



TRAUMA INFORMED EDUCATION COALITION (TIEC)

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TESTIMONY BEFORE THE BASIC EDUCATION FUNDING COMMISSION

PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA

SEPTEMBER 14, 2023

To the members of the Commission, Representative Sturla and Senator Phillips-Hill, Chairs, thank you for this opportunity to speak before you today and to further submit the written testimony of the members of the Trauma Informed Education Coalition concerning resources needed to address the impact of trauma and mental health on school climate and student learning.

I am Dr. Joan Evelyn Duvall-Flynn, Chair of the Trauma Informed Education Coalition (TIEC). TIEC is a diverse collaboration of lay membership and professionals from the fields of education, counseling, psychology, human development, and social work. We plan and conduct professional development training concerning trauma and its ramifications for educators and other entities that serve children and their families.

This opportunity is precious to us. Eight years ago, working with the NAACP State Conference, we brought the issue of trauma to the first iteration of this committee. Since that time, much has been researched and written on the issue and it is now commonly understood and accepted that trauma is pervasive among our young, and that schools must have the resources to address it.

As we have come to know much about each of you as legislators and commission members through your web sites and sponsored or supported bills, we feel assured that you understand the drastic needs of basic education as our students face challenges and situations new to society.

How are our children? They are wounded, frightened, anxious, and stressed; and they are sitting in classrooms across the commonwealth in the care of individuals who have chosen to serve society in roles such as school administrators, classroom teachers, nurses, social workers, and other staff supporters.

Members of this commission understand that trauma refers to the effect an event has on an individual who has an overwhelming experience. Because you know that, some of you here are working on legislation that concerns for example: social media, drug abuse, human trafficking, the complexities faced by LGBTQ students, internet access and the impact a meaningful education has on our nation's global interdependency.

Administrative Team: Chair: Dr. Joan Evelyn Duvall-Flynn, Treasurer: Mrs. Michelle Shields
Dr. Christopher Barnes, Mr. Jonathan Flynn, Ms. Jeanette Oswald



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Currently, the issue before the committee is this. The Commonwealth Court decreed on February 7, 2021, that the present approach to funding our schools has no rational basis and does not serve the interests of the commonwealth. No moral, ethical, logical, or mathematic explanation could make sense of the school funding system. As a result, that sandcastle, as was destined, has been washed away by the tide of justice.

This commission has been given an immense responsibility and a significant moral charge. You have the privilege to create a new vision of education in Pennsylvania – a system that is more positive, more efficient - more just - to create a new mission for school funding.

It is time for a new beginning. This commission now must start from scratch and design a system that provides equal protection under law for each child in Pennsylvania. It is your charge to rebuild – to espouse an ethos concerning the young over whose lives the legislature holds virtually boundaryless power.

So, the foundational questions before the Committee emerge: What are your collective attitudes and beliefs about the value of each child living in Pennsylvania? What is the worth of each child's potential? What is your collective philosophy on the purpose of education?

Thank you for taking on the task. Your work will change the history of Pennsylvania. TIECs specific recommendations are submitted in our written testimony. We are at the service of the Commission to support your efforts in any way we can. We are happy to address any questions you may have.



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WRITTEN TESTIMONY SUBMITTED TO

THE BASIC EDUCATION COMMISSION CONCERNING:

**RESOURCES NEEDED TO ADDRESS THE IMPACT OF TRAUMA AND MENTAL
HEALTH ON SCHOOL CLIMATE AND STUDENT LEARNING**

Much has been written and multi-millions of dollars have been spent since the issue of trauma as an impediment to school performance was brought to the attention of the education community nationwide.

In the interest of the Commission's time and efforts, TIEC will be concise and keep its recommendations focused on the topic as assigned to us. We remind the Commission as it works to recreate and design a Basic Education Funding Framework that the world has agreements concerning children and young people as espoused in and to wit are seen as:

In the interest of the Commission's time and efforts, TIEC will be concise and keep its recommendations focused on the topic as assigned to us. We remind the Commission as it works to rebuild the Basic Education Funding Framework that the world has agreements concerning children and young people as espoused in [Convention on the Rights of the Child text | UNICEF](#) and with particular attention to Article 29 as pertains to education; and that the Commissions recognize the relevance of the components of this document to the issue of trauma.

Article 29

1. States Parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to:

(a) The development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential;

(b) The development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and for the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations;

(c) The development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilizations different from his or her own;



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(d) The preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin;

(e) The development of respect for the natural environment.

2. No part of the present article or article 28 shall be construed so as to interfere with the liberty of individuals and bodies to establish and direct educational institutions, subject always to the observance of the principle set forth in paragraph 1 of the present article and to the requirements that the education given in such institutions shall conform to such minimum standards as may be laid down by the State.

Regarding School Climate:

We find the work of the National School Climate Center to be a viable resource that clarifies and gives structure to the concept. [What is School Climate and Why is it Important? - National School Climate Center](#) (NSCC).

This source is based on current research and best thought. To quote the Center, “A sustainable, positive school climate fosters youth development and learning necessary for a productive, contributing and satisfying life in a democratic society. This definition posits that there are “five major areas that school climate assessment needs to include: **Safety, Interpersonal Relationships, Social Media, Teaching and Learning and the Institutional environment.**”

The center maintains that:

“School climate is the holistic context of the life, vigor and quality of the social connectedness, physical elements, and supportive practices that nurture inclusion and safeness. In order to invest in school climate, one must analyze how his or her individual actions and behaviors contribute to the collective feeling of the school. Students, educators, support staff, families and the community are all key affiliations in co-creating an engaging and inclusive school climate.”

These thoughts are further explicated at: [School Climate Practice - National School Climate Center](#). TIEC highly recommends a thorough review of the Center’s writings on practice to be found on this site.



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Regarding Student Learning:

As well, much has been written on the impact of trauma on student learning. We hold that our testimony with the NAACP State Conference in March of 2015 remains relevant and will be attached as an addendum. It clearly espouses the need for certain school resources such as art, music and physical education as mitigating school experiences that assist traumatized children to regulate their emotions.

We offer also [SAMHSA's Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach \(nctsn.org\)](http://nctsn.org) and SAMHSA's Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach | Youth.gov which provide the most far reaching compilation of thought on what is needed for a trauma informed system that we can find. It speaks to both mental health and trauma. The elements of this site reflect TIEC's position on a trauma informed approach.

The six principles:

- Safety: ensuring physical and emotional safety for people who have experienced trauma
- Trustworthiness and transparency: being clear and honest about the purpose, process, and expectations of care.
- Peer support: providing opportunities for mutual support and learning among people with lived experience of trauma.
- Collaboration and mutuality: sharing power and responsibility with people who receive and provide care.
- Empowerment, voice, and choice: respecting and promoting the autonomy and strengths of people who have experienced trauma.
- Cultural, historical, and gender issues: acknowledging and addressing the impact of cultural, historical, and gender factors on trauma and recovery.

can be addressed through such programs as Comer School Development,

[Comer School Development Program | UW College of Education](#); [Comer School Development Program celebrates 50 years of work in education | YaleNews](#); [Making Schools Work with Hedrick Smith . School-By-School Reform . Comer School Development Program | PBS](#).



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Further relevant resources from SAMSHA pertain to 10 elements of organizational development. TIEC suggest this material as salient to the commission's work on resources pertaining to climate and student learning. According to SAMSHA,

“While it is recognized that not all public institutions and service sectors attend to trauma as an aspect of how they conduct business, understanding the role of trauma and a trauma-informed approach may help them meet their goals and objectives. Organizations, across service-sectors and systems, are encouraged to examine how a trauma-informed approach will benefit all stakeholders; to conduct a trauma-informed organizational assessment and change process; and to involve clients and staff at all levels in the organizational development process.” SAMSHA put forth the following 10 organizational implementational domains.

[TIC in Organizations: Ten Implementation Domains - TIC Training Center \(traumainformedcaretraining.com\)](#)

1. GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP:

The leadership and governance of the organization support and invest in implementing and sustaining a trauma-informed approach. There is an identified point of responsibility within the organization to lead and oversee this work and peer voices are included.

2. POLICY:

There are written policies and protocols establishing a trauma-informed approach as an essential part of the organizational mission. Organizational procedures and cross-agency protocols reflect trauma-informed principles.

3. PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT OF THE ORGANIZATION:

The organization ensures that the physical environment promotes a sense of safety.

4. ENGAGEMENT & INVOLVEMENT:

People in recovery, trauma survivors, consumers, and family members receiving services have significant involvement, voice, and meaningful choice at all levels and in all areas of organizational functioning (e.g., program design, implementation, service delivery, quality assurance, cultural competence, access to trauma-informed peer support, workforce development, and evaluation).



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TIEC is grateful for this opportunity to contribute to the work of the Commission.

5. CROSS-SECTOR COLLABORATION

Collaboration across sectors is built on a shared understanding of trauma and principles of a trauma-informed approach. While a trauma focus is not the stated mission of different service sectors, understanding how trauma impacts those served and integrating this knowledge across service sectors is critical.

6. SCREENING, ASSESSMENT AND TREATMENT SERVICES:

Interventions are based on the best available empirical evidence and science, are culturally appropriate, and reflect principles of a trauma-informed approach. Trauma screening and assessment are an essential part of the work. Trauma-specific interventions are acceptable, effective, and available for individuals and families seeking services. When trauma-specific services are not available within the organization, there is a trusted, effective referral system in place that facilitates connecting individuals with appropriate trauma treatment.

7. TRAINING AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT:

Continuous training on trauma, peer support, and how to respond to trauma is available for all staff. A human resource system incorporates trauma-informed principles in hiring, supervision, and staff evaluation; procedures are in place to support staff with trauma histories and/or those experiencing significant secondary traumatic stress from exposure to highly stressful material.

8. PROGRESS MONITORING AND QUALITY ASSURANCE:

There is ongoing assessment, tracking, and monitoring of trauma-informed principles and effective use of evidence-based and trauma-specific screening, assessments, and treatment.

9. FINANCING:

Financing structures are designed to support a trauma-informed approach which includes resources for staff training, development of appropriate facilities, establishment of peer support, and evidence-supported trauma screening, assessment, services, and interventions.

10. EVALUATION:

Chair: Dr. Joan Evelyn Duvall-Flynn . Treasurer: Mrs. Michelle Shields



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Measures and evaluation designs used to evaluate service or program implementation and effectiveness reflect an understanding of trauma and appropriate trauma-research instruments.

ADDENDUM 1: Pertains to implementation domain 6

**High-risk Factors and Warning Signs for Student Trauma Screening
TIEC © 2016**

These are listed alphabetically so as not to indicate a hierarchy of importance.

Student Data Collection:

Look at student demographics -

Adult care giver: age and level of education

Alcohol/Drug Activity

Attendance – on-going trend

Bullying – as perpetrator or victim

DHS involvement

Discipline Referrals/ Court involvement

Domestic Violence

Frequent visits to the nurse

Gender

Gender Identity Conflict

History of death exposure or significant loss

Home/ Transience

Inconsistency between test scores and other
intelligence indicators i.e. vocabulary

Obvious low self esteem

Persistent expression of negative thoughts

Previous ADHD Diagnosis or symptoms

Previous behavioral health involvement

Progress Reports

Regression in Language

Self-mutilation

Sexual Aggression

Sexualized Affect

Social Economic Status

Social Precociousness

Stuttering/ slow language development

Violence exposure



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ADDENDUM 2: Pertains to Implementation domain 1

Teachers are a first line of defense when bad things are happening in a school-aged child's life. They are uniquely positioned to observe the physical, psychological, and emotional state of their students. Moreover, the school is the community institution with the capacity to assess the needs of a young person and effectively intervene on her or his behalf. That is why, after four years of studying the issue of trauma as an impediment to school performance, in 2014, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) passed a resolution calling for a trauma informed education systems across the United States. That is also why the Trauma Informed Education Coalition (TIEC) was formed; and why together, NAACP and TIEC have worked at both the state and national level for policy in this area.

Through our joint advocacy, NAACP and TIEC have made some progress. The need for the Pennsylvania Secretary of Education to develop protocols to address trauma as an impediment to school performance is included in the PA Basic Education Funding Formula Commission's recommendations of 2015. In addition, funds are included in the current iteration of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, now referred to as Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

NAACP and TIEC are well aware that ultimately each classroom is the endpoint of a thread woven into a complex fabric – a part of an organized system designed through laws, regulations, protocols, and labor agreements. No one member of this system operates in a vacuum. No superintendent, building administrator, or teacher can actualize a "trauma informed approach" without the sanction and support of the system.

To have the *trauma informed education system* necessary for school effectiveness today, Chief School Officers, local education agencies, and building leaders must create, maintain and monitor a clear, well-defined approach designed to address this need.

7 System-wide Practices to Mitigate the Impact of Trauma in the School Setting

- A systematic flow of communication among the system, its educators, staff, and students
- A well-defined parent involvement / community support plan
- A formalized mentoring program
- Programmed guidance groups i.e. grief groups, anger management groups, social skills groups.
- A diversion plan for disciplinary action
- A screening process for trauma
- A systematic, mental health referral plan



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To be clear, in our vision of a *trauma informed education system*, neither NAACP nor TIEC suggests that teachers become therapists for children who face adversity. Rather, the call is for teachers, administrators, and school staff to view students through an informed lens that recognizes the pervasiveness of childhood trauma and that triggers their awareness when signs and symptoms of trauma signal the need for interventions. We also see the need for educators to understand the types of interventions known to be non-productive and that, in fact, exacerbate negative outcomes.

Both NAACP and TIEC realize that specific and systematic professional development is essential for educators and school staff in order to build the professional capacity required to have a trauma informed education system. Because school personnel and student populations change constantly, we hold that this training must be school wide, all inclusive, sustained and on-going.

7 Components of Understanding to Include in Professional Development for Educators and School Staff

- A clear and common definition of trauma
- An awareness of the adverse experiences that tend to result in trauma
- The continuum of trauma response and the role of resilience in individual reactions to traumatic experiences
- How trauma displays as an impediment to academic achievement
- How trauma displays as an impediment to social participation
- The essential needs of traumatized students
- The power of interpersonal relationships

References

Ginsburg, K., R., & Kinsman, S. B., Editors. (2013) *Reaching Teens: Strength-Based Communication Strategies to Build Resilience and Support Healthy Adolescent Development*. American Academy of Pediatrics.

Guthrie, J. W., & Reed, R. J., (1991) *Educational Administration and Policy (2nd ed.)*, Allen and Bacon.

Grant Publication (no date) *Keeping Kids in School and Out of Court*. Stoneleigh Foundation.

Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, Missouri Department of Mental Health, & National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare (2012) *Youth Mental Health First Aid: USA for Adults Assisting Young People*.



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ADDENDUM 3: Pertaining to Additional Resources

[Calls to Action: Federal Legislation Supporting Cross-Sector Community Coalitions \(ctipp.org\)](http://ctipp.org)

[Policies - Hopeful Futures Campaign](#)

<https://www.researchforaction.org/research-resources/youth-courts-and-their-educational-value-an-examination-of-youth-courts-in-chester-pennsyl>

Material on Youth Courts. TIEC believes this approach to school discipline will end the school to prison pipeline.

<https://www.delcotimes.com/2018/02/04/students-rule-in-upper-darby-youth-court-class/>

Darby School District. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z2ZbR_515R8 It is five minutes long.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TQpgxMt35OE> It is twelve minutes long.

Webinar #2 https://1drv.ms/v/s!AmcDoI8n1K3Jh9gJoO-3AjY_qQRA0Q?e=X6bHTL

Webinar #3 <https://1drv.ms/v/s!AmcDoI8n1K3Jh9skscL3QP10dPyzQ?e=Gg1Yp4>

Materials pertaining to Local Control of School Funding

[Local Control Funding Formula Overview - Local Control Funding Formula \(CA Dept of Education\)](#)