

RESPONDING TO STUDENTS SO THEY CAN BE SUCCESSFUL

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Many children in the Schenectady City School District are exposed to traumatic events, also referred to as **Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)**, which can affect learning and behavior at a young age, but also have significant long range effects that are often felt throughout a lifetime.

ACEs include, but are not limited to, physical or sexual abuse, abandonment or neglect, emotional abuse, physical neglect, violence, substance misuse in the household, parent separation or divorce, incarceration of a family member and economic distress/poverty.

Just one exposure to a traumatic event can cause uneasiness, jumpiness, intrusive thoughts, interrupted sleep and nightmares, anger and moodiness and social withdrawal—all of which can interfere with a child's learning.

Ongoing exposure to trauma can cause physical and emotional distress affecting a child's attention, memory and cognition. Some children are unable to focus, organize or process information, solve problems or plan. Many students who experience ACEs come to school with feelings of frustration, worry and anxiety. In the classroom, this might also present itself, or be interpreted, as poor behavior.

ACEs, if unidentified and unaddressed, can eventually lead to dropping out of school, poor decision-making and eventually joblessness and poverty. It can also lead to a wide range of health problems including those associated with substance misuse.

Our Commitment and Work

We know that many students in SCSD are experiencing ACE's. As a district we are committed to understanding, recognizing and responding to children who are impacted by trauma and we have taken steps toward developing trauma sensitive environments.

This work includes shifting our thinking from "what's wrong with you," to, "what happened to you?" Instead of questioning the behavior and enforcing a punitive consequence, we try to understand what the child might be experiencing and then respond in a therapeutic manner.

Our efforts include teaching the whole child by providing them with the tools that they need to cope, feel safe and be ready to learn.

If you have concerns about your child, need assistance, or aren't sure where to turn for help, please call your child's school or the Pupil Personnel Service Office at 518-881-3412.



Schenectady's
**Trauma Sensitive
Schools**

Our work is to ensure that race, economics and disability no longer serve as predictors of student achievement.

Shifting our thinking from "what's wrong with you" to "what's happened to you?"



All school teams attended the 3-Day Trauma Sensitive Institute held during the summer of 2017.

Building trauma informed schools is about **building a culture** in which school personnel recognizes indicators of trauma, knows the impact that it has and how to support children, parents and staff who are affected.

Over the last year, the district has taken huge strides toward becoming trauma informed and developing trauma-sensitive practices. The district has dedicated resources to training, education, activities and collaborations that support trauma sensitivity.

Many of our schools have developed calm spaces such as de-escalation and sensory rooms, which are spaces that are strategically lit and decorated, and have a variety of equipment to help children calm and focus themselves so they can prepare for learning and interaction with others. Many teachers and , whole schools, are practicing mindful moments with students, during which time they stop, relax, focus on breathing, concentrate and become self-aware. There is a focus on helping students to develop strategies that replace bad decision-making or other behaviors—and to learn to cope with their emotions in a therapeutic way.

Some schools are holding restorative circles as a method for resolving conflict and some teachers are posing restorative questions during class time that teaches students to reflect.

We continue to work through a trauma informed lens by offering a team-approach to identifying the root cause of student behavior, providing interventions and trauma informed treatment.



School Based Diversion

Research indicates that youth with unmet behavioral and mental health needs are likely to come in contact with the juvenile justice system.

School Based Diversion is an alternative pathway and therapeutic approach strategically designed to help keep kids in school, improve outcomes, and ensure that students receive interventions and treatment planning instead of being suspended or arrested.

We know that teens who are suspended from school, and/or even arrested, often have diagnosable behavioral health condition. Through diversion, we work to identify the root cause of student behavior and provide interventions and trauma informed treatment addressing mental health needs. It requires a team approach and parent participation.

Youth diagnostic screenings and assessments are administered to determine clinical needs. An emergency response team, consisting of the parents, the student, principal, social worker or counselor, parent advocate and pupil personnel service administrator, collaborate to develop a plan which includes one or more interventions. Before a child can return to school, treatment progress is monitored, and harm repair is underway by means of abeyance.

Of the 141 students who participated in diversion in 2016-17, 78 completed their intervention program. Consequently, 95 percent of the students who completed diversion did not have another serious behavior incident. The 63 students who did not complete their intervention program either needed more time or did not follow-through with the plan.

Restorative Practices

address misbehavior and harm in a way that:

- ◆ Strengthens relationships
- ◆ Focuses on harm done rather than only on rule-breaking
- ◆ Give voice to the person harmed
- ◆ Engages in collaborative problem-solving
- ◆ Empowers change and growth
- ◆ Enhances responsibility