Bloomsburg UNIVERSITY ® | MCDOWELL INSTITUTE
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

TEACHER READINESS TO RECOGNIZE & RESPOND
to Students Experiencing Emotional Distress or Trauma

Trauma affects approximately half of school-age youth in America's schools, with close to the same number of youth reporting exposure to at least one adverse childhood experience (ACEs).

In addition, nearly one-third of students in schools experience two or more ACEs by the time they are 17 years of age. This means that 12 out of 25 students in a typical classroom may have been affected by trauma, with close to 8 of those 25 students having experienced two or more ACEs by the time they are seniors in high school. As concerning as these trends appear, they are even more alarming when considering that these statistics reflect pre-pandemic levels.

School-age youth affected by trauma often experience increased anxiety and difficulties with self-regulation and lowered self-esteem, which can impair learning. Relatedly, the greater the degree of exposure to ACEs, the more likely a student will experience difficulties at school. However, the negative effects of exposure to ACEs or experiencing trauma are not limited to just the classroom or the school day, as there can be long-term implications to physical and mental health and wellbeing.

Day-in and day-out, educators, are increasingly interacting with school-age youth who have experienced traumatic events or an array of childhood adversities that can lead to trauma. Educators and other school staff are on the front lines of this public health crisis.

Acknowledging the important role that teachers and their colleagues play in the lives of their students, it is imperative that we equip our educators to recognize and respond to students impacted by trauma or experiencing other forms of emotional distress. To this end, in

2020 Kognito published a white paper entitled "Are Teachers and Staff Ready to Apply Trauma-Informed Practices?" This white paper reported the findings from a survey of a little over 8,000 K-12 educators from across 11 states. While not reflecting educator responses from Pennsylvania, the highlights from this particular survey were illuminating.

Following the publication of the Kognito (2020) white paper, the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) awarded a research project to the McDowell Institute to replicate the Kognito study with educators in the commonwealth. Between April 1 and June 30, 2021, educators throughout the commonwealth were provided with the opportunity to respond to a parallel survey. A total of 4,793 educators completed this Pennsylvania-specific replication survey.

The response patterns were similar between the Kognito (2020) study and the replication of this study specific to the commonwealth despite the surveys being completed by educators from different states. Here are a few of highlights from these two parallel studies. The full report from the McDowell Institute study can be accessed via the McDowell Institute website(**www.bloomu.edu/ offices-directory/mcdowell-institute**) and provided **HERE** is the link to the Kognito white paper.

Kognito (2020)	McDowell Institute (2021)
1 in 2 Educators do not feel adequately prepared to recognize signs of trauma in their students	**1 in 2 Educators** do not feel adequately prepared to recognize signs of trauma in their students
3 in 5 Educators do not feel adequately prepared to teach students activities to manage their stress and emotions	**4 in 5 Educators** do not feel adequately prepared to teach students activities to manage their stress and emotions
3 in 5 Educators do not feel adequately prepared to use communication strategies to help students feel safe	**3 in 5 Educators** do not feel adequately prepared to use communication strategies to help students feel safe
3 in 5 Educators do not feel adequately prepared to talk with a student to motivate them to connect with support	**3 in 5 Educators** do not feel adequately prepared to talk with a student to motivate them to connect with support
7 in 10 Educators do not feel adequately prepared to implement trauma-informed approaches in teaching	**3 in 4 Educators** do not feel adequately prepared to implement trauma-informed approaches in teaching
82% Agree that part of the role of teachers and staff is to connect students experiencing psychological trauma or distress with mental health support services	**81% Agree** that part of the role of teachers and staff is to connect students experiencing psychological trauma or distress with mental health support services
98% Agree that all educators should receive training in trauma-informed classroom practices	**95% Agree** that all educators should receive training in trauma-informed classroom practices

IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATORS IN PENNSYLVANIA

Through the Office of Advocacy & Reform, the Wolfe administration has been working towards aligning trauma-informed endeavors within Pennsylvania to enhance messaging and sustainability. Resultantly, *Trauma-Informed PA: A Plan to Make Pennsylvania a Trauma-Informed, Healing-Centered State* was released in 2020. This plan has relevance to all human service sectors, including education in the commonwealth.

The Office of Advocacy & Reform, in its efforts to promote The Trauma-Informed PA Plan, established the HEAL PA Leadership Team (HEAL). HEAL is comprised of leaders from across various sectors in the commonwealth that share the vision and mission reflected in the Trauma-Informed PA Plan. Education is one of the working sub-groups of HEAL PA, and in an aligned manner, PDE has been expanding promotion on trauma-informed approaches across Pennsylvania's schools. The replication study conducted by the McDowell Institute (2021) aligns with these trauma-informed promotional activities being conducted by PDE as well as outreach occurring across the commonwealth through HEAL PA.

Beyond understanding how the McDowell Institute (2021) replication study fits within the broader context of state-wide trauma-informed endeavors, this study has direct implications for the professional development of educators in Pennsylvania. These professional development implications are relevant to pre-service educator preparatory programs and continuing professional development for in-service educators.

Pre-Service Implications	In-service Professional Development Implications
Place increasing emphasis on trauma-awareness and trauma-informed instructional practices in educator preparatory programs to enhance the knowledge and associated skills of the next generation of educators as they enter the field.	Place increasing emphasis on trauma-awareness and trauma-informed instructional practices through in-service professional development that is approved to award Act 48 credit for current educators in the field.
Contextualize for aspiring educators through coursework and field experiences how trauma-informed approaches are situated within multi-tiered systems of support.	Contextualize through information dissemination coupled with professional development for current educators how trauma-informed approaches are situated within multi-tiered systems of support.
Explicitly highlight for aspiring educators the relationship between trauma-informed approaches in schools and addressing issues of equity in PK-12 educational settings.	Explicitly highlight for current educators the relationship between implementation of trauma-informed approaches in schools and their endeavors to further address issues of equity in their PK-12 educational settings.

PRE-CORRECTING FOR UNDESIRED BEHAVIOR:
An Ounce of Prevention is Worth a Pound of Cure

Educators, for some time, have indicated that managing undesired student behavior has been one of their greatest concerns in the classroom. Unfortunately, but not surprisingly, difficulties with behavior management is one of the top reasons many educators leave the field of teaching within the first few years of their career. Suffice it to say, reducing the likelihood of undesired student behavior in the classroom is an important priority, and when it is effectively addressed, everyone benefits.

Having trauma-informed strategies planned in advance to redirect students engaging in undesired behavior is logical and necessary to an effective classroom. However, as crucial as pre-planned redirection strategies are, the most effective way to address undesired student behavior in the classroom is by preventing it from occurring in the first place. One of the most efficient preventive approaches for use in the classroom is

referred to as "pre-correction."

Pre-correction is a strategy in which you, the teacher, verbally, gesturally, or physically prompt your students to respond with desired behavior in various situations before they occur. Pre-corrections are often provided at the start of a lesson. However, additional pre-corrections can be provided periodically throughout a lesson or within a targeted block of time in the form of re-occurring prompts and cues. Pre-corrections at the start of class coupled with ongoing prompting/cueing is an effective and efficient

preventive classroom management strategy used to remind students of behavioral expectations BEFORE potential undesired behavior surfaces. In essence, pre-correction provides a road map showing students how to behave throughout classroom activities.

As effective as pre-correction can be, it is often underutilized in traditional face-to-face classrooms and virtual instructional settings. Pre-correction is most effective when situated between two essential components, with each component removed in time from the other.

Before Pre-correction	Providing Pre-correction	Following Pre-correction
Initially establish and teach the classroom behavioral expectations with embedded social-emotional learning with all students. This sets the stage to efficiently provide pre-corrections throughout the year.	Provide a brief but behavior-specific statement of what students should be doing BEFORE the lesson or activity.	Provide behavior-specific praise to students who meet expectations throughout the lesson or activity.

A few examples of verbal pre-corrections from across different contexts will illustrate how simple this procedure is to help students succeed and save you, the teacher, a lot of time and frustration. Here are some examples across academic and transitional situations as well as traditional classroom and virtual instructional settings. Also, please keep in mind that the following examples of pre-correction statements can be further strengthened by adding visual or gestural prompts and by modeling the expected behavior, when relevant.

Traditional Face-to-Face Academic Settings

"Remember class, eyes on me when I am speaking and listen quietly, and be sure to follow directions that I provide throughout the lesson as soon as I provide those directions."

"I have posted the materials needed for this lab activity on the whiteboard. Who would be comfortable demonstrating for the rest of the class what this should look like before everyone starts the lab activity?" … "Thanks Alex" … "Casey, please read each item from the whiteboard as Alex demonstrates the lab set-up."

"Remember, if you have a question or need help while completing your individual work, simply raise your hand and someone will get to you as soon as possible. Please be patient and use your coping skills and quietly wait until help arrives."

Traditional Face-to-Face Transitions

"When the bell rings, gather your materials, push your chair in, and stand behind your chair until your group is dismissed."

"We are about to go to lunch. So, I need each of you to put your books in your desk, stand up and push in your chair, and then walk quietly to line up at the door while keeping your hands and feet to yourself … Ready? … Begin."

"We are about to change learning centers in one minute. Begin to gather your materials and wait until you hear the timer bell ring. Then transition to your next learning center quietly keeping your hands and feet to yourself and begin work at your next learning center immediately upon your arrival."

Virtual Academic Settings

"Please have your microphone muted until you are called upon to speak and use the raised-hand icon to either respond to questions that I pose throughout the lesson or if you have a question or need to hear or see another example beyond what I provided."

"Please wait to hold up your response card after I pose a question for you all to respond to until you hear me say ... 1-2-3 cards for me ... then please hold up your response card and keep holding it up ... still... so I can see it clearly ... in front of your chest until I say ... thanks, cards down."

"When initiating or responding to a discussion thread between class sessions with your classmates, please limit your statements exclusively to your reflections about the assigned reading. Also, remember to be respectful of the opinions of others and that it is fine to express disagreement with the opinion offered by a classmate given the disagreement is presented respectfully."

Virtual Transitions

"I am about to place you into breakout rooms for 5 minutes to work on your group task. Please get to work right away and remember 1) one person speaks at a time, 2) encourage your fellow classmates to contribute to your team's work, 3) everyone is expected to make a constructive contribution to successful completion of the task, and 4) complete the work within the allotted 5 minutes."

"We are about two-thirds of the way through our math class for today. I will give you a one-minute warning as we approach the actual end of our class session. Please continue to stay focused on the lesson until I provide that one-minute warning and then follow my directions at that time and wait until I dismiss the entire class."

"Today, we will jumping-back-and-forth between large group Zoom and smaller breakout rooms. Please be sure when re-entering our large group Zoom from a smaller breakout room to either have your camera live so I can see you are there and ready or, for those not using an activated camera, send me a private chat as we re-enter the large group so I know you are there and ready."

Summing Up Pre-correction

In conclusion, the best way to address undesired student behavior in the classroom is by preventing it from occurring in the first place. As the old adage goes, "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure."Using regular pre-corrections as described through the examples presented can pay big dividends in the classroom. The examples provided illustrate pre-corrections across a variety of instructional settings, but they are just that, examples and not intended to be exhaustive. The bottom line is that pre-corrections lend themselves to a wide variety of situations in traditional and virtual classroom spaces and can make a big difference in the degree of desired student behavior.

STRUCTURING AND FACILITATING STUDENT CONVERSATIONS
on Mental Wellness and Related Issues of Social Responsibility

Teachers play a pivotal role in helping students develop personal reflection skills as well as communication skills to talk openly about sensitive topics such as mental health and associated issues concerning equity. It's important for students, whether at a young age or in college, to learn how to effectively communicate in an age-appropriate manner about such topics as risk and protective factors associated with emotional wellbeing as well as trauma and issues concerning economic inequality and discrimination. These topics can understandably conjure-up visceral feelings and reactions based on one's own life experiences. As such, provided here are a few tips, or guidance, for teachers in structuring and facilitating personal reflection and discussion-based learning activities associated with these topics. First and foremost, we will provide guidance with respect to preparing educators both personally and professionally to structure and facilitate such conversations. Next, we will provide guidance on establishing ground rules and pre-correcting for potential behavioral errors by your students. The following is not intended to be exhaustive; rather, it is simply to serve as initial food for thought to enhance structuring and facilitating such activities. More comprehensive guidance is available through many reputable resources, including the Southern Poverty Law Center's *Let's Talk: Discussing Race, Racism and other Difficult Topics with Students* at the Learning for Justice website: **www.learningforjustice.org/**.

Preparing Yourself Personally and Professionally

It can be understandably awkward to engage students in self-reflection and discussion on topics about which you are personally uncomfortable. As we know with students, growth requires us to help students stretch beyond their comfort zone. This too, is applicable to each and every one of us as learners, regardless of our professional roles as educators. However, just like with our students, there is a difference between healthy and constructive stretching and overstretching too fast or all at once. In other words, healthy stretching and growth is a process that evolves through our experiences, just as is the journey of increasing self-awareness of our emotional wellbeing and our perspective about issues associated with equity in access and opportunity. The initial step on this type of journey is personal self-reflection on life experiences and relatedly our own comfort-level in openly sharing experiences and reflections with others. The previously noted *Let's Talk* resource provides some informative tools to help you through this type of initial self-reflection.

Predictably, you may experience varying degrees of discomfort when engaging in this type of initial self-reflection and sharing with others. It is normal to feel discomfort. However, it is important to understand that discomfort is not the same thing as feeling unsafe. Relatedly, also recognize the need to establish your boundaries as you explore ways to intentionally share your own experiences to facilitate student engagement and growth. Establishing norms, sometimes referred to as ground rules or a comfort agreement with your students in advance of self-reflection discussion-based activities, can help to work through discomfort when addressing sensitive topics.

Establishing Ground Rules with Your Students and Pre-correcting for Potential Problems

Engage your class in establishing ground rules before conducting self-reflective discussion-based activities. Through consensus with your students, build a list of acceptable behaviors that will reduce the likelihood of any class member feeling unsafe, disrespected, or marginalized. There are many ways to develop such a list, resulting in established norms as illustrated by this simple example.

Agreed upon "Do"	Agreed Upon "Do Not"
One person speaks at a time.	Speak when someone else has the floor and is speaking.
Encourage others to share their thoughts and feelings.	Monopolize the conversation space or encourage others to monopolize the conversation space.
Respect the fact that others may not wish to share their thoughts or feelings at a particular moment in time.	Engage in behaviors that make others feel coerced or compelled to share.
Use constructive, active listening skills when others are sharing their thoughts or feelings.	Become distracted with other matters or tasks that are not relevant to the discussion.
Respect confidentiality within the parameters established by the teacher and school.	Discuss or share anything specific or personally identifying about something someone shared during the discussion with others outside of the structured discussion in the classroom.
It is OK to disagree with another's opinion but express that difference in a respectful manner.	Avoid sharing a difference of opinion.

Planning and establishing a safe space within your classroom should help diminish students' discomfort. However it's important to note that for some students, particularly members of marginalized groups, you may not be able to provide complete comfort. Therefore, it is essential to build in some form of "break" or "end the conversation" mechanism with your students. One proactive strategy that you can use to check in with students is referred to as the Fist-to-Five Strategy (as described in the *Let's Talk* resource previously referenced).

FIST: I am very uncomfortable and cannot move on.

1 FINGER: I am uncomfortable and need some help before I can move on.

2 FINGERS: I am a little uncomfortable, but I want to try to move on.

3 FINGERS: I am not sure how I am feeling.

4 FINGERS: I am comfortable enough to move on.

5 FINGERS: I am ready to move on full steam ahead!

Once you and your class have established the ground rules, which can be augmented by a communication system such as the Fist-to-Five strategy, continue to utilize these norms and communication systems throughout the year when engaging students in discussions about sensitive topics. Prior to starting the self-reflective discussion-based activity, remind the students about the norms and communication system. It can be beneficial to pair your verbal reminder with visual and gestural cues along with modeling. Further, it can be helpful to build-in reminders throughout stages or segments of the activity to pre-correct against potential violations of the established norms. This can be done in tandem with your proactive checking in with your students about their feelings about the nature of the discussion (e.g., periodically and proactively using the Fist-to-Five check-in strategy).

Take-away Points

Structuring and facilitating self-reflective discussion-based activities with your students on sensitive topics such as mental wellness or related issues associated with inequities will predictably create some degree of discomfort requiring you and your students to "stretch." Establishing norms through consensus with your students and proactive communication systems can help to navigate this anticipated degree of discomfort. Those interested in learning more from reputable resources are encouraged to check out the Let's Talk resource published by the Southern Poverty Law Center.

MCDOWELL UPDATES

Micro-Credentials are Up and Running!

Micro-credentials through the McDowell Institute officially launched in Fall 2021 and are available to both pre-service and in-service educators and individuals from related human services fields and courses of study. Act 48 credit through the Pennsylvania Department of Education for in-service educators is available upon successfully completing these micro-credentials. Each micro-credential is comprised of virtual asynchronous research-based learning experiences that reflect state-of-the-art practices designed to be:

PERSONALIZED |
You can create your learning journey based on your interests and career goals.

FLEXIBLE | You can study, learn and grow when it's convenient for you in an asynchronous manner.

PERFORMANCE-BASED |
You are awarded the relevant micro-credential based on demonstrated expertise.

MICRO-CREDENTIALS THAT ARE CURRENTLY OPEN TO ENROLLMENT INCLUDE:

Bullying Prevention (comprised of five, distinct bullying prevention micro-credentials): Bullying Prevention in PK Programs, Bullying Prevention in K – 4 Programs, Bullying Prevention in Middle School, Bullying Prevention in High Schools, and Comprehensive Bullying Prevention PK- 12. These micro-credentials highlight effective approaches to both prevent bullying in schools and, in the event bullying does occur, methods to mitigate the adverse effects of bullying behavior.

Youth Suicide Prevention: This micro-credential highlights the increasing rise of youth mental health challenges, the relationship between risk and protective factors associated with suicide risk, decoding signs and symptoms of mental health challenges, responding to youth in emotional distress, and applying multi-tiered logic to youth suicide prevention endeavors. This particular micro-credential provides the added value of earning a certificate from Prevent Suicide PA as a result of completion of the *Suicide Prevention for Educators* asynchronous virtual gatekeeper training.

Please use the following link to enroll in these micro-credentials: **www.bloomu.edu/offices-directory/mcdowell-institute**

Check-out the Kognito Module on Trauma-informed Practice in Schools

Kognito
Conversations that change lives.

The McDowell Institute further expanded the array of asynchronous virtual professional development opportunities for BU education majors in Fall 2021 by making available Kognito's Trauma-informed Practices for K12 Schools. In this 45-minute module, aspiring educators at Bloomsburg University learn how to recognize when a student's behavior might be the result of experiencing emotional distress or trauma, hold helpful conversations with a student about their feelings, problem-solve ways to make the classroom a more comforting experience for students, assess the need for additional support along with skills to help students seek help when needed, and self-reflect pertaining to one's self-care needs as a teacher. Completion of this particular module results in a certificate. Further, the content of this module explicitly aligns with the curriculum associated with the PDE Endorsement on Social Emotional behavioral Wellness of PK-12 Students at BU.

McDowell Institute Professional Development Day at BU on April 15

Mark your calendars for the McDowell Institute Professional Development Day on Friday, April 15 in Kehr Union. This event will employ a conference format with an array of professional development opportunities for members of the BU community, emphasizing our education majors and other majors in related human service fields (e.g., social work). Participation in the training events will be free of charge. Targeted trainings will include youth suicide prevention training (e.g., Youth Mental Health First Aid as well as Question-Persuade-Refer). Additional sessions will highlight trauma-informed classroom-based strategies to help address matters associated with equity in our schools and skill-building in self-care strategies as an aspiring professional working with school-age youth. Further information will be available on the McDowell Institute website in the near future coupled with periodic email blasts regarding this event. Please be sure to mark your calendars now for this professional development opportunity.

Building Capacity in Local Schools

Several important capacity-building activities occur through partnerships and collaboration in schools within the immediate five-county region. One of these initiatives provides guidance and technical assistance to district-level leadership teams to situate programs and practices to enhance the social-emotional wellness of students and teachers across schools. The McDowell Institute, in collaboration with local partners, is currently providing this type of ongoing technical assistance to four particular school systems in Columbia, Northumberland, and Union Counties. A second, aligned capacity-building initiative has been building a sustainable network of instructors in evidence-based youth suicide prevention programs. This regionally established network of trainers is positioned to provide ongoing youth suicide prevention training within and across local school systems in the region. This regional network is comprised of 28 local school staff credentialed as instructors in Youth Mental Health First Aida long, with a similar number of staff credentialed to provide training in Question-Persuade-Refer. This network of aligned instructors will be supported in planning their training endeavors by the McDowell Institute moving forward.

Embedding Trauma-Informed Approaches in Educator Preparation Across the Commonwealth

The McDowell Institute officially concluded its externally funded initiative to further advance educator preparation across the commonwealth. Over approximately four years, 30 institutions of higher education, including Bloomsburg University, that offer educator preparatory programs have been engaged in this initiative to embed trauma-informed approaches within their educator preparatory programs in alignment with required competencies delineated by the Pennsylvania Department of Education. The McDowell Institute will disseminate the final impact report for this initiative in the early Spring 2022.

JED Campus Initiative Update

JED Campus endeavors to build mental health literacy and support for students on campus. These current efforts align with Act 110 entitled *Suicide Prevention in Institutions of Higher Education* enacted in the Commonwealth in 2018. Relatedly, the three brief videos created by the McDowell Institute on the social-emotional wellness of our students are still available to faculty and staff. These videos run approximately 4 minutes each and provide background information concerning: 1) the prevalence of mental health challenges and an understanding of risk and protective factors, 2) signs and symptoms associated with mental health challenges, and 3) what to do if you have concerns about a student.

All three videos are available on the McDowell Institute website under the Social, Emotional, and Behavioral Wellness Videos Tab!

"Social Emotional wellness of our Students 101-Part 1"

"Social Emotional wellness of our Students 101-Part 2"

"Social Emotional wellness of our Students 101-Part 3"