To: Best Practices Clearinghouse@ed.gov

Recommendations for Policy Development (1) Training on Neuroscience and Neuroplasticity

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Topic: Providing Supports for Students and Teachers, Faculty and Staff Well-Being, Professional Development, and Supports

Target Audience: University Educational Preparation Programs, National Professional Organizations, neuroscientists, school administrators (principals and superintendents/central office staff), school psychologists, counselors, and teachers, Prek-12.

Short Description: Revise standards to ensure that teacher preparation programs, and programs for preparation of administrators, school psychologists, and counselors include information on neuroplasticity and ways that trauma-informed practices, including how practices such as mindfulness and social emotional learning/Heart Centered Learning, can alleviate stress and trauma, foster student mental health and well-being, and enhance cognition, executive functioning, and academic achievement.
**Evidence Supporting This as a Best Practice:** Neuroscientific evidence over the past decade strongly supports the need for educators to understand the impact of trauma and adverse childhood experiences on brain development, executive functioning, behaviors, and academic learning, as well as ways that neuroplasticity can be supported through mindfulness, building resiliency, and supportive adults (including school personnel). Such information sets the foundation for changes in disciplinary and instructional practices, including schoolwide expectations and policies.

**Focus on Racial Equity and/or Other Equity:** Instead of turning to punitive measures such as expulsions and suspensions, or identifying and stigmatizing children and youth by over-identification in special education programs, work to enhance the use of compassionate school policies and practices. The proposed policy change is foundational to updating teacher, psychology, counseling, and administrator preparation programs.
Recommendations for Policy Development (2) Coherent Programs to Alleviate Trauma and Develop Social Emotional Learning

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**Topic:** Providing Supports for Students and Teachers; Faculty and Staff Well-Being, Professional Development, and Supports

**Target Audience:** Schools and school districts, curriculum developers, educational policy groups.

**Short Description:** Provide funding for professional development for schools to receive technical assistance and support to implement “coherent” programs to alleviate trauma and improve self-care for staff and students. Coherency needs to be planned across grade levels, schools, and districts. Student and staff well-being is critical, yet many social emotional learning (SEL) programs do little to support staff well-being, and many do not include “mindfulness” programs or programs that enhance metacognition, introspection, and understanding of self and others. Without these components, many SEL programs will deliver some immediate relief, but will fall short of what they could achieve, and in the long run, results will be hampered by lack of consideration of the intergenerational impact of violence, abuse, school shootings, injustice, discrimination, and ongoing societal needs. Youth must be prepared to be more
conscious and compassionate, with greater caring concern and activism to reduce the vicious cycle of violence and trauma that has expanded in the last few decades.

**Evidence Supporting This as a Best Practice:** Many current social emotional learning programs are useful and many even have a good research foundation, yet they are often discontinued or not implemented with fidelity. There tends to be a stop-start cycle to their use, where programs with one purpose or intent are designed for young children, and older students receive programs with a slightly different orientation. Further, many programs do not consider ways to increase student competency or mastery of content. This approach is not adequate to address the escalating cycle of trauma, violence, abuse, stigma, labeling, and injustice that continues to be perpetuated.

As Michael Fullan suggests, “coherence” is needed. We recommend a continuity of key, basic themes, across grade levels. Validation of the *School Compassionate Culture Analytic Tool for Educators* with over 800 educators showed that five key themes are important: (1) leadership and compassionate school communities, (2) conscious awareness of emotions and stress, (3) confidence and positivity (building for success), (4) courage and resiliency, and (5) understanding of equity. These all must include components for addressing not only student, but also teacher, staff, and principal self-care and understanding of trauma. We recommend implementing these in settings that strive to build school community with practices such as restorative justice and mindfulness (both of which have a substantial research base supporting their efficacy).

**Focus on Racial Equity and/or Other Equity:** Any program to address compassionate school practices, including staff and student well-being, must address inequities, injustice, and discrimination. Students need instruction to deepen their conscious awareness of self, of implicit and explicit bias, of discrimination, and of ways to increase meaningful compassionate actions, including individual and civic (societal/communal) actions.
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Recommendations for Policy Development (3) Visioning

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Topic: Faculty and Staff Well-Being, Professional Development, and Supports; Providing Supports for Students and Teachers.

Target Audience: School administrators (principals and superintendents/central office staff), universities, educational organizations, and educational leaders.

Short Description: As schools physically “reopen” and plan for the Fall of 2021, the events of 2020 and into the first quarter of 2021 have been a catalyst for educational reform. Schools have struggled to quickly reinvent how to deliver basic academic instruction to help students meet expectations for proficiency under circumstances we never imagined, with students spending hours on end in front of computer screens. We are concerned not only about alleviating stress, but also student mental health needs, teen suicides, and how COVID-19 has impacted families.
To bring about the greatest educational successes, substantial planning is needed. Due to the crisis we have undergone and the total disruption of so many everyday activities, now is the time for educators to undertake not just planning, but “visioning,” to engage key stakeholders in imagining the future and to strategically decide where to place our efforts, our hopes, and our determination.

Further, we believe that scientific approaches to visioning need to be integrated into courses and professional development for school administrators.

**Evidence Supporting This as a Best Practice:** Visioning is a process that has led to innovative success for hundreds of businesses, including the huge success of giants such as Microsoft and Apple. Currently in Michigan, Paul Liabenow is leading an effort to help administrators across his state engage in meaningful visioning activities, and Drs. Melissa Patschke and Christine Mason are collaborating with Paul in visioning with hundreds of educators and students. We are receiving an enthusiastic response.

Visioning can bring a sense of hope and optimism to schools, families, and students. It is an empowering process that provides key stakeholders opportunities for structured dialogue, to research how others have implemented similar programs, and to go through a systematic process of comparing and contrasting options before committing to a particular plan or program. As people are engaged in local visioning activities, they also become involved in local community building, giving to others, healing from the personal pain they have experienced, and combining resources to increase the efficacy of whatever happens as 2021 unfolds.

**Focus on Racial Equity and/or Other Equity:** The need for greater racial equity came to the forefront in 2020. Visioning, community building, and healing must be an inclusive process. We recommend that the Department of Education include specific expectations and standards for visioning that is inclusive and addresses inequity and injustice, not only for Black and Brown people, but for individuals from other cultures and races, and for others such as those identifying as LGBTQ, individuals with disabilities, those living in poverty, and others who are disenfranchised.
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Recommendations for Policy Development (4) Youth Leadership

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Topic: Providing Supports for Students and Teachers.

Target Audience: Students, school administrators (principals and superintendents/central office staff), school psychologists, counselors, and teachers, Prek-12. Also: youth organizations, including youth advocacy groups.

Short Description: Children and youth have undergone tremendous trauma, suffering, and stress in 2020. They have opinions about what has gone well and what should never be repeated. Their future is at stake, and they have the right to be involved in expressing their hopes and dreams, sharing their worries and concerns, and helping to make difficult decisions about their lives. Students have experienced repeated setbacks, disappointments, and even a feeling of despair, as they have experienced so many losses this past year. They need help finding meaning — finding a sense of purpose in their lives, and in reclaiming their lives and their future.
The Coalition for the Future of Education has begun virtual “Youth Listening Tours” designed not only to listen to youth, but to begin a process of mentoring them to assume greater responsibility and leadership for the future of education, and for themselves and others. We believe these listening tours will also build compassion, courage, and community – the tours provide an opportunity to help youth consider not only what they have individually experienced, but also to consciously tune into their peers, to consider their needs, and to formulate possible first steps to build stronger communities.

We urge the Department of Education to provide financial and other support for these activities through developing initiatives and protocol for listening to youth, developing their leadership capacity, and establishing policies that ensure that individual students are involved in making decisions about their education. This could include activities such as expanded involvement of personalized instruction, individual student goal setting, enhancing student self-assessment and meta-cognition, and engaging students as co-creators of educational initiatives.

**Evidence Supporting This as a Best Practice:** Long-standing research supports the value of individual self-determination. Student goal setting, leadership development, and personalized instruction are all research-based practices. Active listening is also a best practice in helping individuals move beyond the trauma they have experienced.

**Focus on Racial Equity and/or Other Equity:** The trauma and suffering experienced during COVID-19 has not been equal, although everyone has been impacted. Inequities meant that some children and youth experienced the past year differently – some lacked technologies, some lacked bandwidth, some lacked physical space and resources for adequate virtual schooling. In other instances, youth were already stressed out because of family circumstances (poverty, hunger, violence, discrimination), which made it more difficult to mitigate against the impact of COVID-19. Some families experienced more tragedy, and some families were exposed to greater risks and dangers. Youth listening must involve a cross-section of students from many different circumstances. Youth listening provides an important opportunity to show we care. It also provides a platform for determining protocol, policies, and practices for greater equity and justice.

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Recommendations for Policy Development (5) Advancing Innovation

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Topic: Providing Supports for Students and Teacher, Faculty and Staff Well-Being, Professional Development and Supports

Target Audience: School administrators (principals and superintendents/central office staff), school psychologists, counselors, and teachers, Prek-12, think tanks, and technology providers.

Short Description: As educators follow the guidance we have provided in Policy Recommendations 1-4, we have opportunities to also advance the use of innovations in support of the future of education and the future for our students. Part and parcel with policies for understanding youth, alleviating trauma, visioning for the future, and preparing youth leadership, comes opportunities for creative implementation of new technologies, partnering with technology providers to further provisions for remote learning, and using innovation to further aims of creating a more just and sustainable future. Our world needs innovations to address ongoing crises — global warming, depletion of valuable resources, pollution, clean...
water, escalation of natural disasters, and a wide array of needs related to our mental health and well-being.

Evidence supporting this as a Best Practice: Our future is dependent on technology and innovation. STEM and STEAM opened many doors to bringing practical application of science, technology, and engineering, and math to schools. That must continue. It is paramount that education be more involved in providing incentives for technology providers to partner with schools, giving students experiences with advanced technologies, and heightening students’ critical thinking and problem-solving skills so that they are involved in discovering and implementing protocol for reducing the impact of climate change, and furthering sustainability of life on this planet.

Focus on Racial Equity and/or Other Equity: Initiatives to address this policy, professional development, and instructional concern must be written to clearly indicate that racial and other inequities, including inequitable access to technologies, must be central themes in any funding or support provided by the Department of Education. As states and districts design new policies and protocols, equity and justice must be addressed.
Background on the Coalition for the Future of Education

The Coalition for the Future of Education is supported by a 28-member Coordinating Committee composed of educators, educational leaders and researchers, students, parents, and aspiring leaders. It is an outgrowth of listening sessions begun by the Center for Educational Improvement, a 501 c 3 non-profit organization, in November 2020, and our concern for sustainability and scalability of educational supports to increase student engagement in their learning as we alleviate stress and trauma.

With COVID, all of our lives, including the education of children and youth, has been disrupted. Education is at a pivotal point where significant changes can be made to increase the relevance of education as our nation and our world heals.

Our request of the Biden Administration and U.S. Department of Education emerged from background research conducted by the Center and Coalition members over the past decade, as well as outcomes from the Coalition’s virtual listening tour, conducted with over 100 educators, parents, and high school and college students between November 2020 and March 2021.

For these tours, we dialogued with participants about their experienced with COVID, trauma, and equity in 2020. We learned that:

- COVID has taken a toll on mental and emotional health and well-being.
- Equity and access remain a large concern.
- Many aspiring leaders and high school students are feeling a sense of hopelessness and lack of control over their futures. That their lives, their dreams, and their plans have been disrupted.
- In reflecting on their education, youth wish they had experienced less bullying and greater support for pursuing their own interests and passions.

Many aspiring leaders are interested in leadership development, mentoring, and support.

The Coalition is continuing its listening tour, with a focus on listening to college and high-school students. Contact the Coalition’s Director: Dr. Melissa Patschke (MelissaPatschke@edimprovement.org)

The Center for Educational Improvement (CEI) was established in 2009 as a 501 c 3 non-profit dedicated to enhancing education, uplifting schools and school leaders, and conducting educational research. We have a 22-member advisory board composed of educational leaders, researchers, and parents. CEI has conducted significant research in social emotional learning, with our signature Heart Centered Learning approach, including providing technical assistance supporting Yale University’s Childhood- Trauma Learning Collaborative, an initiative to improve mental health supports for students.

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