



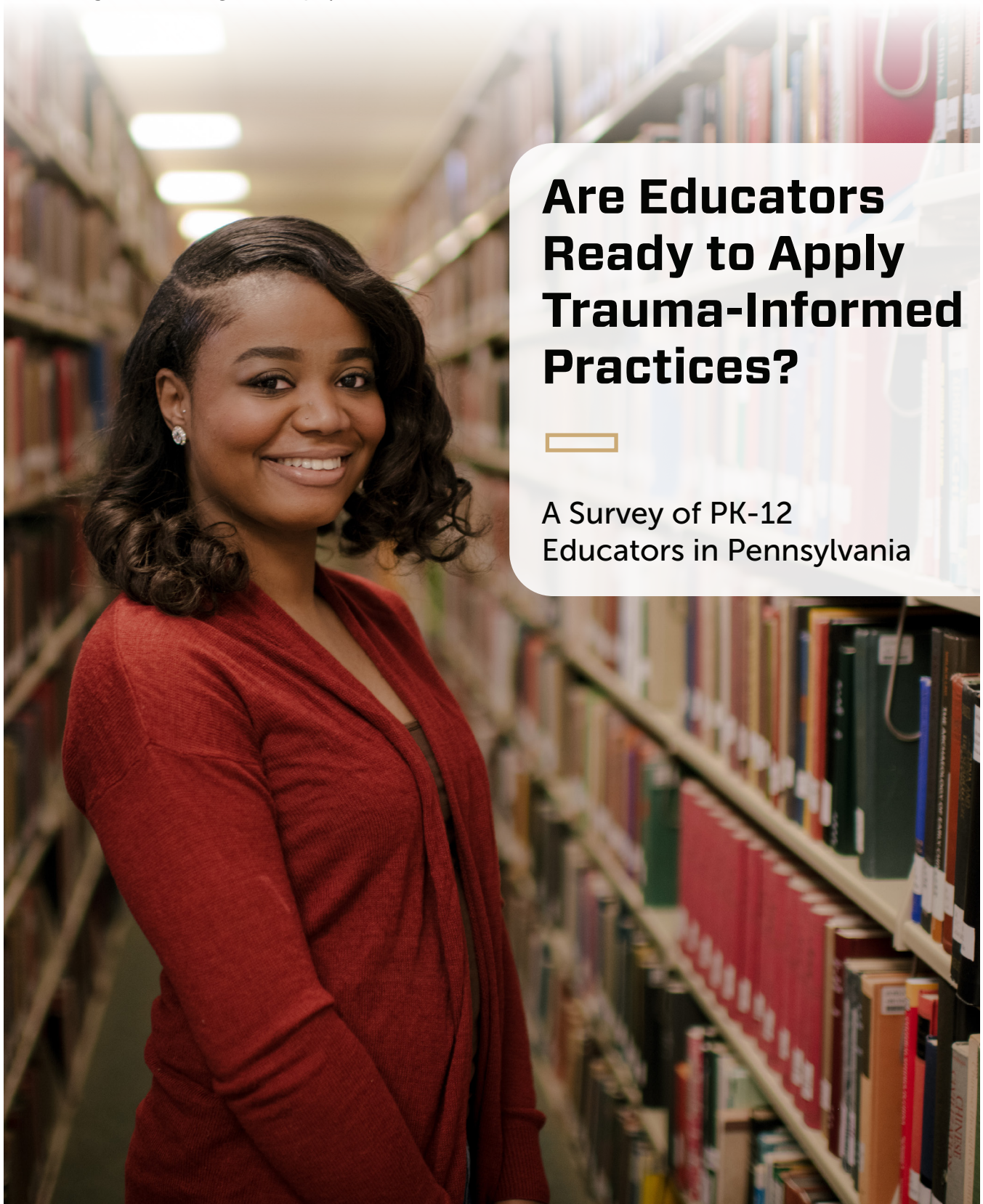
**Bloomsburg**  
UNIVERSITY®

**McDOWELL INSTITUTE**  
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

# Are Educators Ready to Apply Trauma-Informed Practices?



A Survey of PK-12  
Educators in Pennsylvania





# Are PA Educators Ready to Apply Trauma-Informed Practices?

## Introduction

Prior to the pandemic, close to half of youth in the U.S. reported at least one adverse childhood experience (ACE), with nearly 30% reporting having experienced two or more ACEs by the time they were 17 years old.<sup>1</sup> Relatedly, major depressive disorders in adolescents as well as death by suicide have been rising at alarming rates for a number of years as evidenced through national data and the results from the Pennsylvania Youth Survey. It is highly plausible that traumatic experiences associated with the recent pandemic will further exacerbate these patterns of concern.

Day-in and day-out, educators are increasingly interacting with school-age youth that have experienced traumatic events such as the recent pandemic, as well as with students that have experienced an array of childhood adversities that have, in many instances, resulted in trauma. Trauma results from an event, series of events or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual's cognitive functioning and physical, social, emotional, mental, or spiritual well-being.<sup>2</sup>

Educators and other school staff are on the front lines of this growing public health crisis. It is imperative that

we equip our educators to recognize and respond to students impacted by trauma or experiencing other forms of emotional distress. Having both the knowledge and skills in trauma-informed practices increases the likelihood of healthy growth and development of our students in their journey to becoming contributing members of our citizenry in adulthood.

## The Survey

Between April 1 and June 30, 2021, educators throughout the Commonwealth were provided with the opportunity to respond to this Qualtrics-based survey. Participation in the survey was voluntary with individual anonymity protected as approved by the Pennsylvania Department of Education Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects process. The survey consisted of demographic questions and a series of 16 questions to assess to what extent respondents felt prepared to recognize and respond to students impacted by trauma or experiencing emotional distress. A total of 4,793 educators in the commonwealth responded, with 56% of these educators being teachers (N= 2,673).

<sup>1</sup> Bethell, CD, Davis, MB, Gombojav, N, Stumbo, S, Powers, K. Issue Brief: Adverse Childhood Experiences Among US Children, Child and Adolescent Health Measurement Initiative, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, October 2017: [cahmi.org/projects/adverse-childhood-experiences-aces](http://cahmi.org/projects/adverse-childhood-experiences-aces)

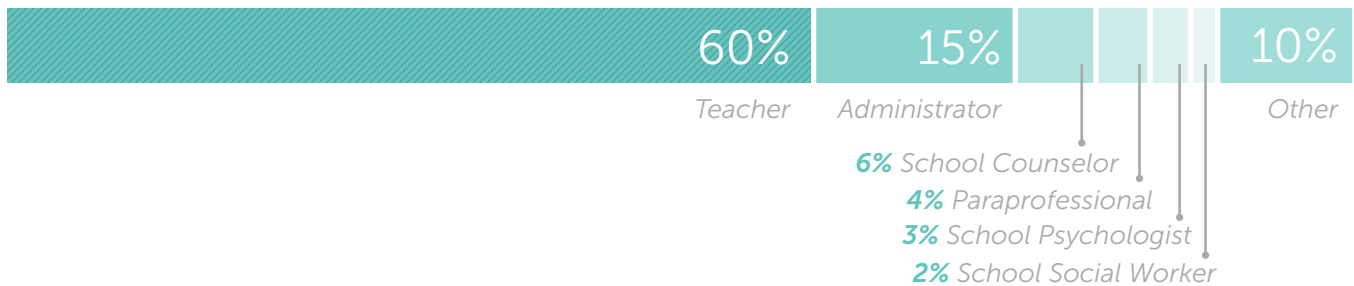
<sup>2</sup> Public School Code of 1949: Omnibus Amendments, Act 18 of 2019

# Demographics

## SEX



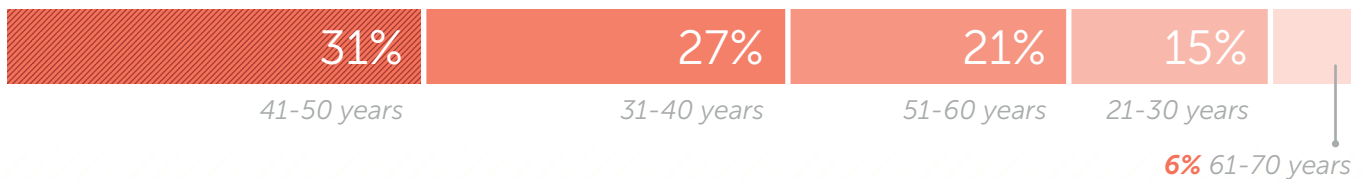
## ROLE/TITLE



## GEOGRAPHIC REGION (per PaTTAN office location)



## AGE



# Survey Highlights



**95%**

agree

that all educators should receive training in trauma-informed classroom practices



**81%**

agree

that part of the role of teachers and staff is to connect students experiencing psychological trauma or distress with mental health support services



**1** *in* **2**

*educators do not feel adequately prepared* to recognize signs of trauma in their students



**4** *in* **5**

*teachers do not feel adequately prepared* to teach students activities to manage their stress and emotions



**3** *in* **5**

*teachers do not feel adequately prepared* to use communication strategies to help students feel safe



**3** *in* **5**

*teachers do not feel adequately prepared* to talk with a student to motivate them to connect with support



**3** *in* **4**

*teachers do not feel adequately prepared* to implement trauma-informed approaches in teaching

## Conclusion

While educators in the Commonwealth believe that professional development and implementing trauma-informed practices is important, only half of the teachers surveyed felt prepared to recognize signs of trauma in their students. Furthermore, only 1 in 4 felt prepared to implement trauma-informed practices. Expansion of policies and professional development in trauma-informed approaches reflecting multi-tiered logic can help to close this gap and further prepare

educators to facilitate the social, emotional, and behavioral wellbeing of students. Closing this gap is essential concerning both in-service and pre-service training of educators. Specifically, training and aligned policies in universal, targeted, and individual-intensive trauma-informed practices will help to prevent as well as mitigate the affects of emotional distress and trauma. Relatedly, professional development in self-care should be incorporated to further ensure desired outcomes.

# Appendix

	All Educators		Teachers	
	Very Low, Low, Medium	High, Very High	Very Low, Low, Medium	High, Very High
<b>Table 1. Please indicate your preparedness to:</b>				
Recognize when a student is exhibiting signs of psychological trauma or distress	46%	54%	55%	45%
Talk with a student exhibiting signs of psychological trauma or distress to motivate them to connect with mental health support services	53%	47%	64%	36%
Use communication strategies to help a student exhibiting signs of psychological trauma or distress feel safe	50%	50%	60%	40%
Teach students activities to manage their stress and emotions in alignment with the PA Career Ready Skills	72%	28%	79%	22%
Implement trauma-informed approaches in teaching	67%	33%	75%	25%
<b>Table 2. Indicate how much you disagree / agree with the following statements:</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neither</b>	<b>Agree, Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neither</b>	<b>Agree, Strongly Agree</b>
I feel confident in my ability to recognize when a student is exhibiting signs of psychological trauma or distress.	22%	78%	28%	72%
I feel confident in my ability to talk with a student exhibiting signs of psychological trauma or distress to motivate them to connect with mental health support services.	30%	70%	38%	62%
I feel confident in my ability to use communication strategies to help a student exhibiting signs of psychological trauma or distress feel safe.	29%	71%	38%	62%
I feel confident in my ability to teach students activities to manage their stress and emotions.	35%	65%	43%	57%
I feel confident in my ability to implement trauma-informed approaches in teaching.	49%	51%	55%	45%
<b>Table 3. Indicate how much you disagree / agree with the following statements:</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neither</b>	<b>Agree, Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neither</b>	<b>Agree, Strongly Agree</b>
I think that a student who is receiving mental health treatment is showing a sign of personal strength	14%	86%	15%	85%
Most teachers and staff in my school think that a student who is receiving mental health treatment is showing a sign of personal weakness	91%	9%	92%	8%
Part of the role of teachers and staff in my school is to connect students experiencing psychological trauma or distress with mental health support services	19%	81%	21%	79%
Students who disrupt my class do not care about learning	97%	3%	96%	4%
I do not take it personally when a student is verbally aggressive towards me	36%	64%	44%	56%
<b>Table 4. All Educators should receive training in trauma-informed classroom practices.</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Yes</b>
In your opinion, do you believe all educators should receive explicit training in trauma-informed classroom practices?	5%	95%	6%	94%

Note: Percentages may not equal 100% due to rounding.

# Additional Information

## About the Sponsor and Research Teams

### Sponsor

Financial support for this research project was provided by the Pennsylvania Department of Education. Data analytic interpretations, conclusions, and recommendations expressed within this report are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Pennsylvania Department of Education and such endorsements should not be inferred.

### Research Team

The McDowell Institute in the College of Education at Bloomsburg University served as the organizing hub for the research conducted through this awarded project. The research team was comprised of Dr. Tim Knoster and Ms. Danielle Empson at Bloomsburg University and Dr. Tim Runge at Indiana University of Pennsylvania.

## Notes of Interest

This study was a replication of a multi-state survey conducted on this same topic by Kognito (2020). A total of 4,793 educators completed this Pennsylvania specific replication survey. It is noteworthy that this level of response represents only a small portion of total educators across the Commonwealth (approximately 3% of all educators in the Commonwealth). As such, caution should be employed in generalization of these results.

Additional information regarding this survey as well as related trauma-informed resources may be obtained via the McDowell Institute website: <https://www.bloomu.edu/offices-directory/mcdowell-institute>.

