Kentucky School Administrator Perspectives on Trauma-Informed Practices: Implications for Critical Supervision

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Abstract

This study explored Kentucky school administrators' perceptions, knowledge, and beliefs about trauma-informed practices, competence in promoting these practices, and the extent to which school administration preparation programs provided relevant training. Participants reported they were not adequately trained in their school administration programs and believed they needed additional training and support to implement trauma-informed practices. The *Culturally Responsive, Trauma-informed Educator Identity* framework outlines essential knowledge and skills needed to promote trauma-informed practices, and implications for critical supervision are explored.

Keywords

trauma-informed practices; school administrators; critical supervision

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Introduction

Implementation of trauma-informed practices has increased in school settings (Avery et al., 2021). This trend is in response to how exposure to trauma can impact students' social, emotional, cognitive, and brain development (Raby et al., 2019; Thomas et al., 2019), which could have adverse consequences for learning. For example, trauma can negatively impact students' self-regulation and executive functioning; there can be issues in identifying emotional states, interpreting cues and expression, and regulating physiological and emotional arousal, as well as problems with language development, problem solving, sustained attention, and abstract reasoning (Blaustein & Kinniburgh, 2019). The expansion of trauma-informed practice into school systems is critical, so that schools and school districts can recognize and respond to these impacts of trauma (Chafouleas et al., 2016; Thomas et al., 2019).

Additionally, when considering the needs of students who have experienced trauma, school systems can address the implications specific to students of color, as these students may have been impacted by racial trauma through experiencing racism or discrimination (Carter, 2007). For example, school systems may potentially retraumatize or cause trauma for students of color when stakeholders maintain biases against those from traditionally marginalized backgrounds; furthermore, trauma can also be a result of school policies and practices that uphold systems of oppression, such as exclusionary discipline practices (Gaffney, 2019; Iruka et al., 2020; NCTSN, 2019; Williams et al., 2018). Given the role that school administrators have in shaping school policies and practices, they can have a significant impact on improving outcomes for all students (Cowan et al., 2013).

While pre-service (e.g., Brown et al., 2020; Wells et al., in press) and in-service teachers (e.g., Brunzell et al., 2019) are often the center of trauma-informed training, little attention has been paid to the preparation of school administrators (Berger et al., 2020). Understanding school administrators' perspectives on trauma and trauma-informed practices is critical because school leaders have the potential to "create a school environment where teachers thrive and students achieve their greatest potential in a safe and nurturing school setting" (Cowan et al., 2013, p. 8). Specifically beneficial for students who have experienced trauma, effective school administrators can support "the physical and mental health of children, as well as their social and emotional well-being, which is reinforced by a sense of safety and self-confidence" (p. 8). Therefore, the purpose of this research study is to explore school administrators' perspectives on trauma-informed practices, including their levels of preparation, beliefs, and professional development needs.

Culturally Responsive, Trauma-informed Educator Identity Framework

Currently, there is not a standard framework for trauma-informed practices in schools (Thomas et al., 2019). This presents challenges in determining the extent of training in trauma-informed practices that educators, including school administrators, should acquire. While organizations have developed frameworks that school systems can incorporate (e.g., NCTSN, 2021), Author et al. (in press 1) have posited a trauma-informed framework at the individual educator level. By having a framework available for the individual, the school administrator (as the individual) would be more equipped with an explicit approach to examine their perceptions of trauma-

informed practices while also evaluating the extent of their knowledge and skills. Further, school administrators may need knowledge and skills at both the school-wide and individual level to effectively facilitate trauma-informed practices in their schools.

The *Culturally Responsive, Trauma-informed Educator Identity* framework (Wells et al., in press) outlines knowledge and skills that educators need to become trauma-informed. The components of this framework were developed from a systematic literature review (e.g., Alexander & Hinrichs, 2019; Brown et al., 2020; Chafouleas et al., 2016; Cole et al., 2005; Erdman et al., 2020; O'Grady, 2017; Olsen, 2012; Kataoka et al., 2018; Sporleder & Forbes, 2016; Thomas et al., 2019; Wiest-Stevenson & Lee, 2016) that highlight trauma-informed practices in the school context. The systematic review process followed steps outlined in Newman and Gough (2020), including 1. specifying a research question (i.e., what trauma-informed practices do individual educators need for implementation?), 2. designing a conceptual framework, 3. constructing selection criteria (e.g., resources published within the last 10 years, described trauma-informed strategies in the school setting, guidance for educators), 4. developing a search strategy, 5. selecting and coding studies, 6. assessing and synthesizing studies, and 7. reporting findings. In this instance, the conceptual framework that was "developed, refined [and] confirmed during the course of the research" (p. 7) was also our reported finding, in that our framework is to be used as 'research tool' for understanding trauma-informed practices in the school setting (Newman & Gough, 2020). We also engaged in document analysis of existing frameworks that take a systems-level approach (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014; National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2021) to create a framework that is useful for individual educator development. After the initial development of the framework's components (Wells et al., in press), the importance of each component was then reviewed by in-service teachers (Wells et al., 2022) and school counselors (Wells, 2022), with the current iteration of the framework revised based on these reviews, including the addition of developing family and community partnerships.

Knowledge of Trauma's Impact and School-based Practices. First, the primary components of the framework are *knowledge of social, emotional, cognitive, and physical impacts of trauma* as well as *knowledge of trauma-informed classroom and school-wide practices*. These topics highlight the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (2014) four assumptions (realizing the widespread impact of trauma; recognizing the signs and symptoms of trauma; responding by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices; and seeking to actively resist re-traumatization) in a particular school's context, as well as evidence-based strategies that can be employed in schools (Alexander & Hinrichs, 2019; Kataoka et al., 2018), such as holding community circles, intentional relationship building with adults and peers, and allowing for student choice.

Culturally Responsive Practice. To ensure that trauma-informed practices meet the needs of students of color and from other traditionally marginalized backgrounds, an integral part of our framework is culturally responsive and sustaining practices (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Paris & Alim, 2017). According to Ladson-Billings (2014), culturally sustaining practices include developing students' ability to consider critical perspectives on policies and practices, as well as ensuring educators' pedagogy affirms students' backgrounds and experiences.

Social Emotional Learning and Self-care. Next, our framework incorporates social emotional learning (SEL). SEL fosters development of identity, regulation of emotions, and the building of supportive relationships (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL], 2022). SEL instruction can be provided as individual lessons through an established curriculum as well as integrated as skills into content area curriculum, such as labeling emotions or developing interpersonal skills (Wiest-Stevenson & Lee, 2016). In addition to student SEL practices, adult SEL strategies are also critical to develop, so that educators can build their expertise and skills to lead SEL initiatives (Woolf, n.d.). Moreover, adult SEL involves self-care strategies to promote educators' well-being (Thomas et al., 2019), another aspect of the framework, because educators can be impacted by the trauma of students and families. This exposure places educators at risk for secondary traumatic stress and vicarious trauma (Hydon et al., 2015; Lawson et al., 2019).

Reflection and Understanding Identity. Additionally, an important aspect of trauma-informed practice is reflecting on our practice. Reflection facilitates introspection into our identity and values, as well as the ethical and practical consequences of social problems (D'Cruz et al., 2007). Introspection also informs our responses to others (National Child Traumatic Stress Network, Justice Consortium, Schools Committee, & Culture Consortium, 2017). In creating equitable classrooms that are culturally responsive and sustaining, educators can work toward dismantling norms of Whiteness (Lynch, 2018). According to Lynch (2018), "the development of a positive, antiracist White identity is an absolute necessity for White teachers" (p. 28). This reflection requires time and space for educators to unpack their experiences and beliefs in a supportive environment, such as during teacher supervision (Lynch, 2018; Willey & Magee, 2018).

School Discipline and Family and Community Partnerships. Moreover, the framework aligns with the National Child Traumatic Stress Network's (2021) aspects of school discipline and family and community partnerships. Educators benefit from learning and implementing restorative justice approaches to discipline (Pavelka, 2013) to improve student behavior and related outcomes. Restorative justice practices can be viewed as a trauma-informed mental health intervention (Sedillo-Hamann, 2022) because it allows offenders who may have been exposed to trauma to regain their voice and social connection. Finally, the framework emphasizes building collaborative relationships with families and community partners (Smylie et al., 2020) to better understand and respond to the needs of students and families. For example, establishing community partnerships can help "support the schools' educational objectives and to provide direct caring support services for children and families" (p. 119). Additionally, trauma-informed strategies in working with families include sharing decision-making responsibilities with family members, being transparent and trustworthy, and ensuring families' physical and emotional safety when visiting the school (Erdman et al., 2020).

Critical Supervision

In addition to the *Culturally Responsive, Trauma-Informed Educator Identity* framework that can help shape school administrators' views of knowledge and skills of trauma-informed practices, school leaders should also be equipped with explicit ways to provide feedback to teachers and staff through supervision. In a broader sense, Sullivan and Glanz (2013) define clinical supervision as "the ongoing, nonjudgmental, collaborative process that engages teachers in

dialogue that encourages deep reflective practices for the purpose of improving teaching and learning" (p. 121). However, there are a variety of forms of supervision in which school administrators can engage.

For example, with communal supervision (Glickman et al., 2018), school administrators, along with formal and informal teacher leaders, could offer direct assistance to teachers by implementing and evaluating teaching methods, as well as designing and providing professional development. To facilitate these processes, school administrators can develop a set of supervision skills, such as how to conduct observations, engage in action research, as well as serve in mentoring and coaching capacities (Glickman et al., 2018; Zepeda, 2017). Further, Glickman et al. (2018) described how supervision skills can be divided into two discrete categories of tasks, technical and cultural. Technical tasks include activities such as direct assistance, evaluation of teaching, professional development, and action research, whereas cultural tasks include facilitating change, addressing diversity, and building community.

It is within these cultural tasks that we highlight the growth of *critical supervision*. School administrators who focus on creating equitable schools through social justice are needed (Guerra et al., 2013), and critical supervision is one strategy that leaders can employ to facilitate change. Critical supervision embeds the nature of critical pedagogy, which is framed around questioning "inequalities of power, about the false myths of opportunity and merit for many students, and about the way belief systems become internalized" (Burbules & Berk, 1999, p. 50). In terms of critical pedagogy in supervision, Arnold (2018) states that "critical pedagogy in the form of in-depth supervisory identity development may help leaders and teachers build on their professional caring and commitment" (p. 591). One goal of critical supervision is for school administrators to develop their supervisory identity in a way that helps to address "inequities and power differentials among racial, ethnic, and cultural groups" (Mette, 2019, p. 4) in the school setting. This could be through using supervision to help build equitable and anti-racist schools (Willey & Magee, 2018) by supporting teachers in adopting culturally responsive teaching practices through examining "assumptions the teacher holds regarding that climate, curriculum, instruction, and assessment" (Gordon & Espinoza, 2020, p. 3).

We see critical supervision's focus on culturally responsive practices as consonant with being a trauma-informed educator. Knowledge and skills in trauma-informed practices may be required to help school administrators provide constructive yet critical feedback to teachers and staff about their implementation of trauma-informed practices both in and outside the classroom.

As trauma-informed practices gain momentum in schools, certain localities have taken steps to ensure that all schools and school districts are trauma-informed. Recently, the School Safety and Resiliency Act (2019), also known as Senate Bill 1 (SB1), was passed by the Kentucky General Assembly to address statues regarding both school safety and student resilience. In particular, one new requirement indicated that schools and school districts must adopt trauma-informed approaches to education (KRS 158.4416). This new mandate required local boards of education to develop district-level trauma-informed education plans by July 1, 2021. The Commonwealth provided a *Trauma-Informed Toolkit* to provide a multitude of resources to school districts, including strategies to address key plan elements such as enhancing trauma awareness, assessment of school climate, the development of trauma-informed discipline policies,

collaboration with community partners (e.g., sheriff, state police) regarding notification of trauma-exposed students, and preventative service and program planning to reduce negative impacts of trauma (Weeter, 2022).

Context of the Study

Because of the new requirements for trauma-informed school districts in Kentucky, understanding Kentucky school administrators' perceptions and knowledge of trauma-informed practices is essential. Additionally, perspectives on trauma-informed practices have implications on how school administrators engage in critical supervision. Data on school administrators' perspectives will help schools, school districts, and school administrator preparation programs better understand the needs of school administrators.

The following research questions are addressed in this study: 1) To what extent do school administrators believe that their school administrator preparation programs trained them in trauma-informed practices? 2) What are school administrators' perceptions and knowledge of the components within the *Culturally Responsive, Trauma-informed Educator Identity* framework? 3) What are school administrators' beliefs about their role in promoting trauma-informed practices and their competence in performing those roles?

Because of the exploratory nature of the study to gain initial perspectives from a variety of school administrators throughout Kentucky, a cross-sectional survey design was implemented to examine school administrators' current attitudes, beliefs, and practices (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). We employ a postpositivist lens to data collection (Creswell, 2014), and critical supervision served as the lens for data analysis.

Method

Participants completed the *School Administrator Perceptions and Knowledge of Trauma-Informed Practices* questionnaire which was designed for this study because there was not an existing one that addressed school administrator perspectives. The questionnaire was adapted from Wells et al.'s (in press) prior questionnaire designed for pre-service teachers and adhered to Fowler's (2014) processes for the creation of additional items. First, we explored the literature on implementation of trauma-informed practices (Alexander & Hinrichs, 2019; Kataoka et al., 2018; Thomas et al., 2019). Next, we drafted an initial set of additional question items reviewed by researchers with expertise in trauma and/or school administration. Then, a field pretest was conducted with students enrolled in a school administrator preparation program.

The questionnaire includes 34 items on a Likert-type rating scale, one all-that-apply item, three open-ended responses, and nine demographic items. For reliability statistics, the 34 rating scale items showed strong internal consistency ($\alpha = .93$). Cronbach's alpha was also calculated individually for items on aspects of school administrator preparation programs (4 items, $\alpha = .59$), components of the *Culturally Responsive, Trauma-informed Educator Identity* framework (11 items, $\alpha = .88$), competence in trauma-informed practices (14 items, $\alpha = .89$), and administrator beliefs about their roles (5 items, $\alpha = .65$). The open-ended response items and demographic questions helped to contextualize participant perspectives on trauma-informed practices. The

three open-ended items include: "Describe the type of training about trauma-informed practices you received," "What is the administrator's role in developing a trauma-informed school?" and "What support do you need to better implement trauma-informed practices?"

Lastly, demographic items included work setting, years of experience, grade level, race/ethnicity, gender, and geographical location. Work setting was defined by the participants' place of work, including whether the setting was rural, suburban, or urban, as well as whether the setting was public, charter, private, or independent. Years of experience included categories of 1 to 5 years, 6 to 10 years, 11 to 15 years, 16 to 20 years, and 21 or more years. Grade level categories were early childhood, elementary school, middle school/junior high, K-8th grade, high school, all grades/K-12, or other. Race was categorized as Asian, Black/African American, Native American or American Indian, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, White/Caucasian, two or more races, or prefer not to say. Ethnicity asked whether participants identified as Hispanic/Latino or prefer not to say. Next, gender identity was categorized as woman, man, non-binary, prefer to self-describe, or prefer not to say. Finally, participants were asked about their geographical location by state of employment.

Recruitment and Procedure

This study received approval from our university's Institutional Review Board, and we employed convenience and snowball sampling to collect responses from school administrators in Kentucky. To be eligible, participants must have been a current school administrator at the time of taking the questionnaire, and participants were encouraged to forward the questionnaire to other administrators. To recruit participants, we contacted school administrators via email through a listserv purchased through the Kentucky Association of Elementary School Principals (KAESP) that included contact email addresses for elementary and middle school principals. Our email provided a description of the study and informed consent, as well as access to the questionnaire; we then encouraged participants to forward our email to other school administrators. Data were collected online via Qualtrics from September 2021 through October 2021. Participants were not compensated and could withdraw from the study at any time.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed in Microsoft Excel. Descriptive statistics were calculated for rating scale and demographic items, as well as an independent *t* test to compare gender identity and an ANOVA to compare work setting were conducted. These demographic characteristics were selected because work setting (rural, suburban, urban) might indicate family or community influence on participants' perspectives, and gender identity might influence participants' understanding of supervisory identity. Because of the homogeneity of our sample, differences in race and ethnicity were not explored.

For open-ended data, we engaged in inductive content analysis (Elo et al., 2014). An inductive approach was chosen as it allows researchers "to understand the multiple interrelationships among dimensions that emerge from the data without making prior assumptions" (Patton, 2002, p. 56) and because of a lack of existing literature our topic. To organize the open-ended data analysis process, we followed steps outlined in Creswell and Guetterman (2019). First, we read

each open-ended response to gain familiarity. Second, we divided the text into segments that related to each research question. Next, we labeled segments with in-vivo codes (Saldaña, 2016), collapsed them into categories and then themes. To improve validity, each researcher analyzed open-ended data separately before coming to a consensus on final themes. A deductive approach is then applied, using the lens of critical supervision, to interpret the combined closed- and open-ended data in the discussion. Specifically, we reviewed data for evidence of critical pedagogy and culturally responsive practices.

Participants

There were 51 total participants in the study out of 1,215 contacted for a response rate of 4.2%. For gender identity, more respondents identified as women ($n = 35$) than men ($n = 16$). Most participants identified as Caucasian/White ($n = 47$). Two participants identified as African American/Black, and two preferred not to disclose. For ethnicity, nearly all did not identify as Hispanic/Latino ($n = 50$), and one preferred not to disclose.

Most participants served in suburban ($n = 24$) and rural communities ($n = 21$), followed by urban communities ($n = 6$). Forty-nine were in public schools, and two were in independent schools. Additionally, most participants served in elementary schools ($n = 27$), followed by high school ($n = 11$), middle school/junior high ($n = 5$), K-12/All grades ($n = 4$), early childhood ($n = 3$), and other ($n = 1$; grades 6 – 12). Finally, many participants were mid-career administrators with 6 to 10 years of experience ($n = 26$), followed by 11 to 15 years ($n = 8$), 1 to 5 years ($n = 7$), 16 to 20 years ($n = 6$), and 21 or more years *($n = 4$)*. All participants ($n = 51$) served in Kentucky.

Results

Both quantitative and qualitative data are explored. Quantitative data include results from rating scale items, as well as independent *t* tests to compare the effects of gender and four one-way between subjects ANOVA tests to compare the effect of work setting. Qualitative findings include three themes that emerged from open-ended response items.

Quantitative

Rating scales items addressed administrator preparation in trauma-informed practices, the components of the *Culturally Responsive, Trauma-informed Educator Identity* framework, competence in the components of the framework, and administrator beliefs. Results from independent *t* tests to compare the effect of gender revealed that there were no statistically significant differences in responses between men and women.

Table 1. *Rating Scales in Trauma-Informed Practices and Administration*

Rating Scale Component	M	SD	Men		Women		t	p
			M	SD	M	SD		
Aspects of Administrator Preparation [a]			7.25	2.77	7	2.42	.06	2.06
Overall training in trauma-informed practices	1.53	.76						
Level of training embedded in curriculum	1.53	.78						
Level of training embedded in instructor pedagogy	1.51	.76						
Satisfaction in training in trauma-informed practices [b]	2.65	.96						
Components of Culturally Responsive, Trauma-informed Educator Identity Framework [c]			43.63	10.51	49.63	4.76	-2.18	.04
Knowledge of social, emotional, cognitive, and physical impacts of trauma	4.57	0.64						
Trauma-informed classroom and school-wide practices or initiatives	4.56	0.73						
Culturally responsive and sustaining practices	4.41	0.90						
Student social emotional learning practices	4.59	0.73						
Adult social emotional learning practices	4.35	0.87						
Understanding your own identity and values	4.25	0.96						
Practicing self-care	4.37	0.82						
Engaging in ongoing critical reflection about your role in your school and in school systems	4.12	0.93						
Restorative justice discipline practices	4.04	0.96						
Family partnerships	4.39	0.75						
Community partnerships	4.18	0.87						
Components of Competence Rating in Trauma-informed Practices [d]			53.31	9.10	54.71	8.05	-.53	.60
Knowledge of social, emotional, cognitive, and physical impacts of trauma	4.12	0.55						
Trauma-informed classroom and school-wide practices or initiatives	4.02	0.58						
Culturally responsive and sustaining practices	3.78	0.70						
Student social emotional learning practices	4.0	0.69						
Adult social emotional learning practices	3.69	0.86						
Understanding your own identity and values	4.18	0.82						
Practicing self-care	3.96	0.82						
Engaging in ongoing critical reflection about your role in your school and in school systems	4.10	0.88						
Restorative justice discipline practices	3.59	0.96						
Family partnerships	4.12	0.52						

Table 1. *Rating Scales in Trauma-Informed Practices and Administration (cont.)*

Community partnerships	4.02	0.62						
Leading school-wide initiatives for trauma-informed practices	3.61	1.10						
Leading school-wide training for teachers and staff on trauma-informed practices	3.43	1.06						
Collecting and analyzing data relevant to promote trauma-informed practices	3.75	1.07						
Aspects of Beliefs about the Roles of School Administrators [e]			19.31	3.93	21.57	2.84	-2.07	.05
Administrators should be responsible for leading trauma informed practices school-wide.	3.92	1.02						
Administrators should be responsible for providing professional development in trauma-informed practices to teachers and staff.	3.92	1.02						
Administrators should be responsible for collecting and analyzing school data to refine and implement trauma-informed practices.	3.82	1.13						
Schools need to become trauma-informed to better serve students, families, and staff.	4.61	.60						
Trauma-informed practices help to improve equitable student outcomes.	4.59	.61						

Note.
[a] Participants rated aspects on a Likert scale (1 = not at all to 5 = a great deal); *t(26)*
[b] overall satisfaction in preparation program (1 = extremely dissatisfied to 5 = extremely satisfied)
[c] Participants rated components on a Likert scale (1 = not at all important to 5 = extremely important); *t(18)*
[d] Participants rated competence on a Likert scale (1 = extremely incompetent to 5 = extremely competent); *t(26)*
[e] Participants rated beliefs on a Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree); *t(22)*

In addition, four one-way between subjects ANOVA were conducted to compare the effect of work setting (rural, suburban, urban) on training in school administrator preparation program, components of the *Culturally Responsive, Trauma-informed Educator Identity* framework, competence in trauma-informed practices, and administrator beliefs about their roles. There were not significant effects of work setting on training in school administrator preparation program at the p<.05 level for the three conditions [F(2, 48) = .20, p = .82]; components of the *Culturally Responsive, Trauma-informed Educator Identity* framework at the p < .05 level for the three conditions [F(2, 48) = 2.37, p = .10]; competence in trauma-informed practices at the p < .05 level for the three conditions [F(2, 48) = 1.21, p = .31]; administrator beliefs about their roles at the p<.05 level for the three conditions [F(2, 48) = .35, p = .71].

Administrator Preparation

Participants generally rated their training in trauma-informed practices as limited. Overall training in trauma-informed practices and level of embeddedness in curriculum and pedagogy were below 2 (i.e., a little) on a Likert scale (1 = not at all to 5 = a great deal). Despite the lack of

training, participants rated their satisfaction higher ($M = 2.65$, $SD = .96$). This rating may indicate that other factors contributed to participants' overall satisfaction with their school administrator preparation program. To supplement their learning in trauma-informed practices since completing their program, participants sought professional development (PD) from a variety of sources: conferences ($n = 33$); publications ($n = 30$); PD provided by the Commonwealth ($n = 19$); PD provided by the school district ($n = 38$); PD provided by a community partner ($n = 21$).

Culturally Responsive, Trauma-informed Educator Identity Framework

Participants rated the importance of the components of *Culturally Responsive, Trauma-informed Educator Identity* framework. All components yielded averages over 4 (i.e., very important) on a Likert scale (1 = not at all important to 5 = extremely important). The lowest average was for *restorative justice discipline practices*, and the highest average was for *student social emotional learning practices*.

Competence Rating in Trauma-informed Practices

Participants rated their competence in the components of *Culturally Responsive, Trauma-informed Educator Identity* framework on a Likert scale (1 = extremely incompetent to 5 = extremely competent). The lowest average was for *leading school-wide training for teachers and staff on trauma-informed practices,* and the highest average was for *understanding your own identity and values.* Results indicate that participants' competence levels are lower than how important they perceive the components to be.

Beliefs about the Roles of School Administrators

Participants rated their beliefs about the roles of school administrators regarding trauma-informed practices on a Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). The lowest average was for *administrators should be responsible for collecting and analyzing school data to refine and implement trauma-informed practices*, and the highest average was for *schools need to become trauma-informed to better serve students, families, and staff*. This result may indicate that while school administrators believe that trauma-informed practices are important, they also believe that school administrators should not be solely responsible for their implementation.

Qualitative

Themes include 1) lack of trauma-informed training, 2) administrators should play a support role, and 3) a need for trauma-informed support. Findings suggest that school administrators in the Commonwealth are supportive of trauma-informed practices but overwhelmingly believe that professional development training in these practices needs to be provided by trained experts.

Lack of Trauma-Informed Training

Participants indicated a variety of responses regarding training on trauma-informed practices that they received during their administrator preparation program. More than a third indicated that

they received no formal training. Instead, many of these participants indicated that training was provided in the school setting in which they were employed through professional development; this training was offered through school districts as in-services within the school or through the local education cooperative and was primarily facilitated by school counselors, school psychologists, and mental health counselors.

Additionally, participants who received training about trauma-informed practices in the graduate setting were taught in diverse ways. Responses ranged from readings and discussions to being embedded in lessons concerning social and emotional learning, student behavior, and classroom management. Most respondents who indicated training at the graduate level discussed the informality of this training stating, "Very brief, just casual mentions of factors like poverty," and "More of a knowledge background that kids come to school with baggage and issues from home," as well as "It was embedded, usually when focusing on student behavior."

Because of the lack of preparation in trauma-informed practices that participants received in their school administrator program, participants may need additional training to promote stronger implementation of these practices, including when engaging in supervision. A thorough understanding of trauma-informed practices would support school administrators' work in coaching and assisting teachers and staff with their practices. Cultural tasks that school administrators may need to engage in critical supervision and facilitate change include having teachers reflect on inequities, such as how poverty or issues at home may affect students' ability to learn.

Administrators Should Play a Support Role

When considering the role of the administrator in developing trauma-informed schools, many participants indicated that while this work was valuable, the school administrator should play a supporting role. Much of the discussion promoted the fact that school administrators are not experts in the field of trauma-informed practices, which has implications for supervision. As one participant noted, "We must be trained ourselves, but are by no means experts in the field. This is a newer concept and those of us who have been around for decades tend to know only what we read on our own." Furthermore, other participants indicated how "administrators are the leaders, but this area is more under the expertise of a guidance counselor," as well as how administrators need to support "those who have an understanding of the processes and [back] the implementation of those practices in the school." Moreover, supporting the work of trained professionals was an important aspect that most participants indicated. The support would come from school administrators in a variety of ways, such as modeling ("Believing in and modeling best practices for the staff, students, and families"), being present ("Bring in the experts, attend training, know and understand as much as your staff"), and in evaluation ("They are responsible to ensure these practices are part of the school").

Moreover, another salient finding regarded offering professional development by trained experts. Many participants noted the value of allowing experts to lead their staff in trauma-informed practices. Participants stated, "I believe the administrator needs to work with an experienced professional to provide a quality, research-based program," as well as "I don't think my role is to lead the PD. I want someone more qualified to do that." Although most participants were

supportive of trauma-informed schools, one participant noted "Schools are institutions of learning NOT behavioral health institutions," indicating that not all school administrators are supportive of developing trauma-informed schools.

In considering the context of providing critical supervision, participants' emphasis of playing a supportive role in implementing trauma-informed practices may also require engaging in communal supervision. For example, through communal, critical supervision, an expert in trauma, such as a school counselor, would collaborate with the school administrator on providing feedback to teachers about their classroom practices.

A Need for Trauma-Informed Support

The primary finding drawn from the question of what support school administrators need to better implement trauma-informed practices was that of professional training to enhance understanding of trauma-informed practices. In particular, one participant stated, "Professionals to train the staff," while another noted, "We need training. We need partnerships with experts." Along with training, participants described how they would like to be provided with more resources. Specifically, participants indicated the need for training that is tailored to their students' needs and building level (i.e., elementary, middle, high), as well as being provided with ample opportunities to absorb and reflect on new knowledge. As one participant indicated, "More training specific to my school," as well as another noted, "More time to use, practice using, the knowledge I have acquired from PD and other learning." The most salient topics that participants wanted to learn included social-emotional learning, trauma support at different tiers, mental health, and restorative justice programs; several participants described how training should be ongoing and not solely at the beginning of the year.

Finally, another need focused on funding. Funding was suggested to enhance training as well as to hire more trauma-informed experts, such as "full time family resource coordinators and full-time school resource officers," as well as "more counselors." Although most participants felt that they needed support to develop trauma-informed schools, some participants indicated that they needed no additional support. One participant "would not recommend these practices within schools," while another stated "I need others – outside experts – to understand the administrators have more than enough on their plates." Participants' responses reinforce the need for experts to engage in communal, critical supervision with school administrators.

Discussion

School administrators believed that all the components of the *Culturally Responsive, Trauma-informed Educator Identity* framework are important to the implementation of trauma-informed practices in school settings. Participants' high ratings of the components support the utility of the framework as a tool that educators could use to reflect on their practices. Consonant with the lack of training in trauma-informed practices in their administrator preparation programs (Berger et al., 2020), participants had lower levels of competence across the framework than how important they rated the components.

Many participants were mid-career school administrators. During the time in which those participants received their school administrator training, trauma-informed practices were likely not commonly taught in their programs, as much of the widely promoted content designed for education employs the trauma-informed approach developed by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration in 2015 (Thomas et al., 2019). Moreover, school administrators varied how they approached their current learning of trauma-informed practices (e.g., conferences, publications).

The level of knowledge and skills that school administrators have on trauma-informed practices may impact their capacity to engage in critical supervision with their teachers and staff. Without a solid foundation in trauma-informed practices, school administrators may be limited in effectively assisting teachers in developing their own practices. Based on school administrators' reluctance in leading these practices on their own, it may be required that an expert, whether that is an educator on staff (e.g., a school counselor) or an outside provider, engage in communal supervision (Glickman et al., 2018) with school administrators to provide feedback to teachers and staff on their implementation of trauma-informed practices. For example, school administrators may need to rely on an expert to engage in difficult conversations with teachers about privilege and bias during critical supervision (Lynch, 2018; Willey & Magee, 2018).

In acknowledging the ever-evolving ways that educators can support students in the school system, it is important to recall how school administrators set the tone for implementation of new initiatives (Cowan et al., 2013). Without school administrators' support, proposed initiatives may not be implemented with fidelity. Some participants held a mindset that trauma-informed practices did not belong in schools. Those school administrators may risk not having fully developed trauma-informed schools because they do not find these practices to be beneficial or applicable to their work, limiting their ability to build consensus on the school's vision (Cowan et al., 2013) for trauma-informed practices. A lack of buy-in may also impact how school administrators engage in critical supervision. For example, if school administrators do not see the value of reflecting on social issues for themselves (D'Cruz et al., 2007), then they may be less able to coach teachers through a similar reflection process. However, there are aspects of critical pedagogy (Arnold, 2018) and culturally responsive practice that are part of ongoing debate, such as Lynch's (2018) focus on the need to develop anti-racist identities, which may influence how school administrators engage in supervision.

For school administrators who embody the Commonwealth's recommendations for trauma-informed schools, there is support in this initiative. Even with support, there is a sense that more resources and support are necessary (Berger et al., 2020). For example, additional funding is required to equip schools with highly trained staff who are trauma-informed experts, such as school counselors, social workers, or school psychologists who have specialized in trauma. These experts could directly provide services to students and families as well as support school administrators, teachers, and staff by providing ongoing professional development or engaging in communal, critical supervision. Further, as more school administrator preparation programs become more intentional about embedding trauma-informed practices into their programs of study, graduates of these programs may be better equipped to lead trauma-informed schools.

Limitations

When interpreting the results from this study, limitations should be considered. The goal of this study was to gather knowledge and perceptions of trauma-informed practices of school administrators. However, limitations to this study include the sample's low response rate, the sample of participants representing only the Commonwealth of Kentucky, and the participants being composed primarily of white women. As a result, the generalization of findings is limited in geography and representation of a more diverse, robust population of school administrators. If duplicated, future research could employ the methods used in this study among school administrators from other states across the U.S. as well as identify more participants from historically underrepresented populations. Additionally, the study did not include direct observations of school administrators to confirm or deny the findings of support of trauma-informed practices in the administrators' school buildings. Future research could extend upon school administrators' knowledge and perceptions to address the application of these practices within school buildings.

Implications for Research and Practice

School administrators could benefit from additional training in trauma-informed practices as well as from engaging in critical supervision. For example, the components of the *Culturally Responsive, Trauma-informed Educator Identity* framework could provide structure in terms of areas where knowledge and skills could be developed. As school administrators begin to increase their competency in trauma-informed practices, they may be more confident in engaging in critical supervision with teachers and staff. For example, practicing their own reflection on power differentials or inequities (Mette, 2019) may help prepare them to lead these types of discussions with teachers (Gordon & Espinoza, 2020). Moreover, with increased competence, school administrators can design professional development on trauma-informed practice and support their staff in developing adult SEL capacities (Woolf, n.d.) as well as their attention to self-care. In terms of supervision of other trauma-informed practices, school administrators with increased competence, for example, may be able to better observe teachers and staff in their interactions with each other as well as with students with attention on examining elements of building heathy relationships (CASEL, 2022). Additionally, school administrators could review policies and practices of school discipline to ensure that they are restorative in nature (Pavelka, 2013; Sedillo-Hamann, 2022).

Despite the potential benefits of trauma-informed practices, there are barriers to implementation. For example, many schools, and further many districts, do not have experts in trauma-informed practices on staff who could train school administrators or engage in communal, critical supervision. Subsequently, hiring new employees or relying on outside experts could present a financial burden to school districts. If it is not possible to place a trauma expert in every school, then, for example, districts could either employ a central office person who can support and provide training district-wide or develop a community partnership with a mental health agency for this service. Additionally, there may be resistance (Guerra et al., 2013) or a lack of buy-in from current staff on the applicability of trauma-informed practices. Focusing first on increasing staff awareness of the impacts of trauma (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014), particularly within their local community's context, could help school

administrators to build consensus (Cowan et al., 2013) on the value of trauma-informed practices in their schools.

Finally, future directions of this research include examining family and community perceptions of trauma-informed practices might impact the level of buy-in of school administrators. For example, researchers could review local perspectives of promoting culturally responsive or anti-racist practices to determine how these perspectives may influence school administrators' willingness to engage in critical supervision.

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