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## A Roadmap for Trauma-Informed Practice Integration in Teacher Preparation Content

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### Cover Page Footnote

We thank Anna Joseph for her important contributions to this work.

## *A Roadmap for Trauma-Informed Practice Integration in Teacher Preparation Content*

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The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA, 2022) has documented the prevalence of childhood trauma. One-half to two-thirds of children experience trauma linked to abuse, neglect, and other hallmarks of potentially traumatic events (Boullier & Blair, 2018). More than thirty percent of children have experienced multiple traumatic events (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020), and there is reason to believe this number is underreported (SAMHSA, 2022). Trauma increases the likelihood of mental and physical health risks later in life (Sowder et al., 2018). These statistics do not account for the trauma of "slow violence" such as ongoing racial discrimination and microaggressions that students of color experience (Pain, 2019) or encounters with other systemic forms of discrimination, suggesting that the actual rate of childhood trauma is likely much higher.

Childhood trauma can disrupt brain development, including memory systems, cognition, emotional regulation, and executive function (Massachusetts Advocates for Children, 2009). Students need memory systems, cognition, emotional regulation, and executive function to be successful at school. The negative impacts of trauma often adversely affect students by interfering with their ability to plan, complete assignments, remember content, and focus on learning (Terrasi & De Galarce, 2017). Trauma also affects interactions with peers because students who have experienced trauma

might struggle with trust, closeness, communication, and problem-solving, all traits needed for friendship and working together in a classroom (Levine Brown et al., 2019; Rodger et al., 2014; Whitley et al., 2013).

Teachers have been an overlooked support system for students who have experienced trauma. Teachers who connect deeply with their students can create better learning environments for these students, leading to increased academic proficiencies within classrooms (Barr, 2016; Taylor, 2021). Further, students whose teachers are perceived to have empathetic engagement are often less stressed, more engaged, and score higher on state assessments (Chang, 2009; De Royston et al., 2017; Gallagher et al., 2019; Martin, 2020).

To prepare teachers for the traumas experienced by students, teacher preparation must also teach about trauma-informed practices (TIPs). TIPs are a set of methods, policies, and procedures that acknowledge, support, and manage the learning needs of children impacted by trauma (Shalka, 2015). When trauma-informed practices become an integral aspect of educator preparation, new teachers can enter the workforce prepared to address the needs of students who have experienced trauma and all students (Castro Schepers & Young, 2022). TIPs equip teachers early in their careers to recognize and support students who experience trauma and will help new teachers learn strategies to mitigate their stress and their secondary traumatic stress

(Borntrager et al., 2015; Levine Brown et al., 2019; Rodger et al., 2014; Whitley et al., 2013).

The TIP program at Metropolitan State University of Denver (MSU Denver) School of Education (SOE) is working to increase the current trauma-informed practices knowledge of preservice teachers so that they are ready to implement these practices from the beginning of their careers. This paper adds to the trauma-informed literature in teacher preparation by describing the TIP initiative at MSU Denver. It provides a roadmap for schools and departments that want to undertake this endeavor and explains each step in the roadmap.

### **Background**

Each year, MSU Denver School of Education (SOE), the second-largest teacher preparation program in the state, prepares 300 new teachers from diverse backgrounds to enter the teaching profession across the state, including public, private, and parochial schools. Existing curricula at the university did not include an explicit focus on TIPs prior to 2018. In June 2018, a national mental health non-profit staff member introduced the concept of integrating trauma-informed practices into teacher education coursework. That fall, the SOE partnered with the non-profit Resilient Futures (RF) to provide a four-part series of trauma-informed practice professional learnings for preservice teachers. Resilient Futures creates and guides the implementation of trauma-informed, equity-centered programming with the goal of healing (resilientfutures.us). These professional learnings took the form of an optional and free TIP professional learning series during the last year of teacher preparation because residency and student teachers are often in classrooms working directly with students and witnessing the effects of students' trauma firsthand. This professional learning series offers an overview of TIPs and explains how future

teachers can implement them in classrooms. Since the fall of 2018, over 800 people have participated in the professional learning series.

Simultaneous to the TIP professional learning series, the implementation team (the authors of this paper and the program Director) developed a process to encourage the integration of TIPs into the School of Education curriculum so that principles learned in professional learning are supported in the curriculum as well. SOE leadership asked two faculty members to lead the charge, and they subsequently hired a part-time director of the TIP program the following year. The following sections explain the theoretical framework of youth trauma, the Healthy Environments and Response to Trauma in Schools (HEARTS) model (Dorado et al., 2016) conceptual framework, and then describe how the SOE has been working to integrate trauma-informed practices into the teacher preparation curriculum.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This section explains how trauma manifests itself in students' experiences in schools. It then provides a rationale for why teachers need to know more about TIPs. Students who have experienced trauma are present in every school. Results from a 2015 national survey of youth indicated that approximately two-thirds of survey respondents reported experiencing a traumatic event either within or outside of school (Finkelhor et al., 2015). In addition, students who have been exposed to one traumatic event have a greater likelihood of experiencing additional traumas than youth who have never been exposed to trauma (SAMHSA, 2022). Trauma-exposed youth experienced three traumas on average, regardless of gender, race, or trauma type, suggesting that multiple victimizations are the norm among trauma-exposed youth (Finkelhor et al., 2015). These traumatic events find their way into schools as a traumatized

child may experience emotional dysregulation, difficulty with changes in routine during the school day, impulsivity, and strong adverse reactions to redirection by authority figures, such as teachers (National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2008). Without a trauma lens, teachers often address these challenging behaviors through traditional disciplinary actions, such as physical removal from the classroom or suspension, which then correlate with these same students dropping out of school and moving further on the school-to-prison pipeline (Borntrager et al., 2015; Tehrani, 2007).

Currently, teacher preparation often lacks a focus on learning about trauma (Alisic et al., 2012) and mental health (Froese-Germain & Riel, 2012). Teachers cite a lack of personal knowledge about trauma-informed practices (Levine Brown et al., 2019; Rodger et al., 2014; Whitley et al., 2013). This minimal educator knowledge and skills for meeting the needs of students with trauma histories highlights the need for embedding TIPs into teacher preparation programs. There is scant literature to guide teacher preparation programs on their way. The literature below highlights what is known about increasing teacher learning.

Hanson and Lang (2016) completed a review of seven trauma-informed care (TIC) frameworks used in schooling. They found three core components across many TIC programs: (a) professional learning (PL) that includes training on trauma-informed topics, building awareness of these topics, and learning about secondary traumatic stress; (b) organizational changes that include a focus on collaboration, service coordination, a safe physical environment, written policies, and defined leadership; and (c) practice changes that include use of standardized, evidence-based practices related to trauma informed care (Hanson & Lang, 2016).

TIPs studies focusing on PL delve into the importance of teaching school-aged

students' resilience and socio-emotional learning (SEL). Some studies focus on how teacher preparation can teach preservice teachers about resilience (Beutel et al., 2019; McGraw & McDonough, 2019). Others focus on broadly teaching socio-emotional curricula to preservice teachers (Schonert-Reichlt et al., 2017). Beutel et al. (2019) examine the role of personal resilience strategies employed by preservice teachers and the importance of the relationship with the supervising teacher in learning resiliency skills. McGraw and McDonough (2019) argue for teaching preservice teachers reflective and strategic thinking to enable their resilience and to help negotiate the reality of teaching. In her study, Castro Schepers (2023) found that teachers were experiencing secondary traumatic stress. This was experienced more distinctly for White, middle-class teachers, coincidentally identifying comments from participants about not having learned this in preservice education. These findings supported the launch of a pilot study designed to understand the impact of secondary traumatic stress on preservice teachers and reinforced the need to incorporate trauma-informed practices as a holistic approach in teacher preparation (Castro Schepers & Young, 2022). The pilot study discusses further implications for TIP in teacher preparation and reviews this ongoing work.

One study stands out concerning changes in practice. Thomas et al. (2019) completed a literature review examining studies related to TIPs in schools across two decades. These included 33 interdisciplinary peer-reviewed articles from teaching and teacher education, social work education, and educational leadership published between 1998 and 2018. The studies included interventions and the effects of those interventions that had clear implications for classroom or school-wide impact. They found no dominant or formally agreed upon framework for TIPs in schools, no consistent determination of effectiveness,

and a lack of empirical base for examined programs.

Around the same time, studies on organizational change in programs explicitly examining teaching preservice teachers about TIPs and their importance to future teachers emerged. Stipp (2019) found that purposefully teaching about school-wide positive behavior supports, trust-based relational intervention, and non-violent crisis intervention helped preservice teachers become better prepared and more confident teaching students who have experienced trauma. Rodger et al. (2020, p. 1) also argue for preparing preservice teachers to address mental health and trauma in students, declaring a "clear need for a strategic and systematic approach to promotion and prevention for mental health in our school." Despite the advocacy for change, Brown et al. (2019) found that when there were standards for teacher preparation around learning about mental health, the standards were quite general and quite limited. In sum, systems need to change to incorporate research-based TIPs more fully into schools, plans that include teacher preparation.

To bolster the programmatic quality and share MSU Denver's robust engagement with PL, organizational change, and the use of practice changes (Hanson & Lang, 2016), this paper details the process the authors are taking to accomplish practice changes in teacher

preparation through TIPs curriculum integration. Hopefully, this process will empower faculty to address the effects of trauma more purposefully and comprehensively in their classrooms and prepare preservice educators to meet their future students' needs in a comprehensive, proactive, and minimally intrusive manner.

### Conceptual Framework

The TIP program uses the evidence-based conceptual framework Healthy Environments and Response to Trauma in Schools (HEARTS) (Dorado et al., 2016). TIP's four-part professional learning series covers the HEARTS guiding principles: 1) Understanding trauma and stress; 2) Cultural humility and equity; 3) Resilience and social-emotional learning; 4) Safety and predictability; 5) Compassion and dependability, and 6) Empowerment and collaboration. Equity is central to the HEARTS framework and the TIP program. Our TIP Program has updated cultural humility and equity to reflect equity, inclusion, and anti-racism.

Each of these six principles reflects an area of understanding that supports teachers in implementing trauma-informed practices. Dorado (2021) defined each component of the guiding principles:

Table 1: Dorado's HEARTS Guiding Principles

<i>Understanding trauma and stress</i>	Without understanding trauma, we are more likely to misinterpret trauma-related behaviors as willful, "sick," or "crazy," which can lead to ineffective, stigmatizing, and/or punitive reactions to trauma-impacted people.
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	<p>Understanding how trauma and stress can affect individual neurophysiology, relational interactions, and organizational functioning can help to reframe otherwise confusing, aggravating, or fear-producing behaviors. Shifting our perspective from "What is wrong with you?" versus "What has happened to you" can lead to more compassionate, strength-based, and effective responses to trauma-impacted people and communities that support healing and mitigate harm.</p>
<p><b><i>Cultural humility and equity</i></b></p>	<p>Racial justice and other forms of social justice are central to our approach. We believe that if practices, procedures, and policies are not racially just, they are not trauma-informed.</p> <p>Racism, sexism, homophobia, ableism, and other forms of societal oppression can be trauma-inducing and push communities of people out of schools, systems of care, and other organizations.</p> <p>When we are open to reckoning with the trauma and adversity caused by historical and present-day structural oppressions and hold ourselves accountable to counteracting these forces as individuals and institutions, we can work together to mitigate these harms and foster equity and belonging for all of us.</p>
<p><b><i>Resilience and social-emotional learning</i></b></p>	<p>Trauma can create feelings of hopelessness and derail the development of healthy social, emotional, and cognitive development, which can</p>

	<p>compound trauma's negative effects.</p> <p>Honoring strengths, cultivating wellness practices, and building social-emotional learning skills that promote self-awareness, self-management, strong relationships, and civic engagement will boost resilience and enhance success in school, at work, and in our communities.</p>
<b><i>Safety and predictability</i></b>	<p>Trauma unpredictably violates our physical, relational, and emotional safety, resulting in a heightened sense of threat and a need to manage risks.</p> <p>Having our physical, relational, and emotional safety needs met and increasing predictability in our daily lives can minimize our stress reactions and allow us to focus our resources on healthy development and learning.</p>
<b><i>Compassion and dependability</i></b>	<p>Trauma can leave us feeling isolated or betrayed, which may make it difficult to trust others and receive support.</p> <p>When we experience relationships that are compassionate and dependable, we re-establish trusting connections with others that foster healing and well-being. By fostering relationships that are compassionate and attuned, as well as dependable and trustworthy, we re-establish trusting connections with others that foster healing and well-being.</p>
<b><i>Empowerment and collaboration</i></b>	<p>Trauma involves a loss of power and control that can make us feel helpless.</p>



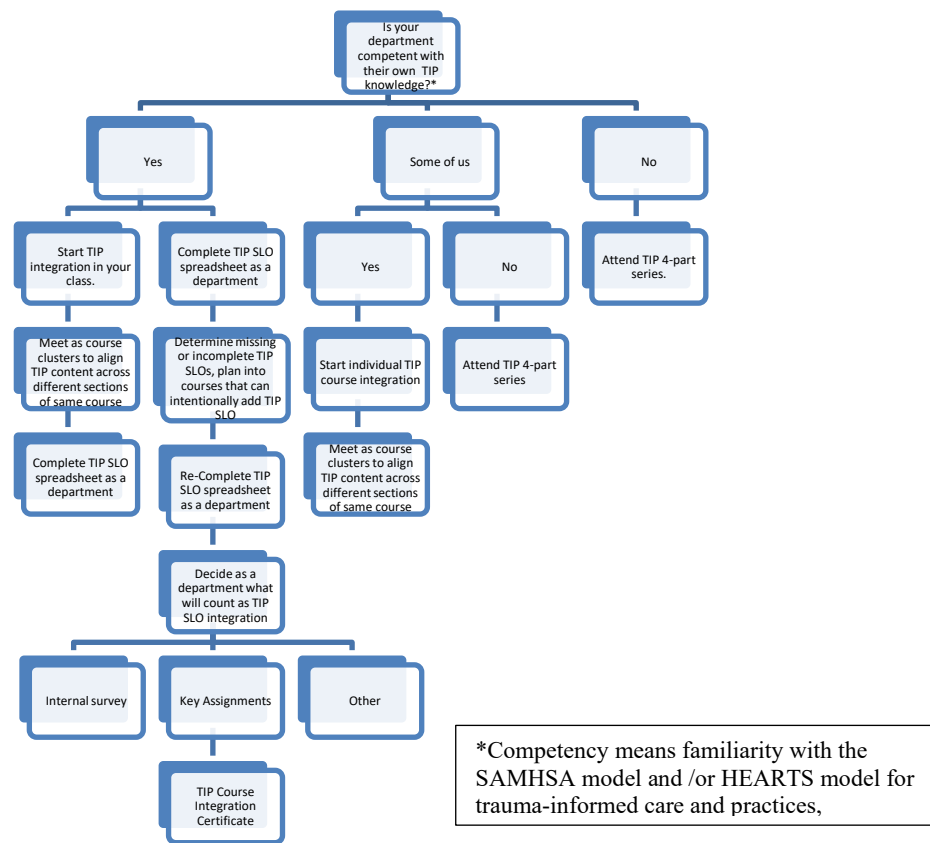
	<p>When we have real opportunities to make choices for ourselves and have meaningful voice in decisions that affect us, we regain a sense of agency and feel empowered to advance well-being and justice for ourselves and others.</p>
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### Practice Changes Through Curriculum Integration

Using knowledge of practice change, organizational change, and the HEARTS principles, the implementation team developed a plan for trauma-informed practices integration at MSU Denver. Curriculum integration in the SOE is a three-pronged approach that includes capacity building, individual course integration, and departmental integration through creative, flexible, and patient TIPs support. The graphic below encapsulates the process, which is then described.

The graphic can also be used as a decision-making flowchart completed collaboratively between TIPs experts and faculty members to plan for the gradual integration of TIPs into teacher preparation programs, thereby working towards embedding these practices in a feasible manner given limited time and resource constraints faced by faculty specifically and schools/departments in general.

Figure 1: TIP Integration Roadmap



***Capacity Building***

Capacity building happened simultaneously and in lockstep on many fronts on an as-needed basis. The implementation team 1) offered preservice teachers the TIP professional learning series; 2) developed for faculty their version of the TIP professional learning series; and 3) provided small grants to support interested faculty in TIP curriculum integration. While supporting faculty with small grants, the implementation team learned that faculty wanted more structure and guidance in translating the TIPs principles into classroom objectives. The implementation team developed TIPs student learning objectives (SLOs) to support a more systematic integration. The implementation team developed a student survey to respond to faculty requests for students' perceived trauma-informed practices knowledge. Each of these steps is described in detail below.

***Capacity Building for Preservice Teachers***

The professional learning series was originally for preservice teachers. The implementation team adapted HEARTS to focus on preservice teachers' needs by changing language and approaches in the professional learning series from how this series is delivered in P-12 schools. A significant shift was how to navigate the relationship between being a residency student and a student teacher in a classroom. Often, with in-service teachers, the language is directly about teachers, their students, and that relationship. Classroom teachers have extensive knowledge and access to students' files, academic profiles, personal information, and family relationships. This relationship is strikingly different for residency and student teachers who spend three to five days of the week in the classroom for twelve to twenty weeks. The power dynamic in the classroom leans in favor of the classroom teacher and K-12 student

relationship, not that between the student teacher and k-12 student. This dynamic is highlighted within the preservice educator professional learning series, and the facilitators share how to navigate and understand student relationships presented in a way that acknowledges this positionality. As the professional learning series grew to include preservice teachers in field placements (classroom placements for 45-80 hours over 15 weeks), navigating the field student/teacher relationship and centering it within the professional learning series became even more critical.

***Capacity Building for Faculty and Staff***

The implementation team quickly learned that faculty and staff also needed to build their TIPs capacity. The implementation team offered faculty and staff a similar but different four-part series. These were initially held after staff meetings twice a semester. They covered the same content as the preservice series but went into ways to model the practices in faculty classrooms as an additional way to infuse TIPs into the curriculum. As most faculty and staff completed the series, the faculty and staff-only series was abandoned. New members of the SOE are encouraged to attend the ongoing preservice series to familiarize themselves with TIP content. Faculty and staff also have access to a TIP Lunch and Learn series where the implementation team presents mini-lessons related to TIPs, asks people where that concept shows up in their SOE work, and asks for ideas they have to push the concept further in their work.

***Capacity Building Through Small Grants and TIP SLOs***

Small grants to individual faculty supported early TIP course integration. Through this initial grant process, the implementation team learned that faculty wanted clarification about what TIPs integration meant in practice, which

trauma-informed practices to highlight, and where to find resources for their classes. The implementation team created TIP student learning objectives (SLOs) based on the HEARTS principles. It used the language of prior state authorization reports to explain the depth of each SLO in each class. Each objective could be discovered, practiced, or demonstrated in a class. The SLOs and depths of each were mapped onto a spreadsheet for use with departments (described below). Although TIP SLOs are not formally assessed in courses, individual faculty, and departments have devised their own way of evaluating them, from adding TIPs prompts to key assignments to having preservice teachers complete an internal survey of their TIPs knowledge (described below). Like other concepts in teacher preparation, the implementation team does not test on all content learned but asks that concepts be meaningfully applied through key tasks, which the faculty member then evaluates.

As personal TIPs capacity built, faculty began implementing these practices into their courses, with the dual goals of teaching in more trauma-informed ways and teaching future teachers to do so with their prospective students. This requires faculty to be transparent with their pedagogical moves and use a metacognitive approach to explicitly point out trauma-informed practices within their classes and explain how they translate into P-12 classrooms. Some examples are highlighted in this chapter (Young et al., 2022).

### ***Individual Course Integration***

Individual course integration happened on many fronts simultaneously and in lock step on an as-needed basis, too. The implementation team queried each department to determine each faculty member's TIP content knowledge through self-report. For those unfamiliar with TIP content, the implementation team suggested attending the four-part

professional learning series. For those already engaged with TIP content, the implementation team asks if it was more helpful to work one-on-one to examine the TIP SLOs in relation to their courses or to work in course clusters to examine the TIP SLOs concerning their courses. For individual faculty, the implementation team asked about each TIP SLO, whether that objective was in a course, and at what depth (discover, practice, and/or demonstrate).

The implementation team worked with course clusters for TIPs integration in a department where many faculty have high TIPs capacity and many people teach different sections of the same course. These course cluster faculty met to examine the classes they taught in common. The cluster evaluated each TIP SLO and asked each member to determine which objectives appear in their course and how deeply they engage with the objective (discover, practice, and/or demonstrate), if at all. Each faculty gave examples of course activities, assessments, or resources that demonstrated the SLO and created a shared document. This shared document could be given to any new person who teaches the course so that they have a TIP course guide from the start. Faculty maintained academic freedom and taught the SLO in their section the way that made the most sense. Only SLOs that were agreed upon in all sections at the same depth were transferred to the spreadsheet (described below) for the department. Once all course clusters met and the SLOs and the information transferred to the spreadsheet were agreed upon, the department could meet and follow the above process.

### ***Departmental Integration***

Each department in the SOE functions slightly differently than the others. Some departments have one faculty member who teaches all the sections of a particular course and teaches that course every semester. Other departments have

several faculty members who teach different sections of the course, and faculty members who teach a specific course change often from semester to semester. These different needs have led to varying approaches to departmental TIP integration.

### ***Collating TIP Content***

In a department where many faculty have high TIPs capacity and teach "their own courses," the implementation team simultaneously worked with the whole department for TIP integration. This complex course ownership meant that the implementation team prepared a list of all courses in the department on a spreadsheet along with all the TIP SLOs. The spreadsheet is a document that lists all courses on one axis and all TIP SLOs on the other axis. Each faculty then completes parts of a spreadsheet that align with the courses they usually teach. This process creates a tableau of which SLOs are covered where and to what extent. It also allows for a gap analysis within the department. When the group notices that an SLO is not being "covered" enough or as deeply as they want, the faculty discusses addressing the curriculum gap and implementing TIP content more fully into a specific course.

### ***Is There "Enough" TIP Integration?***

Although an iterative process, the faculty works as a whole group to look at the curriculum and decide when they think their courses are "integrated enough" with TIP content. Once the spreadsheet is completed to a department's satisfaction, departments can choose to ask for preservice teachers to complete a TIP student survey about how well the students know the content. The survey asks preservice teachers: how much do you know about X concept; how much do you know about X concept from a TIPs perspective. This is not a survey of content mastery but rather a self-reflection. If the data from the student surveys supports the

departmental assertion of TIP curriculum integration, then a TIP Content Integration Certificate of Completion is offered to students. If the student data shows that they are not comfortable enough with TIP content, faculty can reconvene and reevaluate the TIP content in their coursework.

### ***Creative, Flexible, and Patient TIP Support***

As anyone who works in a university knows, no two departments are alike. Although the implementation team planned for every department to undertake TIP integration in one of the two ways above, this is not always possible. In this section, the authors share the importance of creative, flexible, and patient TIP integration. In the case when the implementation team works with a department that is not ready for full TIP curriculum integration as previously described, the team engages with the chair and the faculty to decide on creative and flexible integration. One way the implementation team has accomplished this is through working with a packed alternative licensure program (ALP). The ALP students are all full-time, emergency-credentialed teachers who take condensed courses at night. People who teach in the program are not on the tenure track and are incentivized differently for program change. The department decided to focus on a segment of TIP, that of self-care, for TIP integration. Faculty decided that teachers licensed through the alternative licensure processes needed this focus the most. The implementation team provided self-care resources for people to share with their classes, then returned six months later to hear how talking about self-care has helped their programs and their students. Faculty shared more specific strategies and resources with each other and, when asked about the next steps, felt like they were still happy to focus on self-care for the next year. They also decided not to offer the four-part series to their students until

after the students had completed all coursework, after licensure. Students can return as alumni to participate in the four-part series, and the faculty in the ALP program felt this was a better way to encourage TIP engagement. Although the implementation team might want to integrate TIP content in all coursework, the team needs to be creative and flexible with the capacity of those who teach in the program and their content needs. The plan is that once a year, the implementation team reevaluates in conjunction with the ALP program faculty to see if one more TIP concept can find its way into the ALP curriculum. This is a creative and flexible process.

The implementation team has also been confronted with needing to be patient with TIP integration. The team approached a department that was in the middle of hiring a new person, had just had a retirement, and planned two more retirements in the next year. This department wants the team to reach out once a year and offer new faculty the four-part TIP professional learning series. However, it does not want to focus on TIP integration until the retirements are complete and the new people have a year or two completed in their new departments. They are focusing on the capacity building of new faculty hires and are now waiting on the rest of the TIP integration process.

The TIP integration process is impossible without being realistic about the needs of the faculty and departments that go through the curriculum integration process. The implementation team has found that it works well to be creative on how to integrate TIPs, flexible on how different programs and faculty integrate these practices, and patient with each department's process. This approach supports colleagues and their departments with TIP integration (Hanson & Lang, 2016).

## **Conclusion**

The implementation team learned through this process that organizational change through practice change is robust and sustainable when it comes from the people who have the most at stake in making and maintaining these changes. The team believes strongly in the power of faculty to know what is best for themselves, their courses, and their departments. Given this assumption as the starting point and being iteratively reminded of it as the team works with departments, the implementation team engages with faculty as TIPs experts in their courses and in their departments. By focusing efforts on a sustainable and personalized integration of TIPs into all courses within each department, the implementation team sends the message that TIPs are a necessary part of what the School of Education does to help all students learn and thrive.

There is a need to proactively address the educational needs of students who experience trauma and the effects of prolonged witnessing of all forms of trauma in the teaching population. Schools that implement trauma-informed practices have demonstrated benefits such as improving students "academic and social outcomes and reducing other challenging behaviors" (Brown et al., 2019; Gallagher et al., 2019). Teachers benefit from TIPs by connecting their emotional regulation to student educational and discipline strategies and learning stress management techniques (Eddy et al., 2020). TIPs have also mitigated vicarious trauma and reduced staff turnover (Larrieu, 2018). This shift starts in teacher preparation. Research has found that learning about TIPs in higher education has the potential to mitigate secondary traumatic stress in preservice educators working with students in their field courses or student teaching placements (Castro Schepers & Young, 2022). When teacher candidates can see TIPs modeled in their classes and faculty feel confident that they are

integrating TIPs into curricula, future students will feel the benefit.

### Implications

This initiative empowers faculty to address trauma more purposefully and comprehensively in their classroom in ways that make sense for them and their students. Faculty need to add TIP content that is comprehensive, proactive, and minimally intrusive to current coursework. It addresses a real need in schools. TIP prepare preservice teachers for some of the emotionally hard truths of being a teacher and how to practice self-care so they can continue to work each day. The TIP professional learning series prepares preservice teachers to look for schools and districts that value community self-care so that new teachers can continue to be teachers beyond the first three years without burning out.

This initiative shows that faculty who already teach packed curricula can integrate TIPs without much-added burden to their coursework. They can use TIPs terms and connect the terms to work already happening in classes. They can add small prompts to existing coursework. They can add to discussions already taking place in classes. These small changes allow future teachers to understand the experiences of their future students who have experienced trauma and all students. TIPs integration is a conceptual change; it is another tool that teacher preparation programs can provide preservice teachers to prepare them for real and complex students within school contexts.

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