

# Virtual Listening Tour 2020

## TRAUMA-INFORMED CARE: A CRITICAL COMPONENT IN SUCCESSFULLY RESUMING SCHOOL

### INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused life-altering disruptions in many people's personal and professional lives. Within Florida's education system, data from our listening tour indicate that educators, students, and families have experienced significant trauma as a result of COVID-19. Florida has indicated that trauma-informed care is a priority in resuming school based on a number of [reports](#) and [articles](#) that show the importance of addressing trauma and social-emotional needs of students, families, and teachers. A series of key themes and recommendations emerged from our interviews and surveys of hundreds of educators and families across the state.

### THEMES

#### **Students of color experienced significant disruptions to access to critical services.**

According to the [Florida Department of Education](#), students of color make up 70 percent of those eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. When schools were closed, many of these students lost their safety net of access to nutritious food, safe environments, and technology and internet.

#### **Achievement gaps were exacerbated for educationally vulnerable students.**

Students accustomed to receiving daily support services at school such as meals, exceptional-student care, and mental health interventions, suddenly found themselves at home with challenges in accessing these services. Families reported the hopelessness they felt as they watched their children's progress at school unravel in the weeks at home.

#### **Consistent and transparent communication structures mitigated stress.**

Teachers and families in districts that had a timely and clear communications approach indicated a stronger sense of collaboration, trust, and support. Educators who had a clear understanding of the district's expectations and approach were able to more effectively communicate with families, helping them feel more informed and empowered to navigate the new learning environment.

## CONSIDERATIONS

### **START BY ASSESSING STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING.**

Establishing a sense of trust and safety while also understanding and meeting students' social-emotional needs is critical before students can begin learning. Develop a plan to check in with students and families at the beginning of school, regardless of their learning environment. [Miami-Dade County Public Schools](#) is administering a wellness survey to families in order to capture data on students' emotional and academic status to help drive instruction.

Critical services, such as food and technology, were provided by certain districts through innovative approaches. [Duval County Public Schools](#) utilized current bus routes to deliver free meals to children while [Collier County Public Schools](#) established satellite food distribution sites in rural areas with transportation challenges.

**LEVERAGE CURRENT SYSTEMS AND STRUCTURES TO OFFER CRITICAL SERVICES TO FAMILIES.**

### **INCORPORATE KEY RITUALS AND MILESTONES INTO INSTRUCTIONAL APPROACHES.**

Educators, leaders, and families alike shared about the power of including rituals and events that establish structure and indicate progression through milestones. KIPP Jacksonville plans to start the year with a series of events to address the psychological need for closure from the previous school year before beginning a new school year. Pasco County Schools has developed a [First 20 Days of School](#) plan to support teachers in establishing rituals and attend to their learners' social and emotional needs.

Acknowledging that many teachers were balancing their personal and family needs while providing academic and emotional support to their students and families, it is vital to offer ongoing, meaningful, and practical professional development as well as supports to address their own needs. [The School District of Palm Beach County](#) has already developed a series of professional development sessions that include a social-emotional wellbeing track.

**PROVIDE SUFFICIENT PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND EMOTIONAL SUPPORT TO TEACHERS.**

### **PRIORITIZE ACCESSIBILITY OF MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES TO SUPPORT STUDENTS AND FAMILIES IN-PERSON AND ONLINE.**

Understanding that vulnerable students face greater traumatic impacts, a school in Clay County removed non-counseling duties from counselors so they could provide holistic mental health services to students and families given the collective traumatic impact of COVID-19. By supporting the entire family unit, the school saw an improvement in student and family engagement in distance learning efforts.

## PROJECT BACKGROUND

The University of Florida Lastinger Center for Learning, a national leader in researching and improving how teachers deliver learning, launched a comprehensive analysis of the responses and approaches taken by birth through 12th grade public and private education programs throughout Florida during the COVID-19 pandemic. As part of a Virtual Listening Tour, researchers interviewed students, parents, teachers, early childhood and K-12 educators and administrators about the effect of COVID-19 and how it impacted the delivery of educational services. The work was made possible with funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The findings and conclusions contained within are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect positions or policies of the foundation.