

Creating Trauma-Sensitive Schools *Brief Tips & Policy Recommendations*

Childhood adversity, toxic stress, and trauma can negatively impact students' ability to thrive in school, at home, and throughout life. Given the widespread scope and prevalence of childhood adversity and trauma, promoting trauma-sensitive school approaches has the greatest potential to positively impact all students, regardless of trauma history. [Trauma-sensitive schools](#) promote (a) feelings of physical, social, and emotional safety in students; (b) a shared understanding among staff about the impact of trauma and adversity on students; (c) positive and culturally responsive discipline policies and practices; (d) [access to comprehensive school mental and behavioral health services](#); and (e) effective community collaboration. Importantly, trauma-sensitive school approaches fit well within a multitiered system of support (MTSS) framework.

Role of School Psychologists in Supporting Trauma-Sensitive Schools

[School psychologists](#) are uniquely trained to deliver high-quality, evidence-based mental and behavioral health services in schools to ensure that all students have the support they need to thrive. Specifically, school psychologists:

- [Provide comprehensive mental and behavioral health services](#) to all students
- Develop comprehensive data collection and management plans to help coordinate service delivery
- Consult with other educators on strategies and interventions for reducing barriers to learning
- Work with administrators to implement school-wide mental and behavioral health programs
- Promote school policies and practices that ensure positive and safe learning environments for all students
- Provide ongoing professional development regarding trauma informed practices
- Educate families about the impact of toxic stress, adversity, and trauma

Policy Recommendations

[Creating trauma-sensitive](#) schools requires a shift in policy and in practice. In addition to implementing multitiered systems of support, NASP recommends that schools and local districts:

- Prioritize efforts to [create safe and supportive school environments](#)
- Provide funds to integrate social-emotional learning into the curriculum
- Adopt positive discipline and restorative justice practices
- Provide ongoing professional development, particularly related to toxic stress, adversity, and trauma
- Improve access to school mental and behavioral health services
- Strive toward the NASP [recommended staffing ratio of 500–700](#) students per school psychologist

Opportunities to Advance Trauma-Sensitive Schools in ESSA

The [Every Student Succeeds Act \(ESSA\)](#) provides significant opportunity to increase access to comprehensive school mental and behavioral health services, and it expands local control over decision-making to address specific issues, such as trauma.

- Title IV Part A: Student Support and Academic Enhancement Grants (SSAEG) are a flexible block grant authorized at \$1.6 billion.
- Specialized instructional support personnel (SISP) must be involved in the development of district plans and applications for these funds, which must include a needs assessment in three key areas: (a) access to and opportunities for a well-rounded education, (b) safe and supportive conditions for learning, and (c) access to personalized learning experiences supported by technology.
- Districts must use at least 20% of SSAEG funds to improve student mental and behavioral health, school climate, or school safety, which include trauma-informed policies and practices.