

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

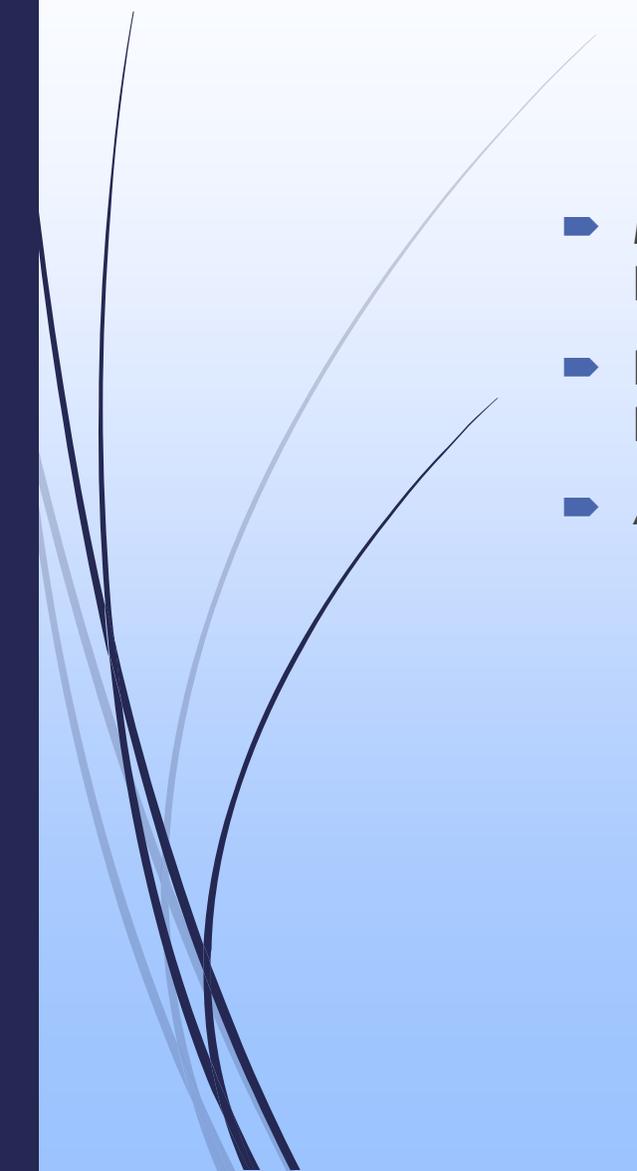


**HEARTS**

Healthy Environments and Response to Trauma in Schools



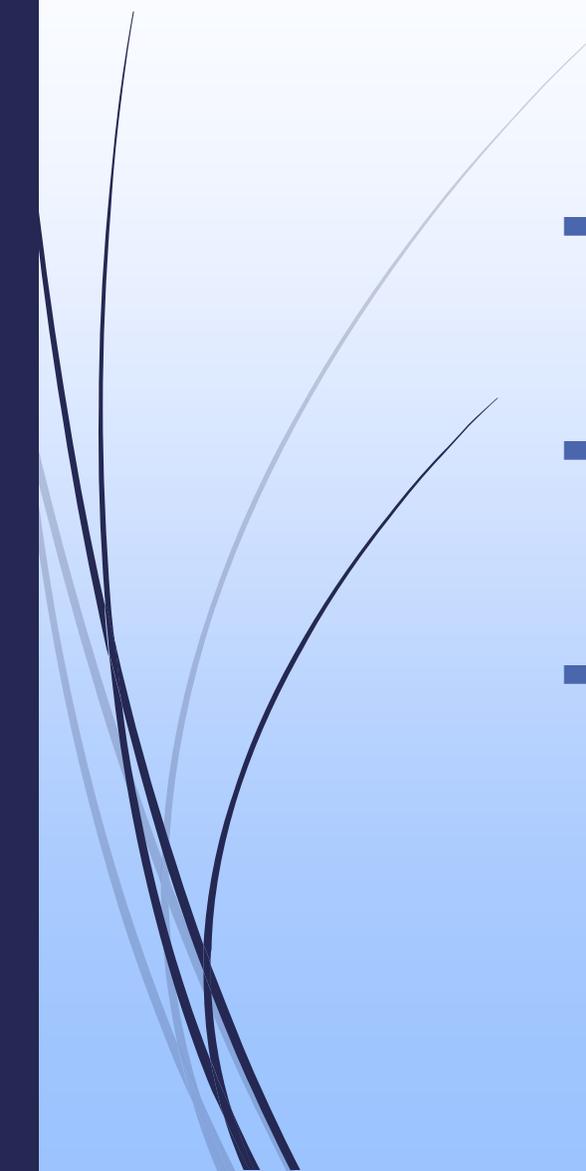
# Introductions



- ▶ Megan Brennan, Psy D. Program Director, School-based Services South, Co-Director, Healthy Environments and Response to Trauma in Schools (HEARTS)
- ▶ Laura McArthur, PhD. Program Director, School-based Services North, Co-Director, HEARTS
- ▶ Allison A. Stiles, MA Child Clinical PhD Candidate University of Denver



# 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)

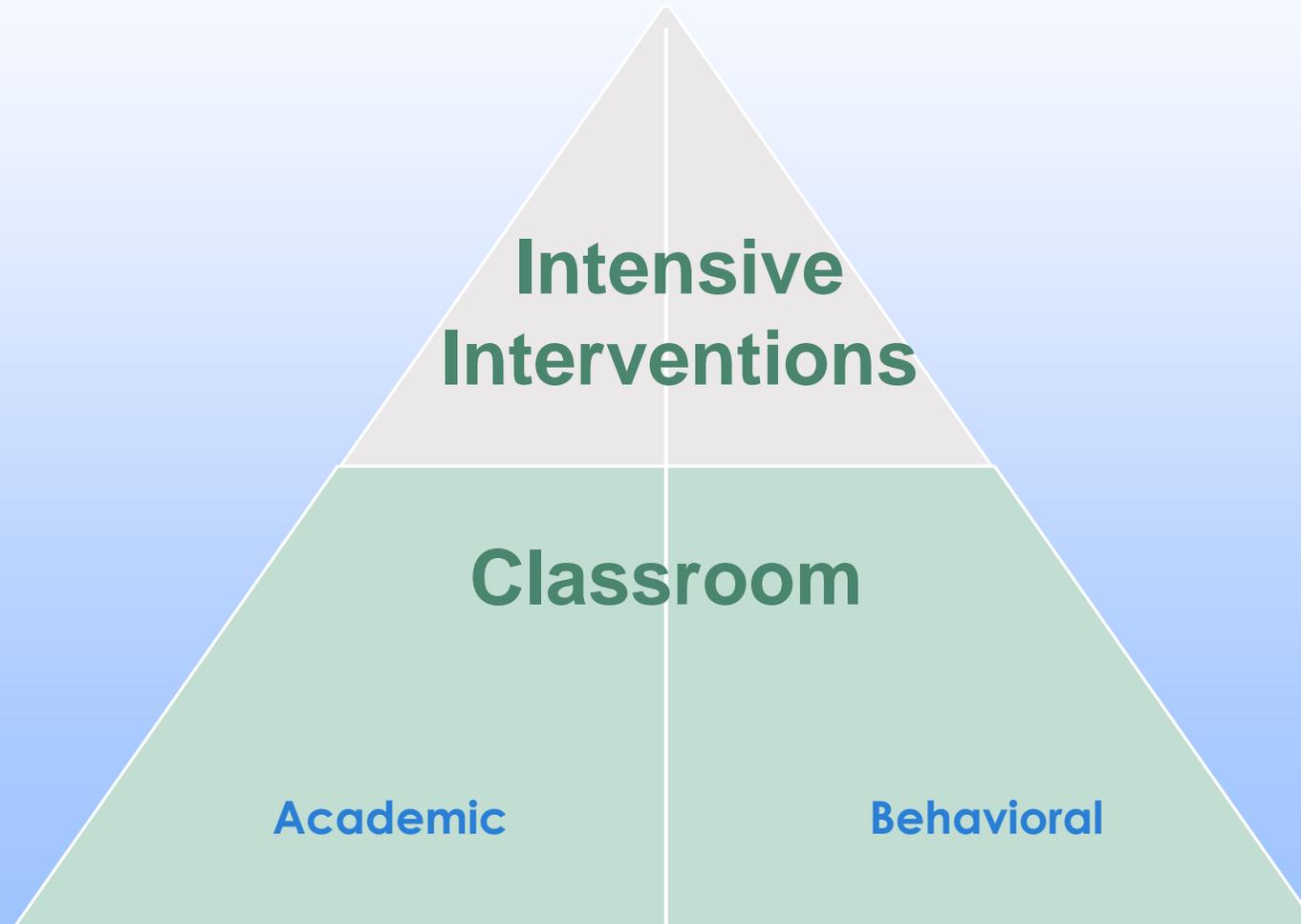


# Aurora Public Schools

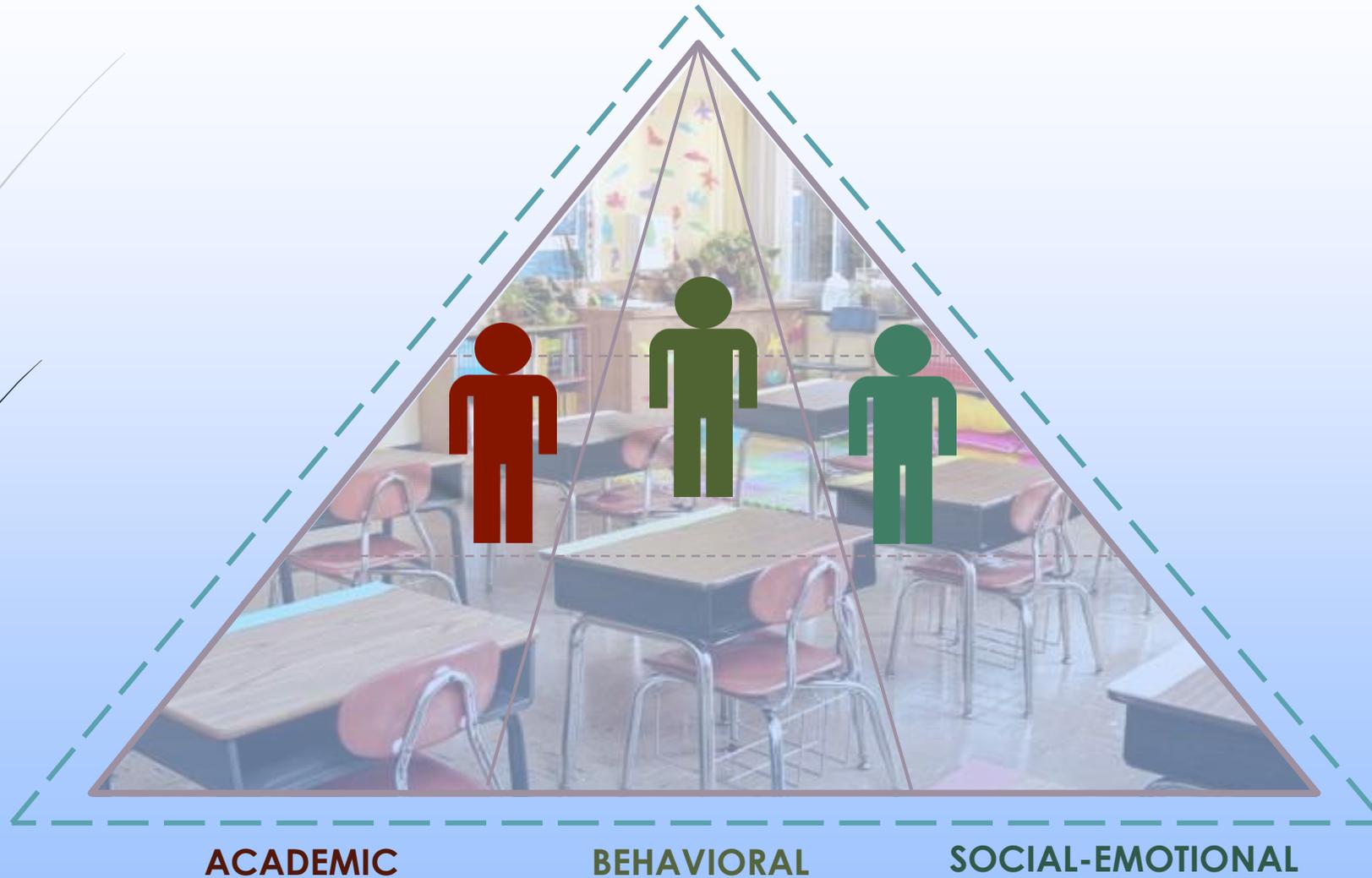
- 71% of students in APS are eligible for free and reduced lunch (HEARTS schools average over 90%).
- Students from 131 countries, 133 languages. 37% of students are second language learners, with 86% of those speaking Spanish.
- On time graduation rate: 55% compared to 76 % for the whole state
- Dropout 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

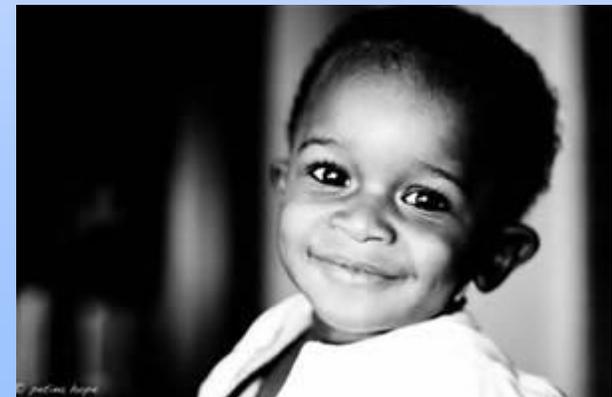


# Transforming the approach:



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?

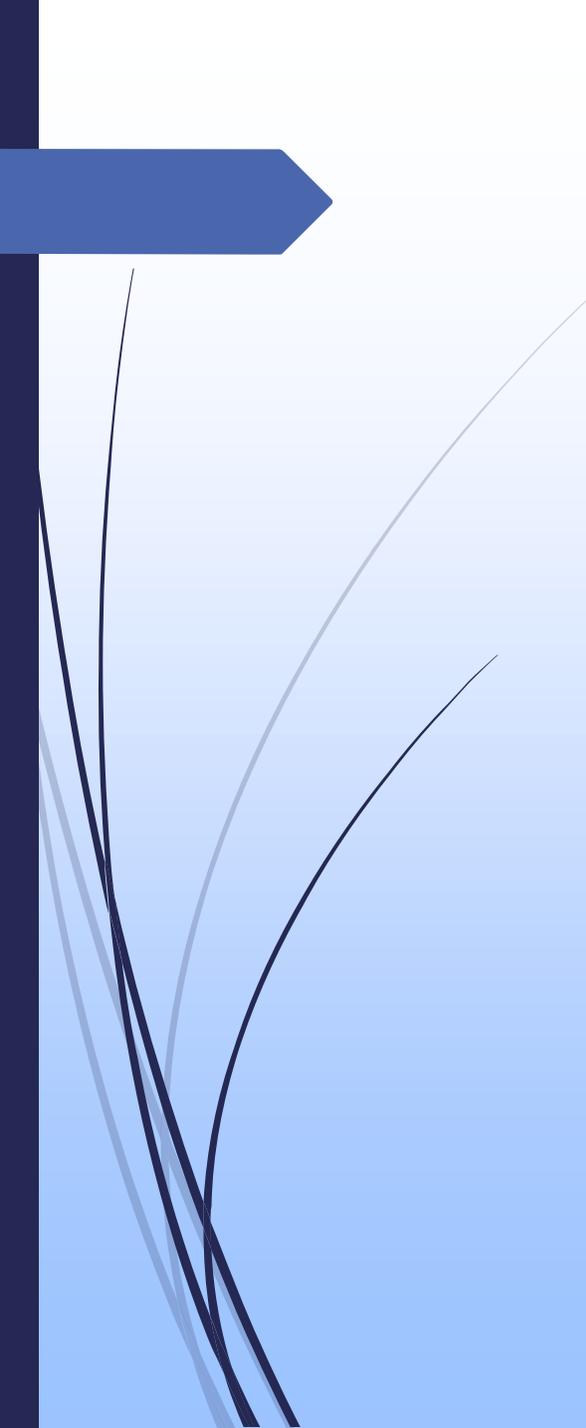
***Children who have experienced prolonged trauma do anything to survive. Not because they want to but because they need to.***



# 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

(Children's Defense Fund, 2007)

## Poverty and Racial Inequity

Babies born into **poverty**:

1 in 3 **Latino**

1 in 2 **African-American**

(Children's Defense Fund, 2007)

APS suspensions:

**African-American 2.3x**

**Latino 2.24 x**

APS expulsions:

**African-American 2.5x**

**Latino 2.29 x**

(CDE 2011-2012)

Dropping out of school increases risk of imprisonment

(Center for Labor Market Studies, 2009)

Chance of being **imprisoned** in lifetime (if born in 2001):

A **Latino** boy: **1 in 6**

An **African-American** boy: **1 in 3**

(Children's Defense Fund, 2007)

## Unaddressed trauma

More days of school **absence**

(Hurt et al., 2001)

Lower grade-point average

(Hurt et al., 2001)

Higher risk of school **dropout**

(Porche et al, 2011)



# The work of HEARTS: Shifting Perspective:

*Intentionally Seek to Know our Students...*

Change the paradigm from one that asks,

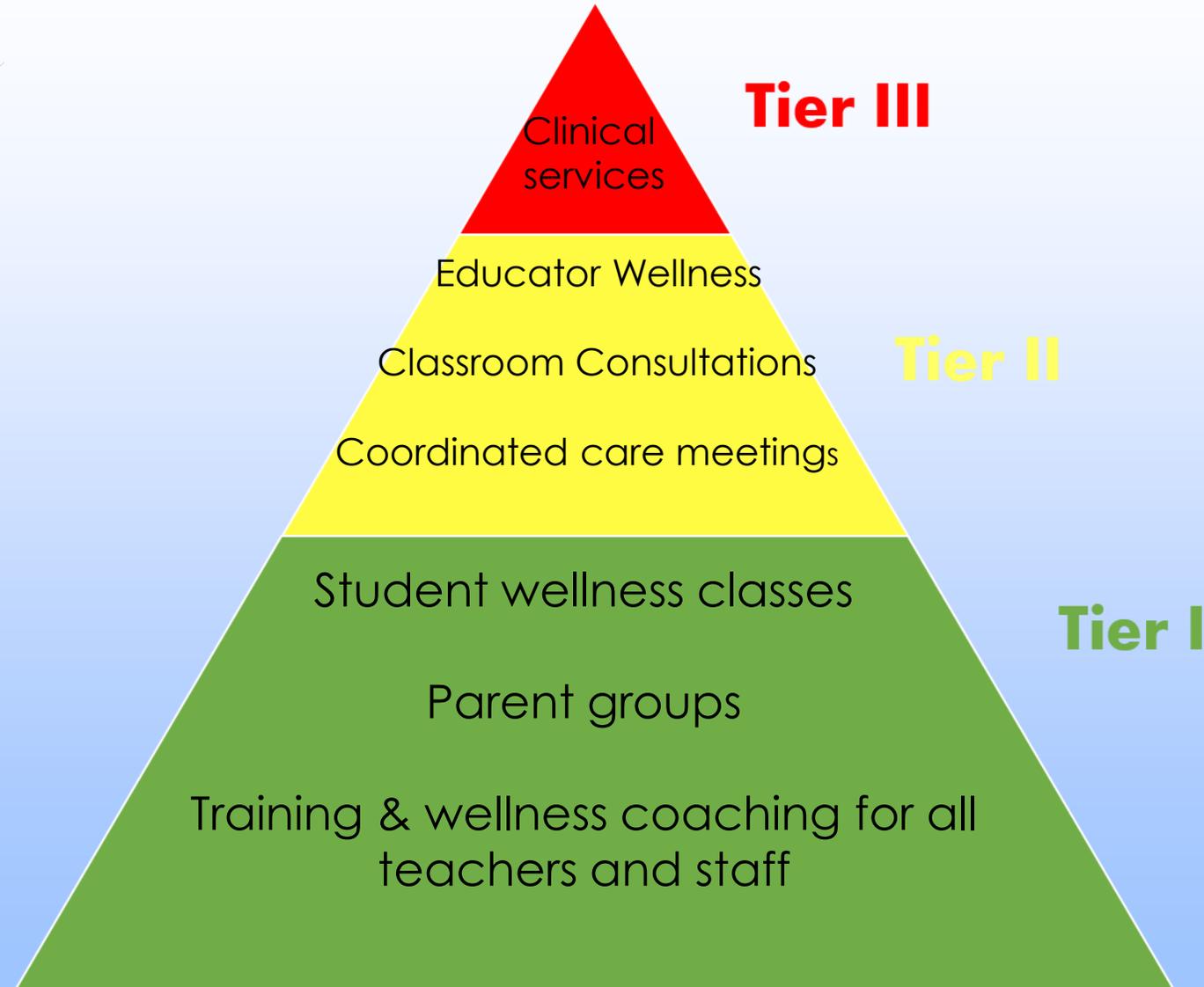
**"What is wrong with you?"**

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...*

# Structure of HEARTS



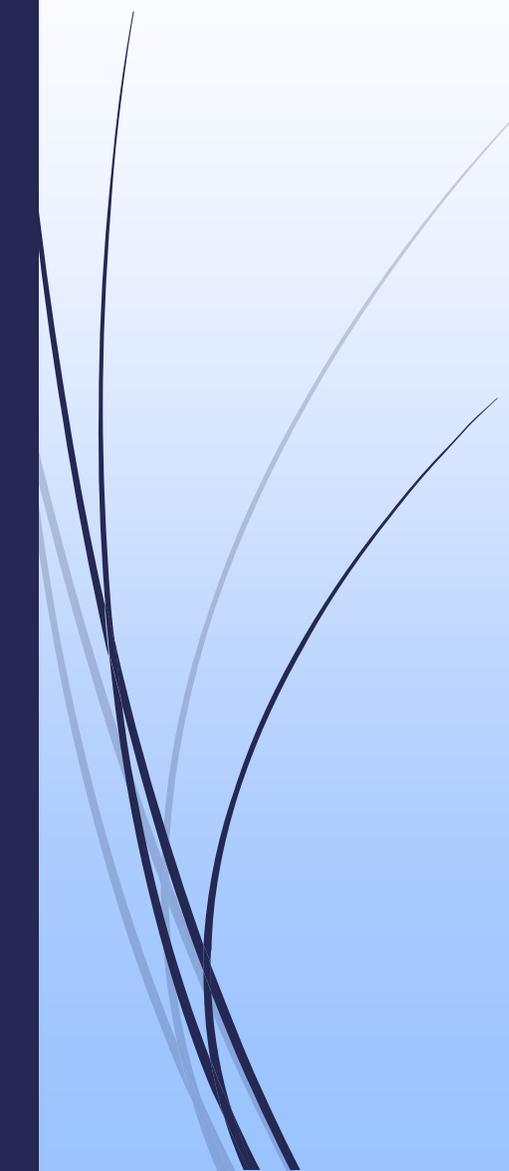


# Initial Discussions with School

- ▶ Initial meeting with Administration/ Leadership Team
- ▶ Evaluation of school's 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 day
  - ▶ 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

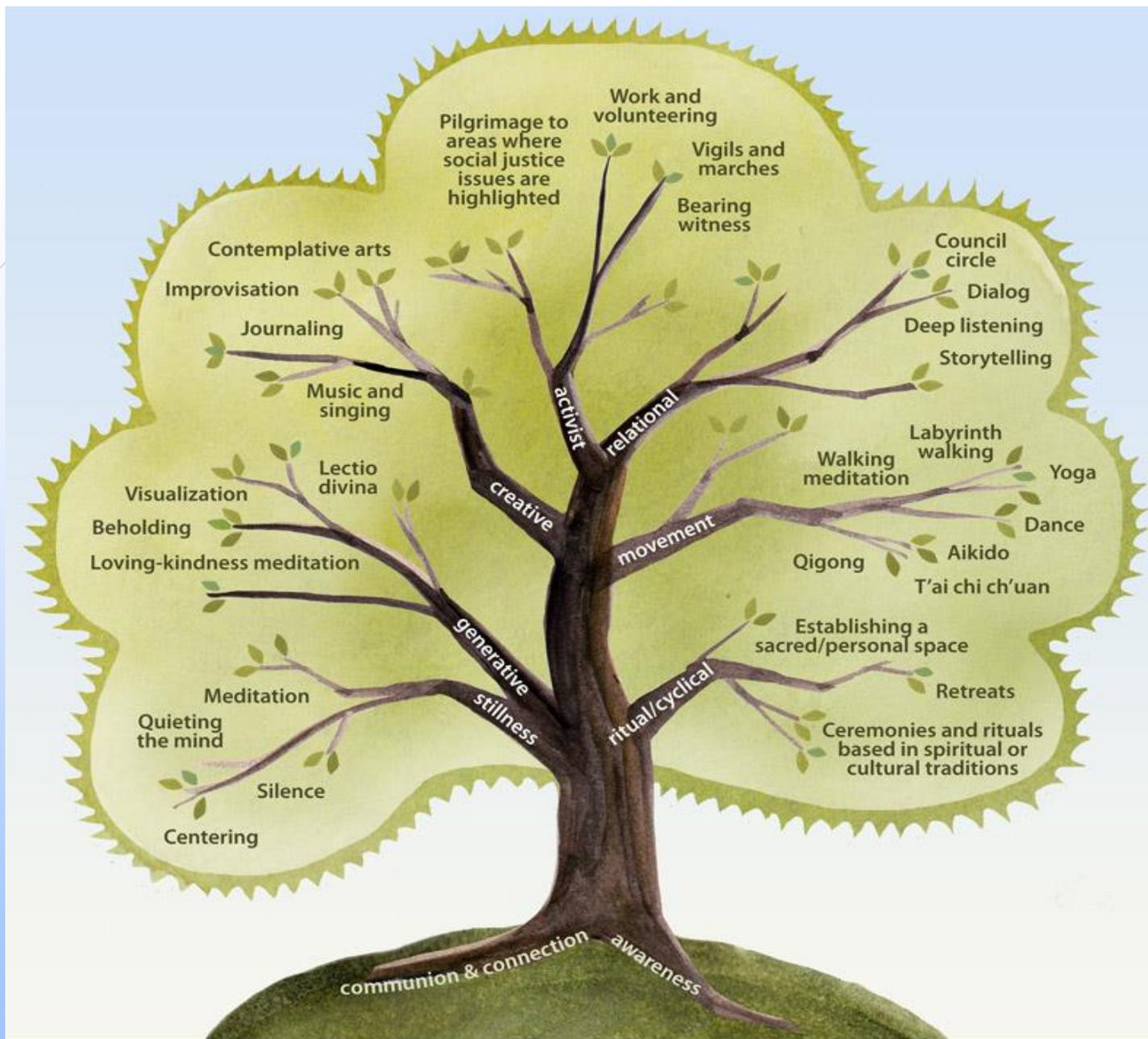


# Building Resilience: Personal Steps ABC's of Self Care

- 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)



## The Tree of Contemplative Practices

[www.contemplativemind.org](http://www.contemplativemind.org)

# Compassion Satisfaction



*How do you remind yourself,  
during those stressful moments,  
why you do this work?*

# Wellness



# Compassion Satisfaction



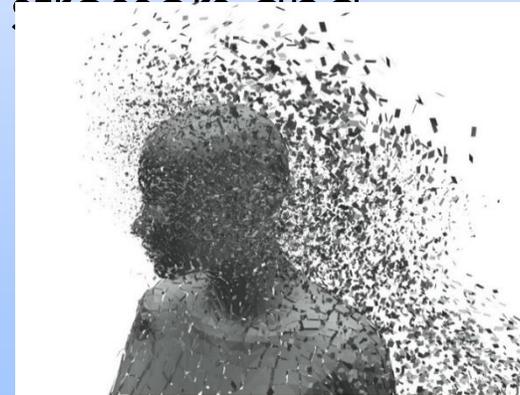
- Pleasure one derives from being able to do one's work well (*Stamm, 2009*)
  - Pleasure in helping others through work
  - Positive feelings about colleagues
  - Positive feelings about contributing to work setting and/or to greater good of society

*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)

©hills www.myburnoutthing.com

# 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

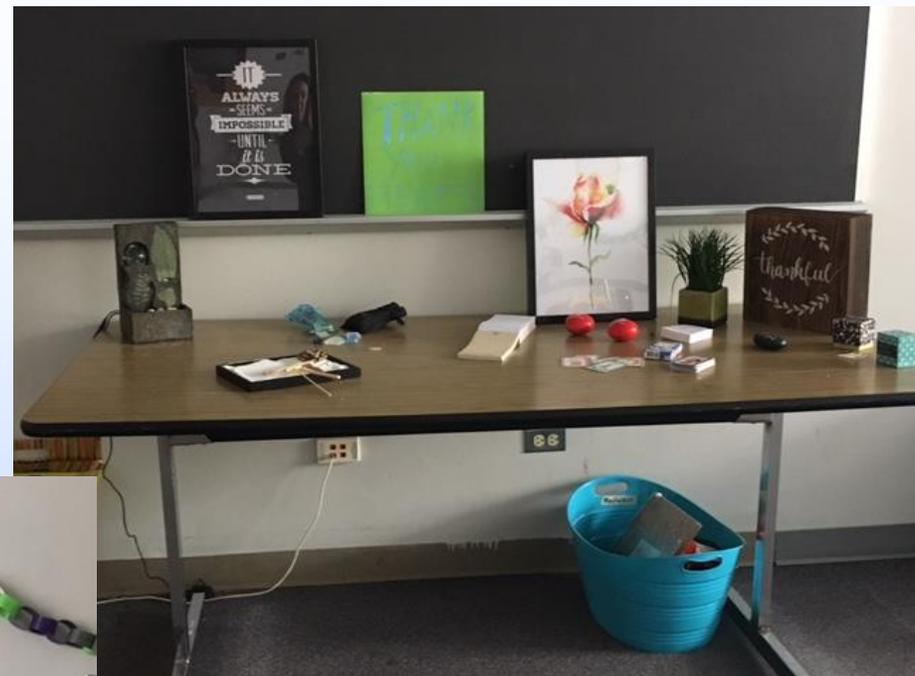


# Turn and Talk



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 Teaches Anything, 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

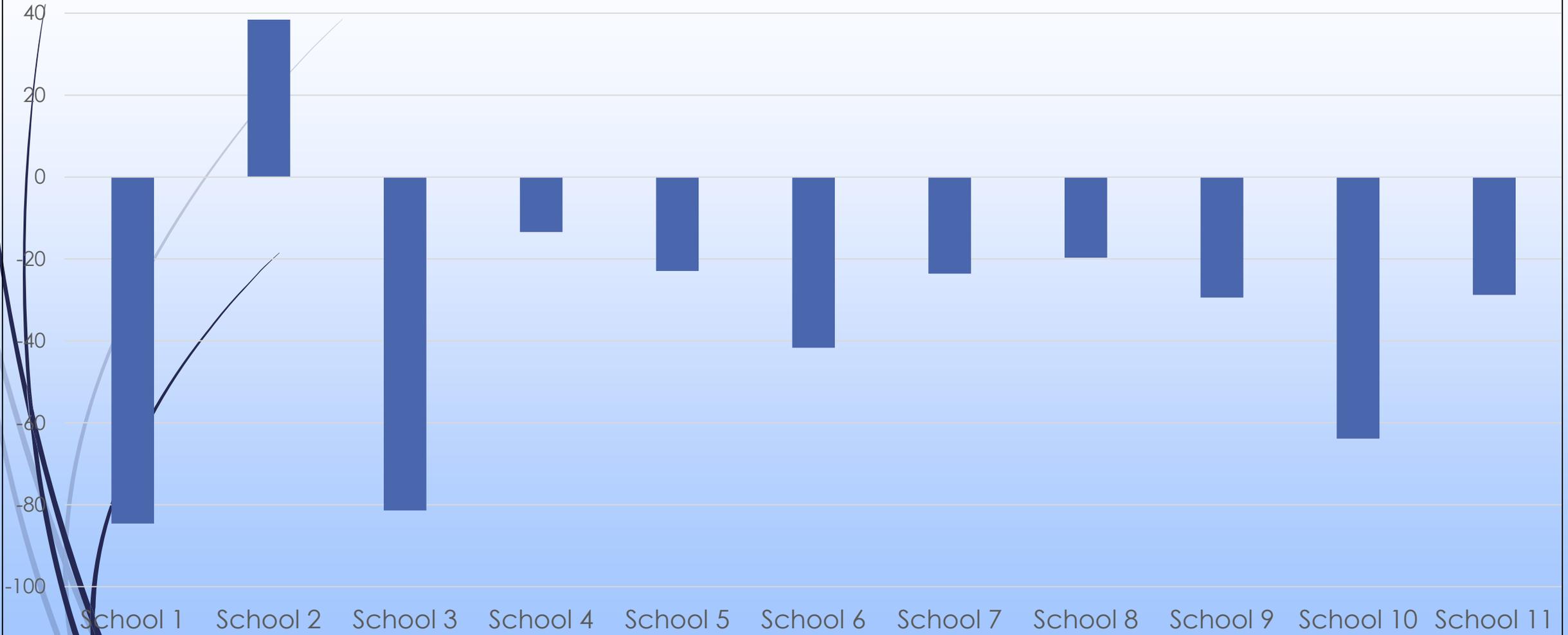


# AuMHC HEARTS Program Evaluation Data

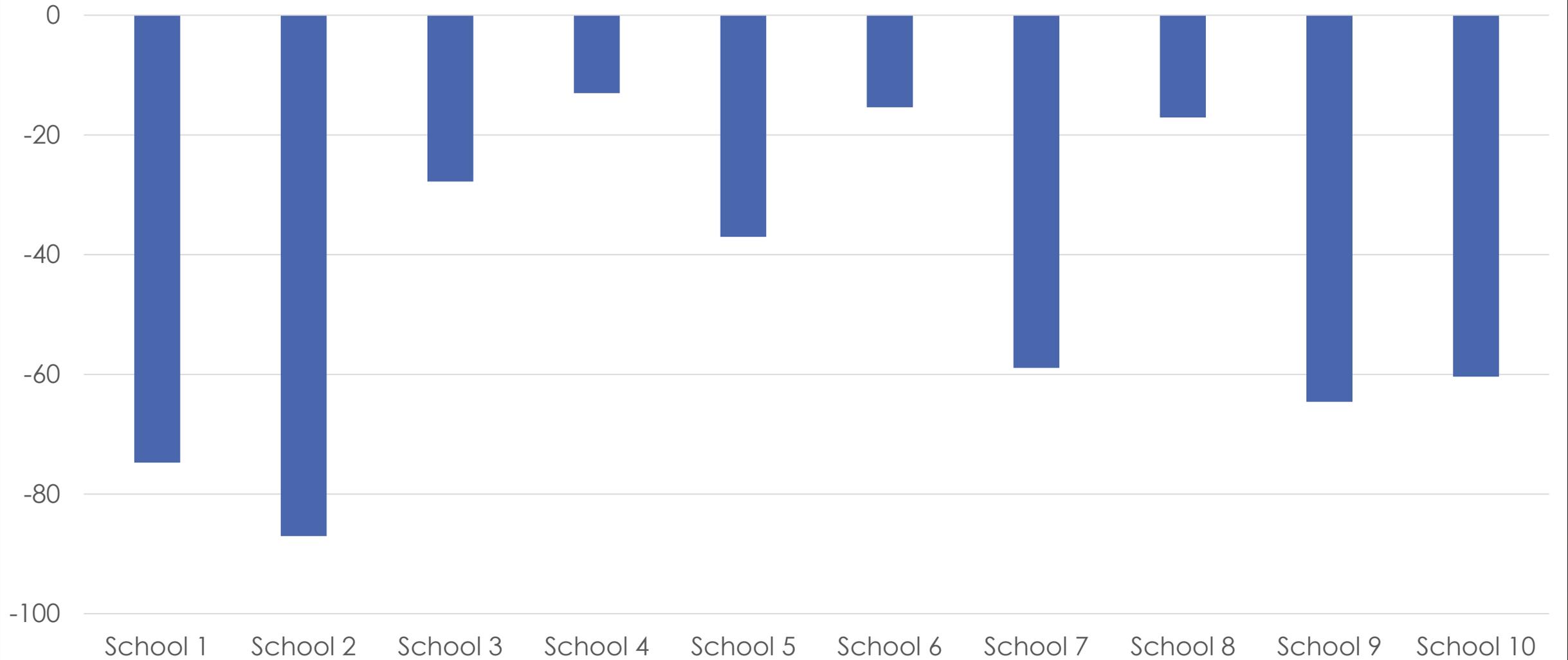
2016-2017 Year End Survey (Teacher & staff self-report from 10 HEARTS schools):

- 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) ( $t = 13.31, p < .001$ )

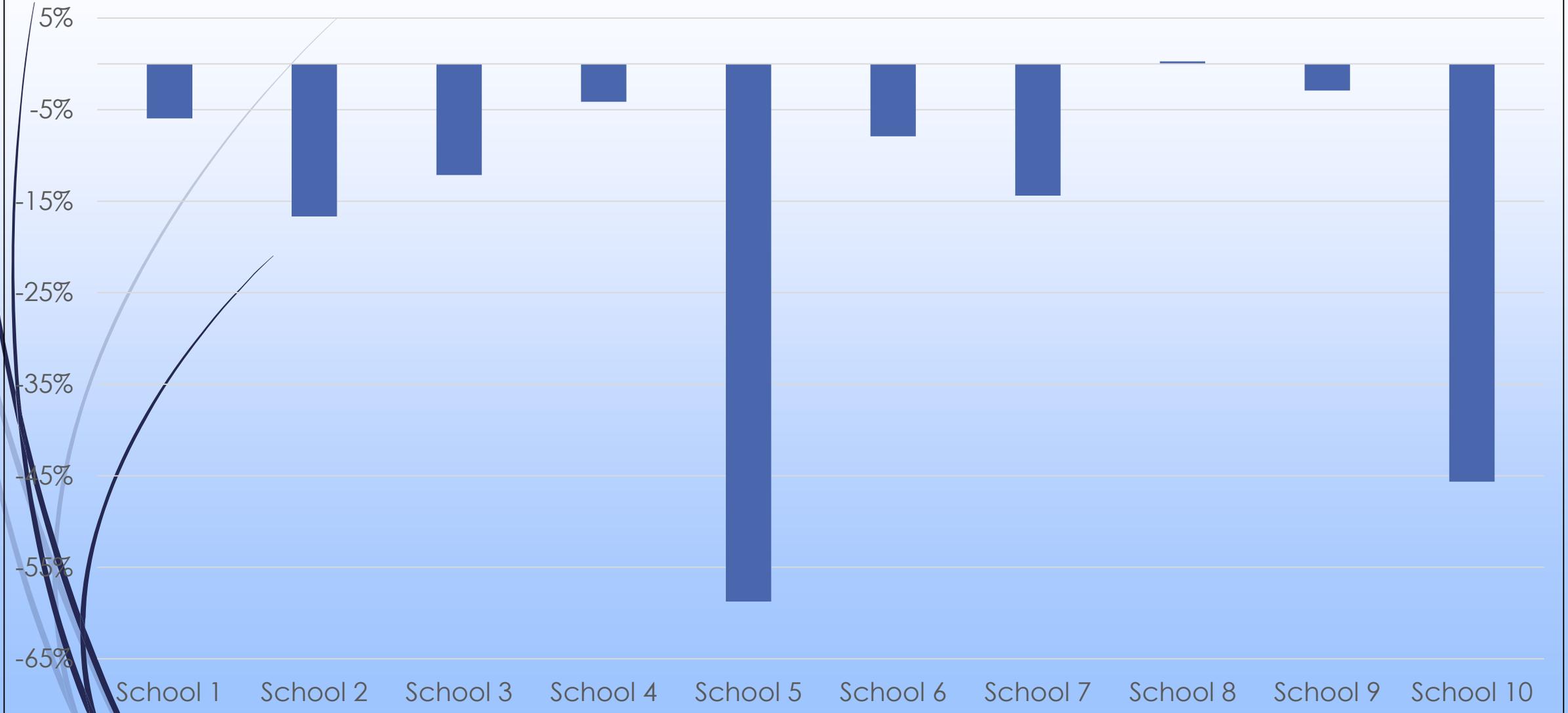
# Percentage Change in Discipline Referrals (Year 1 to Most Recent Year of Implementation)



# 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)



# AuMHC HEARTS Program Evaluation Data

(2016-2017 Year End Survey)



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

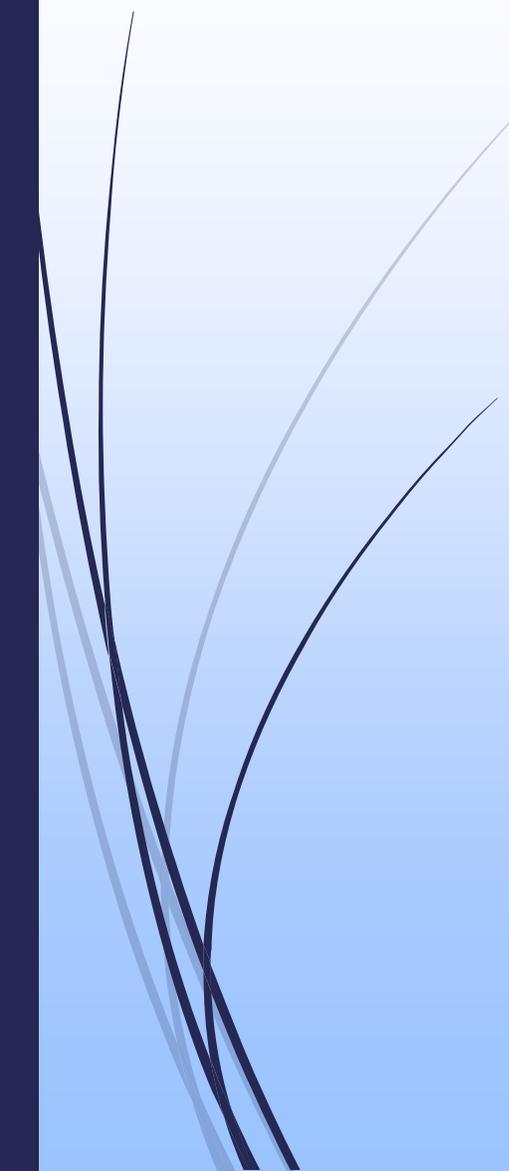
2016-2017 Year End Survey: Teacher & staff self-report  
from 10 HEARTS schools

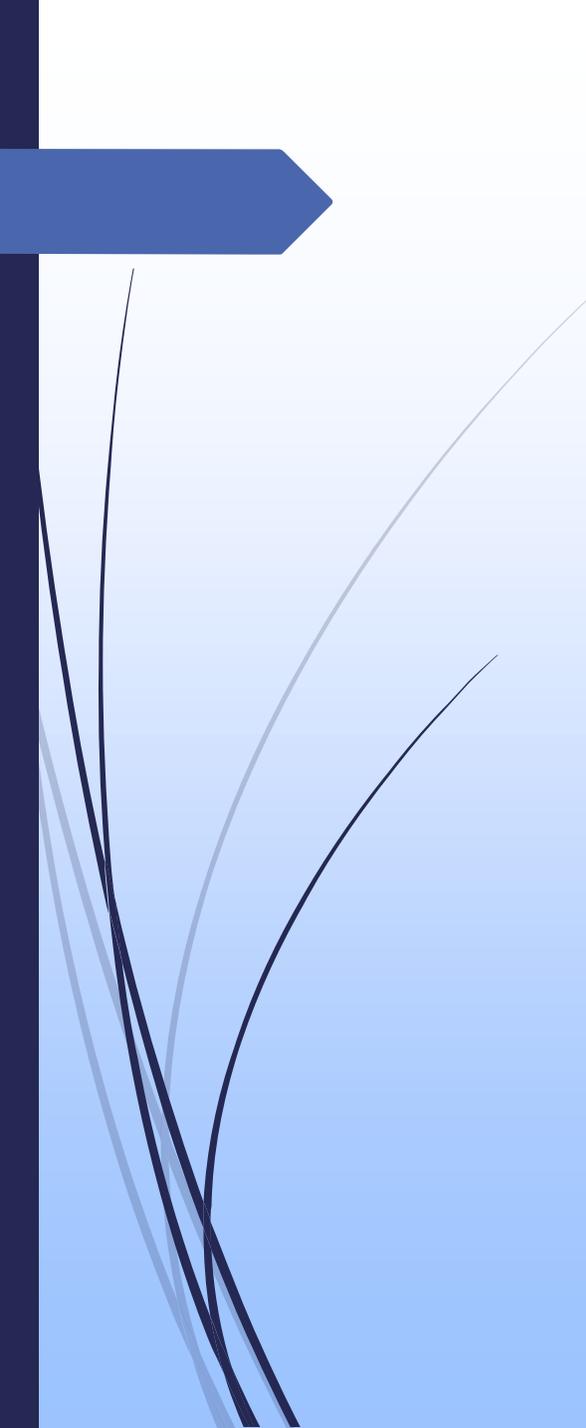


- “Better classroom behaviors and more student engagement in lessons”
- “Better self-care among staff. Less blowing up at students”
- “Fewer incidents of kids being restrained. Fewer incidents of police coming to intervene”
- “Less stress within teachers and better strategies to support students”
- “A 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](http://www.heartsaurora.com)

**National Child Traumatic Stress Network:**  
[www.nctsn.org](http://www.nctsn.org)

**Helping Traumatized Children Learn:**  
[traumasensitiveschools.org](http://traumasensitiveschools.org)

**ACES Too High:**  
[acestoohigh.com](http://acestoohigh.com)

**Lives in the Balance:**  
[livesinthebalance.org](http://livesinthebalance.org)

**Mindful Schools:**  
[www.mindfulschools.org](http://www.mindfulschools.org)





# HEARTS publications and presentations

**HEARTS program in Aurora provides healthy student response to trauma. Aurora Sentinel.**

<https://www.aurorasentinel.com/news/hearts-program-aurora-provides-healthy-student-response-trauma/>

Brennan, M., Lanin, J. (2017) **Healthy Environments and Response to Trauma in Schools**. Invited presentation at Colorado Department of Education Conference, Englewood CO.

Dorado, J., Martinez, M., McArthur, L., & Leibovitz, T. (2016). **Healthy Environments and Response to Trauma in Schools (HEARTS): A whole-school, multi-level prevention and intervention program for creating trauma-informed, safe and supportive schools**. *School Mental Health: Special Issue – Trauma-informed schools*, 10(1), 163-176.

McArthur, L. (2016). **Healthy Environments and Response to Trauma in Schools: An Aurora Mental Health Program in collaboration with Aurora Public Schools**. Invited presentation at Colorado Behavioral Health Conference, Breckenridge, CO. September, 2016.

McArthur, L., Kailin, M., & O'Muireadaigh, J. (2015). **Healthy Environments and Response to Trauma in Schools (HEARTS): A trauma-informed approach aimed at ending the School-to-Prison Pipeline**. Presented at the 20<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference on Advancing School Mental Health. November, 2015. New Orleans, LA.

Ferrel, F., Cassetta, G., Haller, C., & McArthur, L. (2015, April). **Colorado Framework for School Behavioral Health Services: Lessons Learned From the Field**. Presented at the 2015 Colorado Education Initiative Conferene. Denver, CO.