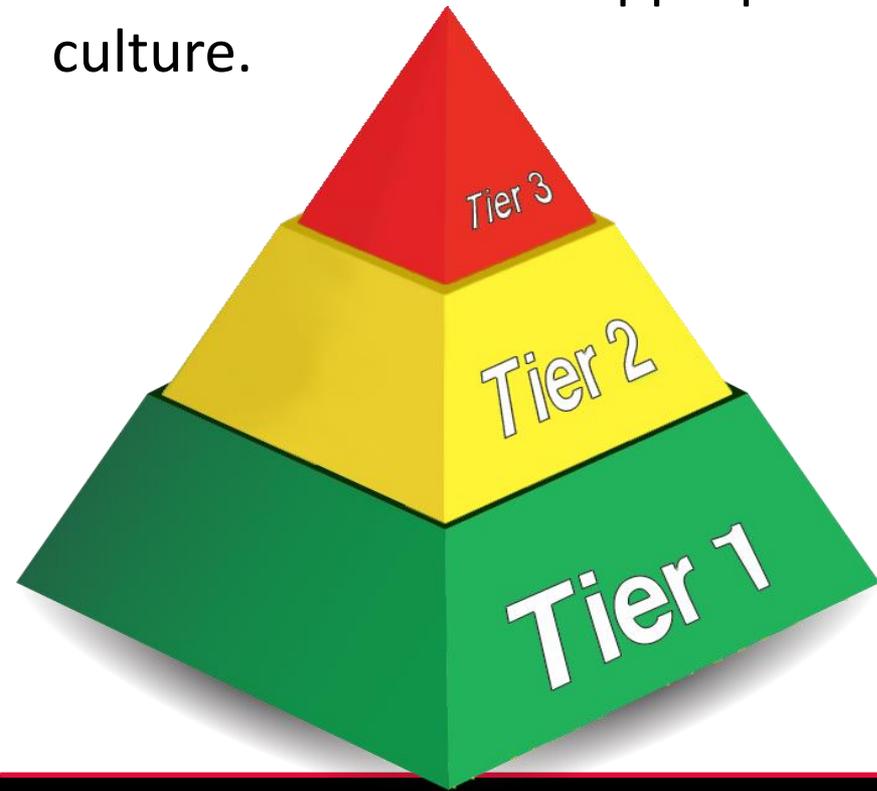
- Develop a tiered system of supports to address the behaviors that negatively affect school climate.
- Adopt trauma-sensitive practices as a way to respond to all student behaviors.
- Explicitly teach social emotional learning skills.
- Recognize the pattern of behaviors that may indicate trauma has occurred.
- Develop discipline policies and practices that are trauma sensitive.
- Engage families and community partners.

Tiered systems of supports

Virginia Tiered Systems of Support (VTSS) is a data-informed decision making framework for establishing the social culture and academic and behavioral supports needed for the school to be an effective learning environment (for academics, behavior and social-emotional wellbeing) for all students.

Virginia Tiered Systems of Supports (VTSS)

We support divisions in establishing a framework of supports and evidenced-based practices with increasing levels of intensity. Divisions determine appropriate supports based on need / fit/ culture.



Tier I: All students have the majority of their academic, behavioral, social and emotional needs addressed.

Tier II: Up to 20 percent of students may need supplemental instruction and supports.

Tier III: Up to 5 percent of students may need intensive, individualized instruction and supports.

Trauma Sensitive Thinking

- **Think:** lack of skill, **not** intentional misbehavior
- **Think:** building missing skills, **not** shaming for lack of skills
- **Think:** nurture, **not** criticize
- **Think:** teach, **not** blame
- **Think:** discipline, **not** punishment

Trauma sensitive classrooms

Target three key areas:

- Relationships
- Environment
- Classroom Practices

Goal: To build protective factors

Building Relationships

“If children experience stress (trauma) but also have a warm, loving adult to support them, then that child will be able to respond to and recover from even the most difficult of circumstances.”

Melissa Bright, Research Scientist University of Florida



Classroom Environment

Create a welcoming space and reduce environmental triggers.

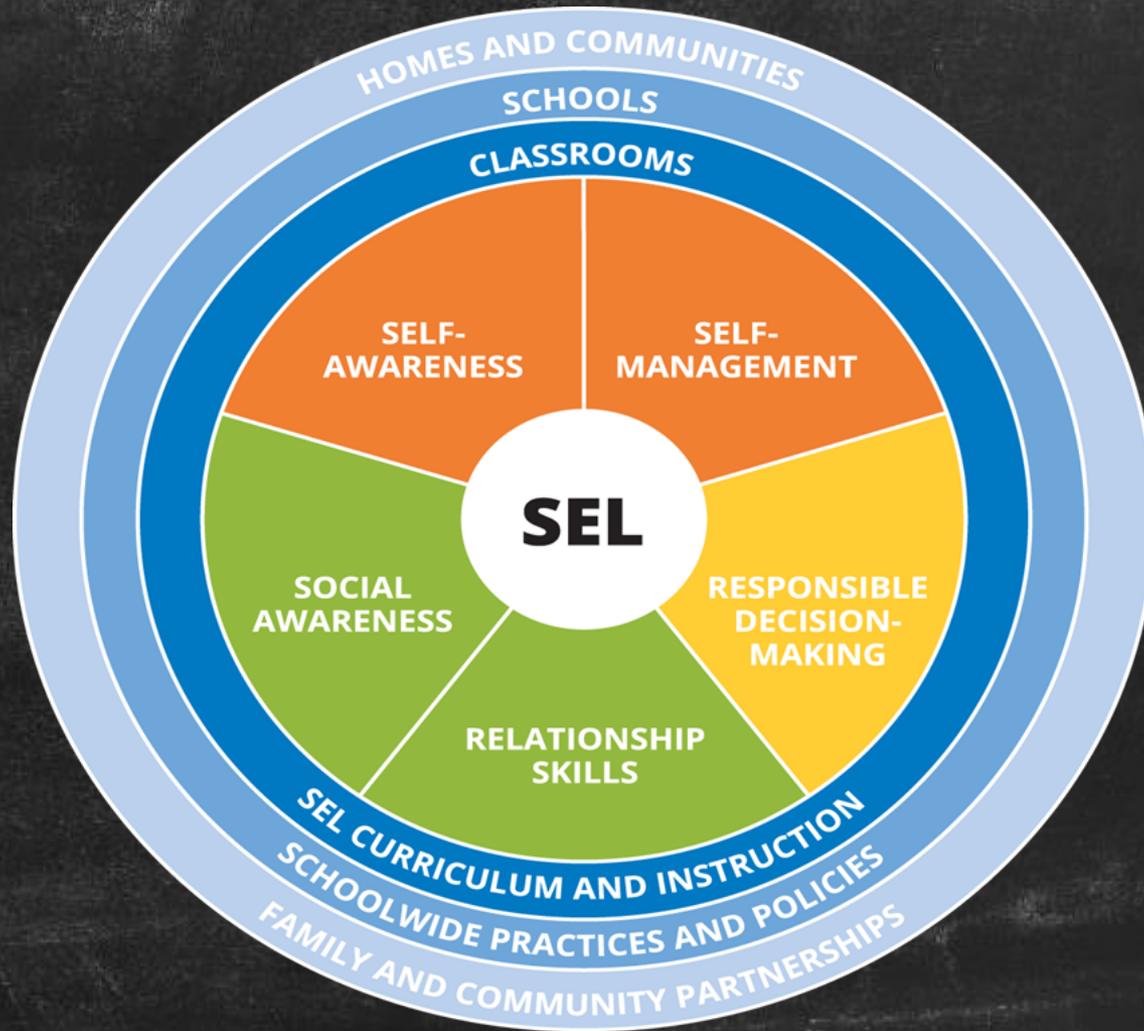
A trauma sensitive classroom:

- Provides a sense of safety.
- Creates opportunities to interact with other students to develop and strengthen relationships.
- Reduces sensory overload.
- Includes a quiet space for students to go when they feel overwhelmed.

Classroom Practices

- Explicitly taught routines
- Explicitly taught SEL skills
- Positive reinforcement of behavior
- Restorative practices to address harm
- Family engagement
- Relationships that foster trust and build protective factors

CASEL SEL Competencies



Benefits of SEL

Increase

- Academic performance
- Self-confidence
- Behavior outcomes
- Positive attitudes towards school and interactions with others
- Teacher confidence
- Self-efficacy
- Job satisfaction and well-being

Decrease

- Student aggression
- Emotional distress of students
- Perceived stress of teachers

Student Incident and Administrative Response Decision Making Matrix



Student Behavior Descriptor by Category	Student's Story	Instructional Intervention	Behavioral Intervention	Level of Administrative Response/Sanction
Impedes academic progress 1. 2.				
Interferes with school operations 1. 2.				
Creates Negative Relationships 1. 2.				
Creates a Safety Concern 1. 2.				
Endangers Self or Others 1. 2.				

Matrix developed by Rebecca Kahila, Virginia Department of Education, March 2019; Graphic from CASEL

The Behavior - Response Framework

Categorize Behavior

What harm was caused?

Did the behavior ...

- Impede academic progress?
- Interfere with school operations?
- Harm relationships?
- Create a safety concern?
- Endanger self or others?



The Importance of Story

Ask Not, “What did you do?”

Ask, “What happened to you?”



Understanding the Story

- ✓ Describe student behavior without bias and without criminalizing it. What effect does the behavior have on the school climate?
- ✓ What's the student's story? What's under the iceberg?
- ✓ What SEL skills may need to be addressed?
- ✓ What response can change the behavior and restore balance?

Leveled Administrative Responses to Student Behavior

- Are grounded in addressing the student's social-emotional learning needs.
- Include supports and interventions to help the student and family address and change the behavior.
- Do not rely solely on sanctions to change behavior.
- Are applied using an established range of responses.

Interventions/Supports and Sanctions



Establish a leveled response system of instructional and behavioral interventions, supports, and sanctions to respond to the student behavior in order to

- Change behavior and
- Ensure safety.

School/Division Administrative Responses

Level	Behavioral Supports	Instructional Supports	Sanctions
Level 1			
Level 2			
Level 3			
Level 4			
Level 5			

The Purpose of Sanctions

“Suspensions, expulsions and other exclusionary discipline policies and practices can be detrimental for school climate and can negatively impact student learning and social and emotional development.” The Continuing Need to Re-think Discipline. Link: [U.S. Department of Education](#)

Three reasons to exclude a student:

- Safety,
- Respite, and
- Punishment as a means of changing behavior.

Sanctions

- Class Removal
- In-School Suspension
- Out-of-school suspension
- Expulsion
- Placed in an alternative setting
- Reported to law enforcement

Supports and Interventions

- Instructional Supports address the student's academic progress and provide the level of instruction needed to keep the student on track to graduate.



- Behavioral Supports address the student's SEL skill development and teach skills to replace the ones learned in trauma.

Instructional Supports

Code	Type of Instructional Support
1	Permanent Change in Placement for Student with Disabilities (per IEP)
2	Home-based Education
3	Virtual Learning Programs
4	Alternative Program
5	Alternative Hours of Attendance
6	Other Instructional Programs

Behavioral Supports

Code	Type of Behavioral Support
1	Referral to Specialized Instructional Support Personnel or Program
2	Referral to Multi-tiered Support System Team
3	Referral to the Threat Assessment Team
4	Participation in Restorative Practices
5	Parent Contact and Involvement in Supports
6	Other Behavior Support Intervention

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