Trauma-Sensitive Climate and Culture Plan

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**Abstract**

Many students regardless of their socio-economic backgrounds have experienced trauma in one way or another. These traumas that students have had in their lives can negatively affect learning, behavior, and relationships at school. Because of this it is important to address the main issue and not the symptoms. By being informed of and sensitive to the students’ trauma it will allow us to develop a plan for a trauma based school and record the effect this approach has on the students’ feelings about coming to school. This plan will be created by having a committee of faculty members meet to create expectations for the leader, staff, and students to foster an environment that is sensitive to the trauma of students. We will provide a written culture and climate plan as well as a sample of the modeled anonymous student survey

Keywords: Trauma, Trauma-Sensitive, LHES, Climate, Culture

Trauma-Sensitive Climate and Culture Plan

# Purpose

**What was the purpose of the project?**

The purpose of this project was to develop a school culture and climate that uses research based practices that address the traumatic events that LHES students have experienced; and find a way to reduce the negative impact on school performance.

**How did it come about?**

The project came about in August 27, 2018 with the arrival of a new principal at LHES. When the principal addressed the staff a crucial component was that the building operated like a large family, but there were inconsistencies throughout the building. This required the staff to think about how to address this issue and to ensure that the school had a climate and culture that was uniform across the building.

The second factor that led to this project was the various amounts of research that my colleague, Jason Kissoon, and I came across. Since 2015, Richmond Virginia has had the highest rate of suspensions and expulsions in the state (Resler, 2017). Various studies across the nation have shown the direct correlation between a student’s time out of school and the rates of incarceration.

Also, The National Child Traumatic Stress Network states that in the United States, more than 60% of children have been exposed to a traumatic event within a school year and 20% of children have experienced three to four traumatic events in a single school year (Resler, 2017). However, when speaking to Kendra Vendretti, RPS behaviorist/trauma specialist, she pointed out that over 50% of Richmond Public Schools’ student body experiences three or more traumatic events in a single school year.

Due to these reasons, LHES, Jason Kissoon, and I felt that it was important to focus on trauma-sensitive based practices to change the culture and climate of the school. This will allow us to provide a safe zone for the children so that they can actually focus on learning instead of their daily traumas.

**How does the topic relate to Leadership?**

This topic relates to leadership in that a school is only as successful as the culture and the climate of the school. If the school has a culture that is not conducive to learning, the children will not learn and the teachers will not perform to their greatest potential. Because of the high incidents of trauma experienced by RPS students, developing a climate and culture that addresses these traumas and acknowledges that they may impact the students’ academic progress is paramount.

## Research design

**Explain the timeline and process for the project.**

The process began by determining the crucial factors that impacted the academic progress of the students at LHES. Once looking past the academic components, it was clear that the environment that many of the students are in resulted in behavior that would lead to students being routinely suspended and expelled. My partner, Jason Kissoon, and I realized that many of the behaviors that negatively impact the academic progress of the students stemmed from the various traumas they experience. When a student is worried about being homeless, losing a parent or family member to violence, or finding food to eat at night, the last thing the student is going to focus on his/her school work.

Periodically, Jason and I met with various staff members of LHES and conducted informal interviews to determine the current culture of the school. Due to drastic changes, the previous the current culture was very different and contained a lot of inconsistencies. Jason and I had various staff member and parents fill out a Trauma-Sensitive School Checklist that was created by Lesley University Center for Special Education. Once the surveys were retrieved and looked over, we began to research how to implement trauma-based practices into a school and worked with the staff of LHES to create a team that was dedicated to the creation and implementation of this new school climate and culture.

**How was the research conducted? Interviews, archival analysis of data…**

Over the course of one semester, Jason and I met with staff members and parents every two weeks. During these meetings we conducted informal interviews, and had them complete a survey to determine the level of trauma sensitivity in the school. We also looked at different sources such as *“One of the Worst:” The School-to-Prison Pipeline in Richmond, Virginia* (Powell, 2016), *Facing the Facts: Trauma-Informed Schools* (Resler, 2017), and the *Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative* (Massachusetts Advocates for Children, 2018)

### **Results.**

**Hours documented – Create a simple chart of hours copied from your log.**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 8/27/2018 | 5:00 PM | 6:30 PM | 1:30 | Linwood Holton | Dr. Hurt, Ms. Jefferson | 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1,4, 3.1 | Meeting to discuss creating of school culture plan and school culture team |
| 10/2/2018 | 5:00 PM | 7:00 PM | 2:00 | Linwood Holton | Dr. Hurt | 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1,4, 3.1 | PBL Leadership, Met with Kendra Vendretti (Behavior Specialist) discussed implementing a trauma-based culture at Linwood Holton, discussed new research on trauma based culture in a public school setting, discussed the steps necessary to change a school's culture to one that is based on trauma sensitivity |
| 9/4/2018 | 5:00 PM | 8:00 PM | 3:00 | Starbucks | Dr. Hurt | 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1,4, 3.1 | PBL Leadership, discussed implementing a trauma-based culture at Linwood Holton, discussed new research on trauma based culture in a public school setting, created initial draft of PBL proposal |
| 9/5/2018 | 5:00 PM | 7:00 PM | 2:00 | Linwood Holton | Dr. Hurt | 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1,4, 3.1 | PBL Leadership proposal, edited finalized proposal |
| 9/11/2018 | 4:45 PM | 6:15 PM | 1:30 | Linwood Holton | Dr. Hurt | 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1,4, 3.1 | PBL Leadership proposal, met with admin to review proposal and obtain permission to use Linwood Holton as a model. |
| 9/16/2018 | 6:00 PM | 9:00 PM | 3:00 | Starbucks | Dr. Hurt | 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1,4, 3.1 | PBL Leadership, researched data that showed benefits to implementing a trauma-based culture in a public school setting. |
| 10/6/2018 | 2:00 PM | 6:00 PM | 4:00 | Panera Bread | Dr. Hurt, Ms. Jefferson | 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1,4, 3.1 | PBL Leadership, researched pros and cons of trauma-sensitive education policy, researched differences between Trauma-Sensitive education and PBIS, reviewing RPS school board policy's effect on implementation of trauma-sensitive education |
| 10/11/2018 | 5:00 PM | 7:00 PM | 2:00 | Linwood Holton | Dr. Hurt, Ms. Jefferson | 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1,4, 3.1 | PBL Leadership, Researched trauma-sensitive education policies in Richmond/Fairfax/Loudoun County Public Schools |
| 10/16/2018 | 5:00 PM | 7:30 PM | 2:30 | Linwood Holton/Starbucks | Dr. Hurt, Ms. Jefferson | 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1,4, 3.1 | PBL Leadership, watched documentary about the implementations and effects of trauma-sensitive education program in Seattle public schools, researched trauma-sensitive education policies in Seattle |
| 10/20/2018 | 2:00 PM | 4:00 PM | 2:00 | Panera Bread | Dr. Hurt, Ms. Jefferson | 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1,4, 3.1 | PBL Leadership, Met with Kendra Vendretti (Behavior Specialist) to further discuss the implementing a trauma-based culture at Linwood Holton |
| 10/22/2018 | 4:00 PM | 6:00 PM | 2:00 | Linwood Holton | Dr. Hurt, Ms. Jefferson | 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1,4, 3.1 | School Climate and Culture team meeting, discussing various rule implementations and how it is effecting the school. |
| 10/24/2018 | 4:00 PM | 6:00 PM | 2:00 | Linwood Holton | Dr. Hurt, Ms. Jefferson | 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1,4, 3.1 | School Climate and Culture team meeting, discussing various rule implementations and how it is effecting the school. |
| **Total Hours** | 27 Hours 30 min | | | | | | |

**Final product presented –**

See attached document titled: LHES Climate and Culture Plan

See attached document titled: Trauma-Sensitive School Checklist

#### Conclusion***.***

**What did you learn from your results?**

Throughout our research and interviews with different members of Richmond Public Schools, the point that came up over and over was the fact that a large majority of the students experience multiple traumas throughout the school year and it negatively affects their academic progress. We learned that for all of the academic interventions that are attempted every school year, they become ineffective when the traumas of the students go unaddressed. The numbers of students that are affected by trauma are staggering and it is important to target these areas if we want to have any chance of truly reaching the students academically.

**What did you learn from this project?**

When trying to change or improve the climate and culture of a school, it requires a village mentality. Everyone one from the parents, the teaching staff, the administrators, the custodians, bus drivers, lunchroom personal, and even the students have to work together and buy in to make it work. While it is time consuming and requires a lot of change, it is a low cost intervention that can result in major positive progress.

What are some potential next steps based on what you have learned?

Based on what we have learned, the next step would be to determine the common practices that will be used in every classroom and finding a manner to get the parents to model these practices at home. It would also be beneficial to collaborate with the sister school of LHES, Ginter Park Elementary School, to work on a trauma-sensitive climate and culture so that it has a greater impact on the community at large.

**References**

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