

# Survivor-Focused

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Transforming the Trend Conference  
Des Moines, WA

# Compassion

**Lessons on Trauma-Informed  
Responses to Sexual Assault from  
The Supporting Survivors Project**

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**Do Big Good LLC** is a human-centered design firm based in Seattle. We use co-design methods and social justice principles to help clients create transformative change *with*, not for, directly-impacted stakeholders.

# Supporting Survivors



Student quotes from listening sessions are shared pseudonymously and with consent.

As part of Proviso ESSB 5693 § 501(4)(ee)(i), last year OSPI hired Do Big Good to talk to 70 current (96%) and former (4%) Washington public school students about school responses to sexual assault. These conversations occurred between October of 2022 and March of 2023. These student voices from the Supporting Survivors project form the center of our presentation.

- Of the participants, 29% were student survivors, 34% peers, and 37% chose not to disclose their status.
- Their ages ranged from 11 to 20, with a median of 15.
- They were from\* Eastern (32%) and Western (68%) Washington, with identities that were rural, low-income, disabled, and LGBTQ+, including transgender, non-binary, gender-fluid, and gender-nonconforming students.
- Across the sessions, 56% of participants were Black (30%), Indigenous (9%), and other people of color (17%), including Asian and Pacific Islanders and Latinx and Hispanic identities.

We also spoke to 48 adult allies and experts from DCYF, law enforcement, national and state organizations supporting the interests of sexual assault survivors, victims' advocates, educators, school administrators, and school counselors.

“We’re the rape school. It’s a well-known thing. ... You can walk through the halls and name them, like him and him and him and him and him and him.”

- Green\*, 15  
Her high school experience



“Remember when they used to do the **Slap Ass Friday** thing and the other thing, **Touch Titty Tuesday**?... [I]t was two days out of the week, Tuesdays and Fridays, so every other day.”

- Lisa, 18  
Her middle school experience



“I remember there was a tree that me and my friend would often climb and that **teacher** would yell at us for climbing the tree, but he **wouldn't do anything** when there was a guy literally touching a girl without her consent.”

- Gardenia, age withheld\*  
His/their elementary school experience



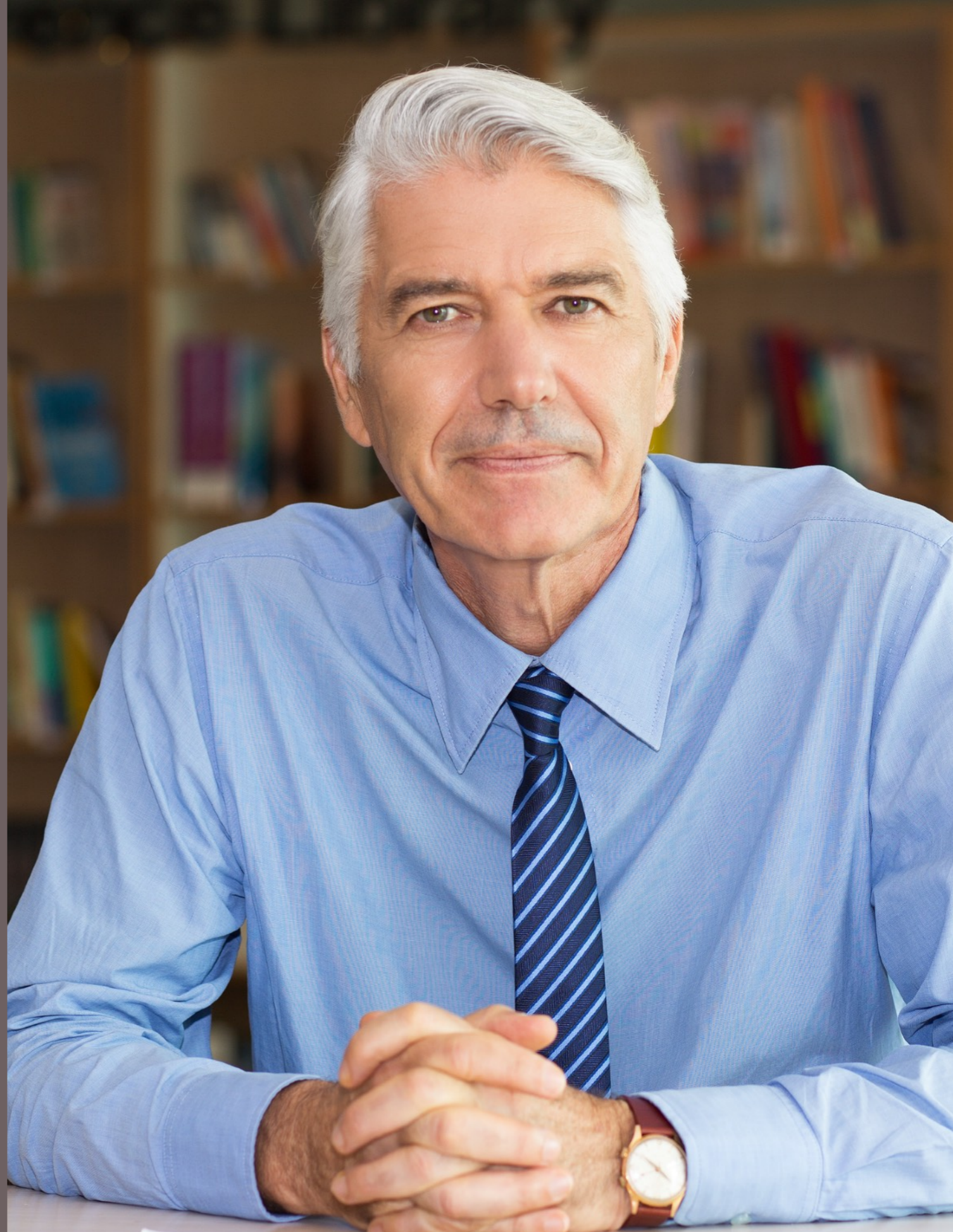
“[A] lot of the issues I’ve had with reporting things to school... administrators don’t always handle it properly. I was with someone who was reporting an assault to one of the coaches and their response was, ‘Well, we know him. He would never do that. That’s not the boy we know.’”

- Blue, 16



**“We took it up to the principal, the vice principal, and we were trying to have it handled and nothing came of it and it felt like all of the staff members avoided me from there on out.”**

- Poppy, 14  
Her middle school experience





“I do think that sexual assault complaints don't get taken as seriously as other complaints.... [T]here were **no consequences** for what was happening so it kept going.”

- Cherry Blossom, 18  
Her middle school experience



# Students Want Support

1. From “a team of helpful people” who provide **emotional support** first, reporting second
2. Who will share other options for **safety** and **healing**, including **supportive measures** and **accommodations**
3. Who are **trained** in sexual assault response
4. Who **believe**, not judge or retaliate against them
5. Whose response is compassionate, **not procedural**
6. Who will **coordinate** the response with them, including prompt and transparent **investigations** promptly and transparently and a **choice to report**
7. Who respect their **privacy** from parents/guardians, classmates, and teachers
8. Who may be **peers**, not necessarily school **counselors**, due to lack of trust
9. Without which students will not seek help or will seek justice outside school channels, through **protest** or **legal action**



# Students Want to Know

1. Reporting **process**, step by step, **before** an assault occurs
2. **People** who can support them, including the Title IX Coordinator
3. Supportive measures and other **choices** available to them if an assault occurs

## They Want to Receive this Info

- Verbally at an annual **assembly** and in **class**
- Brochures in administrative and counseling **offices**
- Posters in **bathrooms**
- Online by **email** and on the school or district **website**



# how to: respond to a disclosure

created by  
KCSARC

It's not always easy to know what to say when someone tells you that they've experienced sexual assault. It's important to remember that it can be difficult for a survivor to share their experience. Overall, the best thing that you can do is simply be a supportive, non-judgmental listener.

Here are some tips to help you respond to a disclosure of sexual assault:

## **B**ELIEVE

When a survivor is believed, they are much more likely to continue seeking the support they need to heal.

## **A**FFIRM

It's important to counter any internalized self-doubt and let the survivor know that telling you was a good choice.

## **S**UPPORT

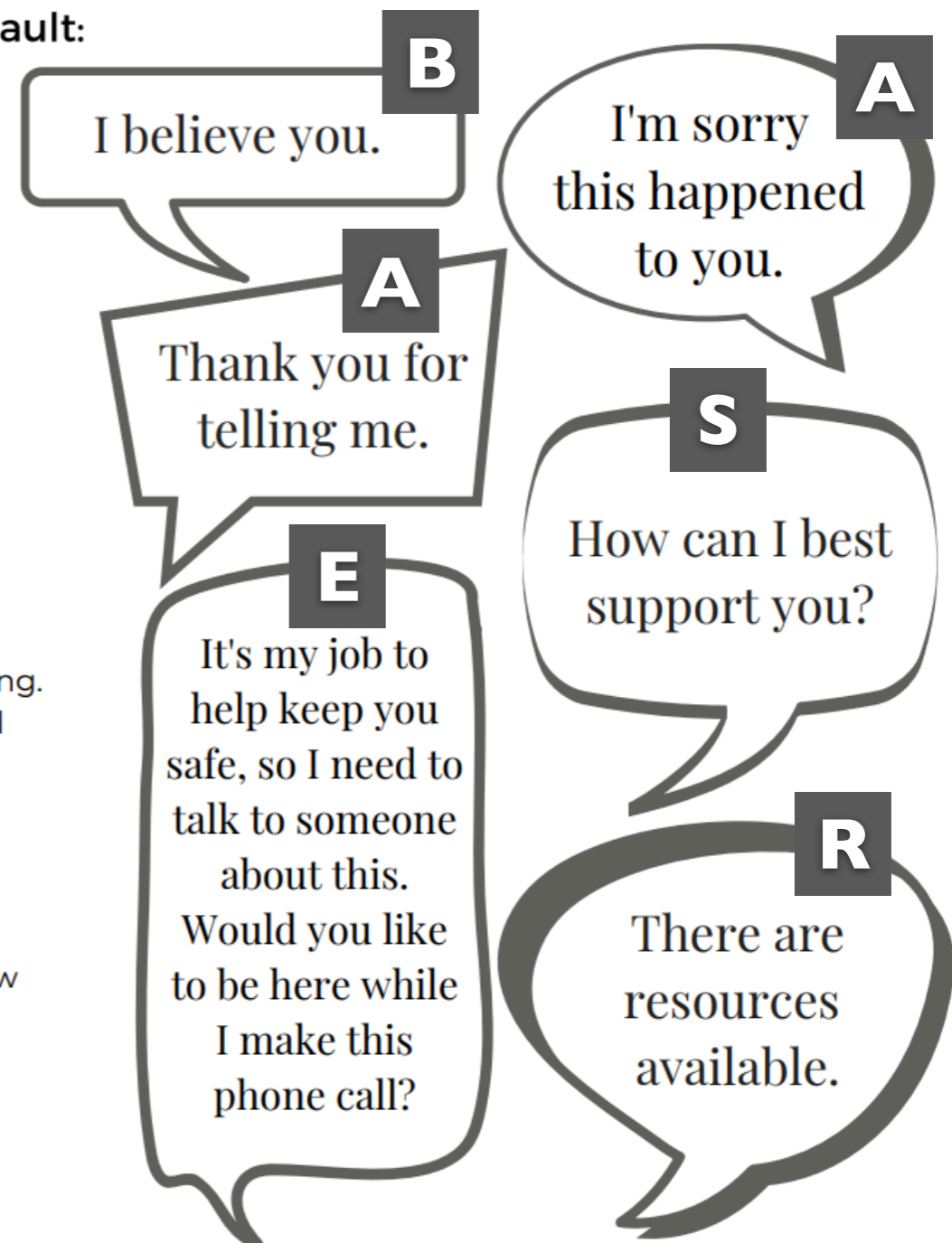
Avoid questions or comments that may be perceived as victim blaming. Let the survivor share what they choose to, and offer non-judgmental support.

## **E**MPPOWER

Survivors often feel like they have no control over their situation. Depending on your role and relationship to the survivor, you should follow their lead on what, if any, actions they'd like to take. Note that even if you are a mandated reporter working with a minor, it can be empowering to provide age-appropriate choices, as possible.

## **R**EFER

You are not expected to have all of the answers or solutions for the survivor. Point the survivor to resources such as KCSARC, or offer to find resources together.



Remember to take care of yourself: it's normal for feelings to come up after hearing a disclosure.

“I didn’t have a trusted adult to talk to.... I had friends who also went through the experience.... I mean, we only had each other.... I never was taught on any procedure on how to report sexual assault.... I just thought it was just normal... and **I was just a little girl....** [S]exual assault awareness, I think if it was taught more, I think it would definitely have made me more aware and more courageous to report.”

- Cherry Blossom, 18

## Lunch Reflection

- 1) How can you **implement** BASER and the student requests in your school/district?
- 2) What are the **obstacles** to implementation?
- 3) How can you **address** those obstacles as an administrator?



One-Pager  
[bit.ly/BASER\\_PDF](https://bit.ly/BASER_PDF)



Training Video  
[bit.ly/BASER\\_TRAINING](https://bit.ly/BASER_TRAINING)

# Survivor-Centered Care

Survivor-centered care is a type of trauma-informed care for individuals who have experienced sexual violence, including assault. To be survivor-centered means to empower that individual by prioritizing their rights, needs, and wishes. According to the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) Community Cares initiative, there are four principles of survivor-centered care. They are placed into a school context below:

1. **Right to Safety:** Every student has the right to be protected from further physical or emotional violence.
2. **Right to Confidentiality:** Information should not be disclosed at any time to any party without the informed consent of the student.\*
3. **Dignity and Self-Determination:** Sexual violence is an assault on the rights and selfhood of the student. Restoring choice to the student regarding how to respond to the assault is critical to restoring selfhood.
4. **Non-Discrimination:** All students have the right to the best possible assistance without bias.



# Research Findings

**Proviso** Research best practices for a victim-centered, trauma-informed approach to responding to sexual assault and supporting survivors in schools.

## Findings and Recommendations

- **ENABLERS of Effectiveness** A whole-school approach, cross-sector partnerships, a caring adult to disclose to, and clear codes, well-implemented are enablers of effective school responses to assault.
- **BARRIERS to Effectiveness** Lack of staff training is a key barrier to effective response, as are minimization, harmful gender norms, and working in silos.
- **Tiered Response** A multi-tiered system of support\*, grounded in compassion for survivors, well-trained staff, clear and well-enforced policies, prompt intervention for students enacting problematic sexual behavior, and removal of employees committing sexual abuse and misconduct, is the best path forward.

**Activities** Summarized peer-reviewed research, quantitative data, and grey literature on the topics described in the Proviso.



# Mandatory Reporting

**Proviso** Review current legal requirements mandating that educators and staff report suspected sexual assault and assess whether changes to those requirements should be made to align them with best practices for responding to sexual assault and supporting survivors in schools.

## Recommendations

- **Adopt a Consent-Based Standard:** To replace the current mandatory standard, for students age 13+ (age of medical consent). Teen students want this choice.
- **Remove Criminalizing Penalties:** Mandatory reporting makes elements of survivor-centered and trauma-informed care illegal. If penalties are removed, school professionals can legally affirm student agency and privacy.
- **Use Harm Reduction Strategies:** Until changes are made, reporters should maximize student choice and transparency within the constraints of the law.
- **Train Reporters on CPS Limitations:** Assaults by peers and school employees are “screened out” by CPS ([WAC 110.30.050](#)) and will not result in a response.

## Activities

- Conducted consultations with students and adult experts and practitioners on mandatory reporting law, policy, and lived experience.





# Training Recommendations

**Project Task** Develop a plan for deploying victim-centered, trauma-informed training for school administrators and counselors, based on best practices for responding to sexual assault and supporting survivors in schools and informed by the requirements of Title IX of the education amendments of 1972.

## Recommendations (by priority)

1. **Don't Interrupt, Support:** Receiving a Student Disclosure of Sex-Based Violence (All Staff)
2. **Stand for Children:** Bystander Intervention Into Employee Sexual Abuse (All Elementary School Staff)
3. **Administrators Supporting Survivors:** Decision-Making, Bias, and Resources (All Administrators)
4. **Being a Support Person** (Counselors, Community Members)
5. Technology Assisted Sexual Violence (Counselors)
6. State/Circuit Court Specific Requirements (All Staff)
7. FERPA + Title IX (Administrators and Investigators)
8. Informal Resolution Procedure (Title IX Coordinator and Facilitator)

**Activities** Conducted consultations with students, adult experts and practitioners, and our team's Title IX compliance expert.



# HEARTS Model

The Healthy Environments and Response to Trauma in Schools (HEARTS) model uses a whole-school approach and multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) framework to prevent and respond to student trauma. It could be a model for a statewide approach to the specific trauma of sexual assault in Washington public schools.

<b>Tier 3</b>	<b>Tertiary Intervention - Intensive Supports for Traumatized Students</b>
Students	School-based, trauma-specific individual, group, and family therapy services for students with trauma-related mental health difficulties that include intensive collateral work with students' teachers, as well as consultation around Individualized Education Program (IEP) assessment and plans.
Staff	Brief crisis support for trauma-impacted school staff and referral for more intensive services, if needed.
Parents	Engaging and supporting parents/guardians as part of a child's psychotherapy
System	Consultation around central district office personnel efforts to improve the district-wide Educationally Related Mental Health Services (ERMHS) process
<b>Tier 2</b>	<b>Secondary Intervention - Selected Supports for At-Risk Students</b>
Students	Psychoeducational skill-building interventions for at-risk students
Staff	Wellness (non-treatment) support for school staff that addresses stress, burnout, and secondary trauma (e.g., teacher wellness groups)
Parents	Participating in Coordinated Care Team meetings that address the needs of at-risk students and coordinate integrated responses
System	Consultation to school/district efforts to re-examine/revise discipline policies to be trauma-informed, including suspension alternatives
<b>Tier 1</b>	<b>Primary Prevention - Universal Supports for All Students</b>
Students	Classroom training for students on coping with stress
Staff	Training and consultation for all school staff (e.g., teachers, administrators, support staff, paraprofessionals, medical and mental health staff) around (a) trauma-informed practices, (b) addressing stress, burnout, secondary trauma.
Parents	Psychoeducation and skill-building workshops for parents/guardians/caregivers on coping with stress.
System	Providing a trauma-informed lens to school staff in their implementation of school-wide supports and interventions (e.g., Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, Restorative Justice/Practices, social emotional learning).

Chart adapted from Dorado, J., et al. (2016). "Healthy Environments and Response to Trauma in Schools (HEARTS): A Whole-School, Multi-Level, Prevention and Intervention Program for Creating Trauma-Informed, Safe and Supportive Schools." *School Mental Health* 8:163-176.

# Thank You

Let's continue this work together.



## Do Big Good

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