Addressing health and educational disparities together: The role of trauma informed schools

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Learning objectives

At the conclusion of this webinar, participants will be able to:

1. Explain how health and educational disparities are linked in childhood and across the life course
2. Describe two or more ways exposure to adversity and trauma shapes health and learning in school aged children and adolescents
3. Explain how a trauma-informed approach in the school setting could help reduce health and educational disparities
4. Identify two or more attributes of a trauma-informed school
Health and educational disparities
More education is associated with better health
People with less education have poorer health

Life expectancy
Health status
Risk factors

Differences In Life Expectancy Due To Race And Educational Differences Are Widening, And Many May Not Catch Up

Olshansky et al. Health Aff 2012;31:1803-13
Educational attainment is linked with fewer health conditions and health risk behaviors.

- Diabetes reduction: 1.3%
- Heart Disease reduction: 2.2%
- Overweight reduction: 5%
- Smoking reduction: 12%

RWJ Culture of Health: www.rwjf.org/en/culture-of-health/2012/08/better_educationhea.html
How does education influence health?

http://www.rwjf.org/content/dam/farm/reports/issue_briefs/2011/rwjf70447
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Health is a prerequisite for learning
Poor Child/adolescent Health

Cognition
- Problems with learning, memory

Attention
- Reduced attention, focus, persistence

Connectedness/engagement with school
- Poor mental health
- Adverse child childhood experiences/trauma

Absenteism
- Absences due to mental or physical illness or medical visits

Health risk behavior
- Substance use, aggressive behavior

Reduced Ability and Motivation to Learn

Poorer School Achievement

Adapted from: Basch CE. J Sch Health 2011; 81: 593-8
Shared pathways to health and educational disparities
Both health and educational outcomes show marked disparities.
Proportion of children with fair or poor health by household income

- <25K: 13%
- $25-50K: 9%
- $50-75K: 6%
- $75-100K: 3%
- $100-125K: 4%
- >$125K: 2%
Sixth graders in the richest school districts are four grade levels ahead of children in the poorest districts.
There are large gaps between white children and their black and Hispanic classmates. The gaps are largest in places with large economic disparities.
Health Disparities

- Stress
- Poverty
- Trauma
- Nutrition
- No Access to Care
- Education
- Health Behaviors
- Poor Housing
- Toxins
- Inequities

Educational Disparities

- Stress
- Poverty
- Trauma
- Nutrition
- School climate
- Teacher/curriculum Quality
- Health & Health Behaviors
- Poor Housing
- Toxins
- Inequities

Adapted from: Iton, A. California Endowment
“The single most effective way to improve health and reduce disparities is to invest in helping young people reach their full academic potential”
What threatens the foundations of health and learning in childhood?
Toxic stress

Severe or unrelenting stress without the buffering influence of a supportive adult

Image: K. Negley, New York Times

Shonkoff et al, Pediatrics. 2012: 129(10)
Toxic stress and learning: Developmental delay at age 3 by number of risk factors

Source: Barth et al 2008; aspe.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/75351/report.pdf
Adapting to threat: “Defensive phenotype”

Trauma and vigilance

Biological embedding: “Ecology becomes biology”

Shonkoff et al, Pediatrics. 2012: 129(10)
Where do we intervene to address the shared determinants of health and education?

Shared pathways to health and educational disparities
Academic Achievement & Health
for healthy futures

Wellness programs, screening & school health campaigns
to improve readiness to learn

Chronic illness programs
to promote disease self-management & reduce absenteeism

Full service school clinic
to meet physical & mental health needs

Nutrition and physical activity programs
to promote healthy school environment

Parent and Teacher health education & wellness
to support parents & educators to support children

School health curriculum
to promote healthy behaviors
Positive Schools Center: Who We Are

**Mission:** The Positive Schools Center promotes positive, supportive and mindful learning communities where students and school staff can connect, develop and grow.

**Vision:** Positive, Supportive and Mindful learning communities will be places where Students & School Staff can:

- Connect with each other in a safe and positive environment in a mindful manner;
- Positively Develop as students and staff (academically, professionally, socially, and emotionally); and
- Grow as student scholars and educational leaders.
FACT: One out of every four children attending school has been exposed to a traumatic event that can affect learning and/or behavior.

-NCTSN Child Trauma Toolkit for Educators
Trauma Prevalence in Children

- **71%**
  Children exposed to violence each year
  (Finklehor, et al, 2013)

- **3 million**
  Children maltreated or neglected each year

- **3.5-10 million**
  Witness violence against their mother each year
  (Child Witness to Violence Project, 2013)

- **1 in 4 girls & 1 in 6 boys**
  Sexually abused before adulthood
  (NCTSN Fact Sheet, 2009)

- **94%**
  Children in a study of juvenile justice settings who have experienced trauma
  (Rosenberg, et al, 2014)
What Is a Trauma-Informed School?

- Adults Understand & Recognize Trauma
- Adults Respond to Trauma
- Clear expectations & communication strategies for all
- Culture of Respect & Support
Adults have an awareness of the impact of trauma on students
Adults understand and recognize that a child's behavior is a developmental response to past experience.
Adults and students set expectations and communication strategies
Adults and students create a culture of respect and support
Essential Components of Trauma Responsive Schools

- Positive School Climate
- Restorative & Healing Practices
- Social, Emotional & Character Development
- Racial Justice
- Student, Family & Community Voice
- Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS)
Reducing HEALTH & EDUCATIONAL Disparities through a Trauma Responsive Schools Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS)
UNIVERSAL SUPPORTS
(School-Wide)

HEALTH DISPARITIES

School Health Clinics
- Well-being Visits
  - Physical Health
  - Eye Care
  - Dental Care
  - Mental Health

Circles of Care
- Nutrition
- Sex Education
- Physical Health
- Self Care

EDUCATION DISPARITIES

School wide Expectations
- Attendance
- Academics
- Behavior

Whole School Mindfulness

Restorative Circles
- Morning Meetings
- Academic Instruction
- Play Activities
- Exit Activities
SECONDARY/SELECTIVE SUPPORTS
(Small Group)

HEALTH DISPARITIES

Small Group Circles of Care
- For Select Students Based on diagnosis
- For Select Students Based on needs
- For Select Students Based on Gender
- Parent Groups on Health Care
- Teacher Groups on Health Care

EDUCATION DISPARITIES

Small Groups
- Academic Tutoring
- Attendance Monitoring
- Check & Connect

Mentoring
Community Conferencing
Mindfulness
Parent Support Groups
INTENSIVE SUPPORTS
(Individualized)

EDUCATION

HEALTH

INDIVIDUALIZED FOCUSED SUPPORTS
What are you going to do about health & educational disparities?

Build Your TRUAMA RESPONSIVE Triangle
Trauma creates change you DON'T choose. Healing is about creating change you DO choose.

- Michelle Rosenthal
Questions