

**Designing for Trauma-Informed Practices:
Professional Development to Grow School Founders**

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Dedication

Joy Denise, one day you will ask me why I always push you to do your very best. On that day I will tell you that I pursued my first two degrees for me, but this one is for you. You are my why every single day. You are the reason I felt motivated to finish strong. I dedicate this work to you because I want you to know that I, your mother, have been proud of you since the day you were born, and I hope that one day you will feel proud of me. Right now, you are only one, but someday you will be 21 and maybe you'll ask me for help in figuring out what to do after graduation, and maybe I'll pass you this capstone and tell you how much energy I put into making my life's work about education for myself and others, and maybe you'll feel inspired to follow your dreams too.

Justin, thank you for encouraging me to apply, study, write, and sleep; and to stress less. Your partnership through this entire experience has been needed and appreciated. Kim, thank you for your unwavering support during this process. Your phone calls, text messages, prayers, and affirmations have been reenergizing. Every reminder that I could do it has been so incredibly helpful. Mom, thank you for being my cheerleader from afar. You have always been confident that I could accomplish this, even when I did not. Your strength is my inspiration. Laticia and James, thank you for being persistent in asking if I could use help, or if I needed support. I needed it probably more than I accepted it, but the willingness to be there made all the difference. Julius, Jason, and Jourdan, you all are the best siblings anyone could ask for...the spontaneous check-ins to see if I'm okay reminded me that my work is not my life, my family is my life, and they care for me deeply.

Dad and Bigmama, I wish you all were here to see what I've done. Your high expectations from a young age, your ability to tackle any challenge life threw your way, your big Hodges smiles and loud Hodges voices have been in my heart and mind as I think about what it means for our family to accomplish this. Instilling faith in me to know that God would see me through this is invaluable. I dedicate this to you both for pushing me hard, and believing that I could do anything.

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Executive Summary

The Freedom Fellows Institute recruits and trains school leaders of color to found their own charter schools in marginalized communities. This quality improvement project sought to help the executive director of Freedom Fellows Institute (FFI) determine how to design the trauma-informed learning that fellows experience in year one of the institute which informs how fellows design their schools. Two theoretical frameworks were combined to shape this study: Laura Desimone's Core Conceptual Framework for Studying Professional Development and The Flexible Framework for Trauma Sensitive Schools. The professional development framework helped to shape the core understandings of how the Freedom Fellows Institute should consider facilitating leader development for fellows. The flexible framework helped to inform specific trauma-informed professional development aspects that will guide the fellows' school planning process. The two questions that are addressed are:

1. To what extent do the Freedom Fellows receive training related to trauma-informed practices (TIP) during year one of their training with the Institute?
2. How has the current Freedom Fellows Institute's training informed how fellows design their charter applications for trauma-informed practices?

By collecting and analyzing professional development artifacts and charter school applications, as well as conducting stakeholder and fellow surveys and interviews, four concrete findings emerged:

1. FFI leads in a trauma-sensitive way.
2. FFI offers flexibility and choice in the TIP training.
3. FFI contributed more to the clarity of fellows' school designs, not the content for Trauma Informed Practices.

4. Fellows do not have a shared definition for TIP.

Based on the findings, three recommendations were offered to FFI:

1. Keep modeling trauma-informed practices throughout FFI trainings.
2. Collect data from fellows throughout year one to assess their understanding of TIP as new learning occurs.
3. Make the TIP learning more concrete by utilizing trauma experts who are more knowledgeable about TIP.

All recommendations were formed considering the frameworks, which point to strong trauma sensitive professional development leading to increased knowledge and skills, and will support leaders' planning of trauma-informed practices to be embedded in their school's infrastructure. If followed, the fellows will have a greater likelihood of experiencing TIP training which gets directly used in their school design.

Introduction

Emotional safety for students in K-12 schools has long been a competing priority alongside academics, culture, and a host of other critical design components that separate how schools are evaluated, ranked, and funded. Oftentimes, academics have maintained priority status because of the traditional ways in which school success is measured. However, researchers and educators alike recently called for the increased need to prioritize the support of students who encounter trauma in their personal lives. Recent research finds that implementing trauma informed practices is a critical step in promoting positive school culture and personal student resiliency, as well as positively impacting student achievement (Dean, 2008; Cole et al., 2005; Hoover, 2019; Phifer et al., 2016; Plumb et al. 2016; Woods-Jaeger et al, 2018).

Trauma is “an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening, overwhelms the person’s ability to cope, and has lasting adverse effects on the person’s mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being.” (trauma.airprojects.org). When school-aged children experience adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), that are traumatic “physiological changes to children’s brains as well as emotional and behavioral responses to trauma have the potential to interfere with children’s learning, school engagement, and academic success—even years after the trauma took place.” (nassp.org). And, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) women and racial/ethnic minorities are at greater risk. Therefore, to understand trauma and its impact on students as an educator is critical.

The new-found importance of addressing trauma in schools has been heightened by the number of student suicides, suspensions, and drop-outs due to trauma exposure gone untreated (Charuvastra et al., 2010; Hadland, 2011; Mendelson et al., 2020; Porche et al., 2011). Furthermore, addressing trauma is needed because of the racial injustices that have come to the fore-front during the rise of social media and because of the fatigue, stress, and loss experienced because of COVID-19. In 2018 the U.S. House of Representatives approved resolution 443, which recognizes the importance of trauma-informed care within federal programs and agencies, including schools. Now, there are more than 11 states establishing standards and indicators for addressing trauma. In 2019 the House of Representatives received Bill 4146 from Massachusetts: The Trauma-Informed Schools Act of 2019, to define practices and activities that schools can implement and get funding allotted for trauma-informed practices (TIP).

The Freedom Fellows Institute (FFI) is a non-profit organization based in Memphis, TN. The organization’s mission is to find, develop, and support justice-minded aspiring school

leaders of color to found their own charter schools after an intense, 12-month fellowship program. The first 12 months serve as the “learning year” for the fellows, year two is the “planning year” when they apply their learning, and year three is the “implementation year” when they open their schools. This program is unlike many other training programs that prepare school leaders to open their own schools because they exclusively recruit and train educators who identify as a person of color. Low-income communities - like the areas in which fellows in the Freedom Fellows Institute will open schools - serve students of color who experience disproportionately more trauma than other students (Alvarez, 2020; Grinage, 2019; Henderson et al, 2019; McGee & Stovall, 2015).

FFI views leaders of color as vitally important to the communities where schools will open because they will identify with the students, families, and community members they serve based on their shared background and experiences. Grissom et al note that a principal’s ethnic or racial background being the same as their students’ leads to positive outcomes (2021). One positive outcome is retention of teachers of color, but the other outcome is the teachers having a positive impact on student learning (Bartnen & Grissom, 2019). Likewise, the leaders of the Freedom Fellows Institute are also people of color who have previously led at the school and systems level, and who have a vested interest in making sure these leaders, and their schools, offer a unique learning environment to the community. In the summer of 2019, with a two-person staff of an executive director and an institute coordinator, FFI launched its first cohort with six aspiring school founders.

After completing the first full year of training, FFI’s executive director identified one key area that the institute may not have supported enough: helping fellows understand how to integrate trauma-informed practices into their charter proposals to ensure their schools are

emotionally safe spaces for students who have faced varying degrees of trauma. For this capstone project, I am partnering with FFI to help them better understand where the strengths and gaps exist in their current trauma-informed professional development. This capstone will help the executive director determine how to design the learning that fellows experience in year one of the institute for coming years. The project may also help inform which schools, contractors, and conferences to use more or less of in the future.

Organizational Context

Leader Selection

FFI works hard to find the “right-fit” fellows for the intense learning experience they craft for aspiring school founders. The program was designed to select and train six new leaders each year. In the recruitment, interview, and selection process, there are quite a few steps to ensure they find people who ideally have prior leadership experience, have thoughtful and innovative school design ideas, show humility and a desire to learn and grow, want to serve in marginalized communities, and are committed to improving the student experience for students of color (see Appendix F). An additional characteristic FFI looks for is if the candidate also desires to open their school in the Southeast, because the executive director noted that charter school founders historically shy away from opening in that region because of low funding.

With clear ideals in mind regarding who they are looking for, the search begins with every aspiring fellow completing an initial online information document. From there, most are then invited to a 30-minute virtual pre-interview, conducted via Zoom. After that stage the pool narrows, and only some are asked to continue on to complete a full application, which includes submitting an initial vision pitch for the school they hope to open. Then, if a person makes it to the last step, they are flown to Memphis for a full-day, in-person interview. In that final

interview, the selection panel hopes to hear a strong and compelling vision come to life through a series of activities that would let the executive director know if they will be able to withstand the pressure and support of the institute. Also, the FFI leaders want to know that selected fellows can meet the demands of funders, school boards, and so many other stakeholders an aspiring leader will constantly be pitching their ideas to.

Learning Components

After selection of the fellows, the program immerses them in all dimensions of what it takes to found high-quality charter schools in high need communities where students of color live. Their guiding principles are: liberation through education, beyond the classroom, and institutional perseverance (freedomfellowsinstitute.org, 2019). Those principles guide the professional learning experiences that fellows encounter throughout year one.

The learning during year one in the fellowship includes professional development sessions led by the institute's executive director and contracted specialists, conferences, school-visits to high performing K-12 schools, and a host of shared resources and research they are expected to delve into. Because the leadership team is just two people, they rely heavily on their stakeholders who are:

- 1) Partner schools that they have vetted as shining examples for strong culture and academic practices.
- 2) School leaders of color at partner schools, who often are the founders of those schools, and who have crafted and are executing on their school design visions.
- 3) Contracted educational specialists who are K-12 school and systems'-based leaders with knowledge on critical content components that will be asked for during the school design and charter application writing process.

Each of the educational contributors to the fellowship are vetted by the executive director and program director for high quality instruction and alignment with the FFI's guiding principles. All educational contractors secured were people of color who have educational experience and proven results in their area of expertise. All conferences that fellows attended during the "learning year" had reputable speakers and focused on supporting students of color, low-income communities, and/or social-emotional learning. At conferences the executive director would normally point out sessions he would recommend, and fellows would decide which ones to attend. The director and fellows would convene after sessions to debrief and add new learnings into their charter applications.

According to the executive director, all school visits that the FFI coordinated for fellows were aimed at learning rather than judging the work of current school leaders at single-site charter schools (except one charter network of seven schools) led by people of color. The school visits would focus on the strengths of the school, how the school leaders developed the school, and what they are currently working to improve. Fellows would spend the morning observing the school and taking notes, while the afternoons were devoted to asking pre-prepared questions of the school leader. The late afternoon/evening consisted of debriefing their learnings with other fellows and the FFI directors. This learning was intended to directly inform information they were adding to their school design for the charter application. According to the executive director, "any learning fellows did that they did not then add into their charter application was wasted learning."

Funding

To make all of this learning happen, FFI relies on funding from several philanthropic entities. Each funder has a vested interest in financially contributing to charter schools and

innovative schools who serve marginalized communities. The executive director noted that the funders understand that supporting school leaders of color to open schools has a huge impact on positive school outcomes. Some of the current funders are the Walton Foundation, Charter School Growth Fund, and New Schools Venture Fund. Potential upcoming funders include Education Leaders of Color (EdLoC) and the Schwab Foundation. One of the most successful current partnerships happens to be with New Schools for Alabama (NSA). Through that partnership, NSA fully funds the participation of one FFI fellow who will open their school in Alabama. The FFI's executive director noted this partnership as being mutually beneficial and a near-guarantee that a leader will be able to open their school on-time. He hopes that in the future, more states will have similar programs that FFI can partner with.

The First Years

The FFI theory of action expects that after the fellow's initial 12-month experience of their "learning year" in the institute, that they will be able to submit charter school applications that meet the requirements of the cities they intend to serve. Then, in year two, after getting approval to launch through their local school district, they spend time making their visions come to life in the "planning year". This consists of hiring faculty, securing funds, finding facilities, training staff, and recruiting board members, students, and families. During year two, the fellows also have the ability to continue using the institute's leaders, partners, and stakeholders to act as mentors and resources to lean on for advice. Then, in year three, which is the "implementation year," they open their schools.

In the spring of 2019 when FFI launched, they had high interest and were able to kick off their inaugural year with six fellows who planned on opening schools south-eastern and north-eastern states. FFI was able to complete most professional development in-person, until March of

2020 when the national lock-down started due to the Coronavirus pandemic. Between March and June, support was given to fellows virtually, and reduced professional development was offered because of airlines, conferences, and schools shutting down and cancelling. Simultaneously, many school districts stopped reviewing charter school applications because of the pandemic. Two of the six fellows were able to successfully get their charters approved and move into their “planning year”. The others were not approved or not able to be reviewed.

In the summer of 2020, because of the pandemic, many philanthropic entities focused their efforts on supporting the re-opening of schools, switching to virtual learning, and providing technology. Because of this refocus of attention and funds, FFI was without funding (except for the partnership with New Schools for Alabama). That partnership was able to fund one fellow. Therefore, in the Summer of 2020, one fellow was brought on for their “learning year”. This fellow is receiving an altered version of support and development, which exists more exclusively with the FFI executive director who will provide direct support and training, while also offering connections to school leaders and virtual learning opportunities with schools.

With so much change occurring in the first years of FFI, they have decided to not recruit new fellows in the Spring of 2021, in order to give themselves time to pause and re-vamp. In this gap year, they hope to learn about what has worked, what has not, and how their practices impact the “implementation year” for the fellows who will be opening schools in the fall of 2021. The program knows they will have funding and a new group of six aspiring school leaders in the Spring of 2022, and they look forward to more effectively growing leaders then.

Problem of Practice

When students identify their adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and are not given the proper tools to grieve, heal, and persevere, these experiences can negatively impact that student’s

academic performance and general attitude towards their studies (Cole et al, 2005; Diamanduros et al, 2018; Holmes et al, 2015; Phifer et al, 2016). Not only do the students need methods for how to cope, but the teachers, staff, and leaders need training to adequately assist students through that journey to create a positive school climate where students can heal from trauma. Creating schools as spaces for students to heal and build resilience, must start with adult training on how to do that (Bonk, 2016; Carello & Butler, 2015; Chafouleas et al, 2016; Cole et al, 2005; Epp, 2020).

The lack of knowledge that exists for school leaders and teachers about how to implement trauma-informed practices can lead to schools leaning on families to take on the responsibility of addressing children's trauma (Ballard & Hodge, 2020). Families might not always see the signs of trauma, know about - or have access to - the resources to get their child help – in fact, they may not even know what trauma is. As a consequence, if left untouched and unaddressed, trauma may fester in the hallways of school buildings and in the bedrooms of families without a clear plan for how to respond, help, and heal.

Freedom Fellows Institute seeks to equip founding school leaders of color with all of the skills and knowledge needed to open charter schools that create equity and liberation for communities. Beyond that, FFI desires to have well-informed fellows, who can take their knowledge and past experiences of trauma, and positively and proactively plan and design for trauma-informed practices to be embedded in their schools to create innovative spaces for students of color to learn in. Because of the many risks associated with unaddressed trauma, the Freedom Fellows Institute intentionally planned professional development sessions during the “learning year” that would aid leaders in understanding how to design for resilient, inclusive learning communities. (Woods-Jaeger et al, 2018).

At the end of the FFI's inaugural year (2019-2020), the first cohort of fellows completed their initial "learning year". The hope was that because of the training the fellows received, they would be ready to have their charter school applications reviewed and approved, and then move into their year of applying that learned knowledge into more hands-on planning for their schools to operationalize their visions.

Based on initial conversations with the executive director, he knew that, based on their charter school applications submitted, fellows had varying degrees of clearly outlined plans within their charter applications for how their school would directly address trauma. He wondered if that was because of the professional development on trauma-informed practices, prior knowledge and experiences fellows had before the fellowship, or because of how well fellows understood how to integrate trauma-informed practices into their charter applications and school design. Currently, the executive director questions whether or not the professional development he has designed for fellows adequately prepares them to address and incorporate trauma-informed practices in the schools they open.

The purpose of this quality improvement capstone study is to assess the extent to which the Freedom Fellows received training in year one of the institute, and the impact of that training on how they design their charter applications and schools to address trauma informed practices. Because none of cohort one's schools will open until the fall of 2021, the executive director knew that he could not wait to see the implementation of their plans before changing parts of the training. And so, as the Coronavirus pandemic started at the end of the first year, as cohort 1 was finishing their learning year, the executive director dug, even more, into trauma-informed research he could use in trainings for the upcoming second cohort who would be starting their

“learning year” in hopes that their experience would be even better than the inaugural cohort’s experience.

Literature Review

Before collecting and analyzing data to understand the professional learning related to trauma-formed practices happening for fellows during FFI, I reviewed literature regarding school leadership and the design and implementation of a trauma-informed program that meets the needs of all of the students. Additionally, the literature reviewed discussed which people and trainings are most critical to implementing trauma-informed practices in schools. Being able to define the types of trauma a school’s program is addressing is critical to understanding which trauma-informed practices the school needs. Therefore, this section will uncover why trauma should be addressed in schools, the type of programs that would support addressing trauma, who should give and receive trauma training, how training should be facilitated, and what benefits will be added to the overall school environment.

The Program Matters

Even elementary-aged students should be getting emotional support in schools (Sciaraffa, M. A. et al, 2018). For years, schools have not been held accountable for providing that emotional support to students, as evidenced by the lack of clear state or national guidelines, policies, or funding for social workers, therapists, and trained teachers and leaders who can handle students’ trauma (Hoover, 2019; Kight et al, 2019). Striking research from Woods-Jaeger et al. (2018) identifies the intergenerational cycle of trauma. The researchers interviewed families in low-income communities and were able to show how the traumatic experiences families go through can make it difficult for them to support their children. It sometimes leads to them fighting for their children to not fall into the cycle of trauma. School leaders then, should

understand trauma in schools and in the communities, they serve in, how it manifests, and how it has existed and looked in years past in order for them to create a plan of support. Understanding the whole family, not just the student, aids in seeing patterns that can help inform which interventions are needed and break family cycles of trauma.

When trauma-informed practices are used in a school settings, the school climate and culture are altered. Chafouleas et al (2016) name how school-wide positive behavior comes out of proactive trauma-informed practices. The only way schools can be proactive is to start trauma services early. Their research suggests that elementary school is a great place to start these interventions because it informs, at an early age, how a student will learn and how they will deal with trauma. Specifically, the integration of high-quality trauma-informed practices in the design of a new school's support system can enhance the well-being of a child and their school performance.

Multi-tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) are critical for designing a school's trauma-informed program because the model assumes that change comes in multiple tiers or layers. Dorado et al (2016) saw the power of a strong MTSS model, "HEARTS" (Healthy Environments and Response to Trauma in Schools), which led to more student engagement. Similarly, Holmes et al. (2015) used the MTSS model "Trauma Smart", which leads to decreased stress in children impacted by trauma. These models prove that integrating strong tiered models can be the difference in the students, but also in the school. And the bottom line is that, as Hoover et al. (2019) explains, "student psychological safety and success hinges on mental wellness". Thus, school leaders are responsible for the mental wellness of their students.

The People Matter

The first step in moving in the right direction is to address the leader. The school leader must be clear in design about how they want to address trauma in their mission, vision, daily practices, policies, team cultures, supports, and services. Ballard and Hodge (2020) identifies that “school district administrators are not adequately equipped to create trauma informed schools whereby teachers and staff are supported and trained by district leaders in research-based trauma informed intervention strategies” (p. 5). This is an issue that extends far beyond Missouri. It requires training on the part of the leader, and real intentionality. Leaders determine how the school chooses to operate and respond to trauma.

In wanting to heal school communities, families, and students, having the right staff who are trained properly matters. According to the National Association of School Psychologists, “Poor ratios (of mental health professionals to students) restrict the ability of these professionals to devote time to important initiatives.” Therefore, designing a school for staffing that supports the MTSS trauma-informed system with a focus on Behavioral Health and Public Schools Framework matters greatly to the success of implementation. Diamanduros et al (2018) notes that “through trauma-informed practices, schools can help traumatized children adapt after experiencing a traumatic event... provide a safe place and a designated person to whom the student can go to talk about the traumatic event, emotions, or worries” (p. 37). This further reinforces the fact that having the right people in place to respond to a child’s trauma can alter how they understand what has happened and what that means for them.

The Training Matters

Gubi et al. (2019) notes that psychologists are often not “ready” to properly support students due to lack of adequate training specifically around how to address trauma. Bonk et al.

(2016) lays out specific professional development that leads to teacher knowledge, which also supports increasing trauma-informed staff. Desimone (2009) suggests that the most impactful professional development includes “content focus, active learning, coherence, duration, and collective participation”. To fully engage people in trauma-informed professional development, then psychologists would be needed to bring the proper knowledge and support on the subject-matter.

Hoover et al. (2019) ultimately names that “collaborative, sustained professional learning is more likely to be effective and directly related to and integrated into teachers’ daily practices” (p. 27). Therefore, if schools create collaborative, on-going trainings to enhance adult knowledge around trauma and how to respond to it, then they can better implement a MTSS model with all students in mind.

Based on the literature reviewed, professional development for school leaders on trauma-informed practices should be deeply focused on leaders understanding trauma (content knowledge). The only way leaders will become more knowledgeable on TIP is to learn from psychologists who have a healthcare background and understand the complexities of trauma. Laura Desimone’s (2019) research on professional development effectiveness also suggests that the training should be active (perhaps including more activities and ways to extend the learning). Therefore, ongoing-interactive training will be needed for strong implementation.

Conceptual Frameworks

Two theoretical frameworks will be combined to shape this study: Laura Desimone’s Core Conceptual Framework for Studying Professional Development and The Flexible Framework for Trauma Sensitive Schools. Desimone’s framework focuses on the most critical practices for effective professional development: content focus, active learning, coherence,

duration, and collective participation. The Flexible Framework, which was introduced in *Helping Traumatized Children Learn*, centers around six elements to consider when designing a trauma-informed school: leadership, professional development, access to resources and services, academic and non-academic strategies, policies and protocols, and collaboration with families. The Core Conceptual Framework will help shape core understandings of how the Freedom Fellows Institute should consider facilitating leader development for fellows who are in the planning phase for their schools. The Flexible Framework will inform specific trauma-informed professional development aspects that will guide the fellows' school planning process.

Multi-tiered Systems of Supports and Services (MTSS) Framework

The Flexible Framework allows multiple stakeholders in a school community to evaluate the various needs for the school at multiple levels. The research and best practices around designing trauma-informed schools through the Flexible Framework stem from the more general multi-tiered system of supports and services (MTSS) framework. This system was developed to provide targeted support for all learners, similar to response to intervention (RTI) systems that schools utilize to offer differentiated supports to students. The MTSS framework focuses on the whole child, emphasizing academics, behavior, social, and emotional support. The MTSS model includes doing screening, data analysis, intervention, assessment of progress, and revised practice.

The Multitiered Systems of Support (MTSS) represents a framework for a continuum of system-wide interventions of increasing intensity depending on need to create safe and successful schools. It causes the community, families, teachers, and students to all work together. It focuses on (pbisrewards.com, 2021):

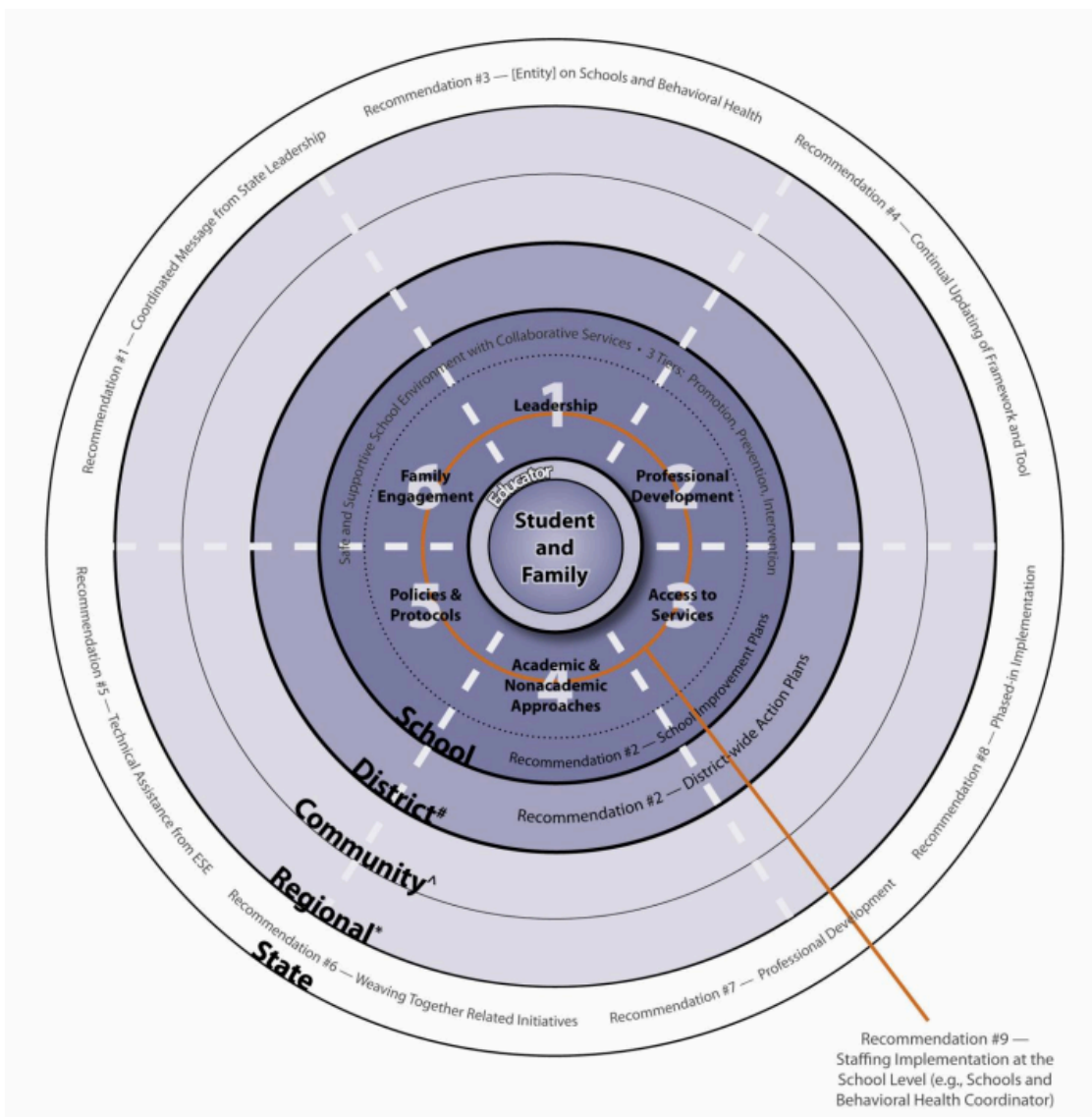
- Prevention and wellness promotion.

- Universal screening for academic, behavioral, and emotional barriers to learning.
- Implementation of evidence-based interventions.
- Monitoring of ongoing student progress in response to implemented interventions.
- Engagement in systematic data-based decision making about services needed for students based on specific outcomes.

The Behavioral Health and Public Schools Framework

To further understand the Flexible Framework is to have a deep understanding of The Behavioral Health and Public Schools Framework which is designed to enable schools to tailor local solutions to address the needs of their communities based on the three tiers it identifies. As stated in the 2011 Massachusetts Behavioral Health and Public Schools Task Force Final Report, the three tiers include:

“fostering the emotional wellbeing of all students through school-wide safe supportive environments, supports and services that are preventive and enable schools to intervene early to minimize escalation of identified behavioral health symptoms and other barriers to school success, and intensive services and schools’ participation in coordinated care for the small number of students demonstrating significant needs” (traumasensitiveschools.org, 2021).



This framework names 6 critical sections that must be addressed:

1. Leadership by school and district administrators to create supportive school environments and promote collaborative services that reliably address each of the three levels.
2. Professional development for school administrators, educators, and behavioral health providers, both together through cross-disciplinary trainings and separately.
3. Access to resources and services by identifying, coordinating, and creating school and community behavioral health services to improve the school-wide environment. The

framework recognizes the need for resources that are clinically, linguistically, and culturally appropriate for students and their families.

4. Academic and non-academic approaches that enable all children to learn, including those with behavioral health needs, and that promote success in school.
5. School policies, procedures, and protocols that provide a foundation for schools to implement and support this work.
6. Collaboration with families where parents and families are included in all aspects of their children's education.

The Flexible Framework

When applying the Flexible Framework to the Behavioral Health and Public Schools Framework, and considering a MTSS approach, it allows this quality improvement project to focus on the trauma specific six elements (traumasensitiveschools.org, 2021):

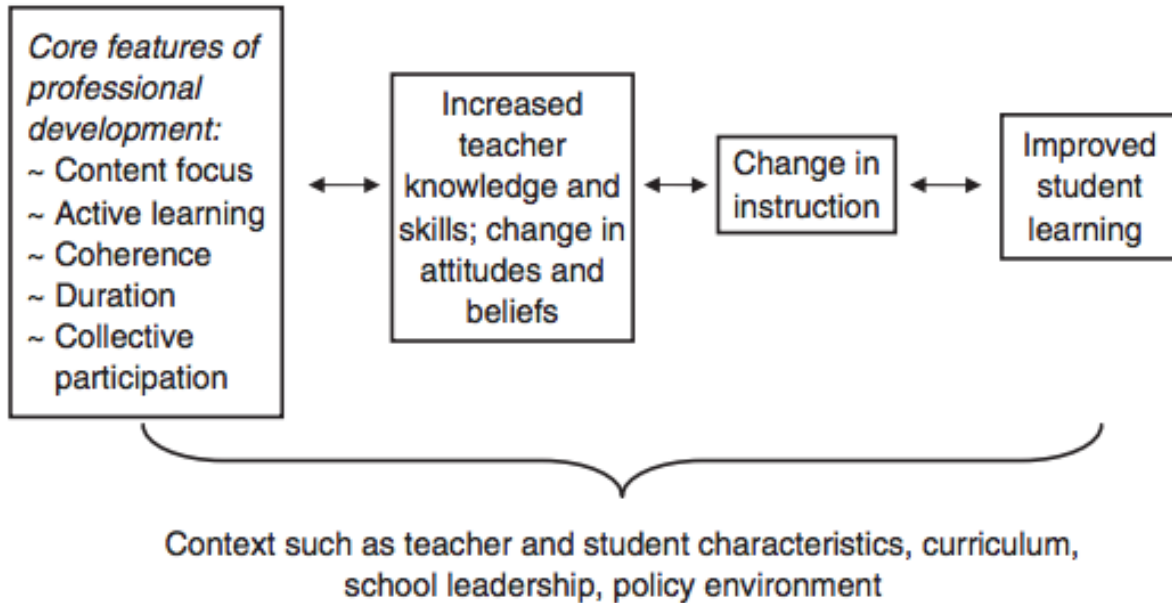
1. Schoolwide Infrastructure and Culture;
2. Staff Training
3. Linking with Mental Health Professionals
4. Academic Instruction for Traumatized Children
5. Nonacademic Strategies
6. School Policies, Procedures, and Protocols.

The stakeholders at the Freedom Fellows Institute will focus on the first element of schoolwide infrastructure and culture to design for trauma informed practices. From there, they will be able to better assess teacher and student needs for the other elements of this framework.

Effective Professional Development

To design for and be ready to implement the Flexible Framework for trauma-informed schools, one needs to learn the components of trauma-informed practices. Laura Desimone's

Core Conceptual Framework for Professional Development helps to centralize foundational practices that lead to strong professional learning environments for teachers.



Those ideas will be applied to the work of FFI is doing with teaching TIP to fellows. Desimone defines professional development as all of the varied learning that leads to teachers' performance improving. If that same definition holds, then the framework will uncover what learning happens in FFI, and how does it lead to fellows' planning and designing improving.

Research Questions

This study is a quality improvement project intended to uncover the current professional development experiences fellows receive related to trauma-informed practices and the design choices these aspiring school leaders are making as they write and revise their charter school applications. Because the work of Desimone points to strong professional development, and the Flexible Framework points to leaders' understanding of trauma and programmatic design as critical areas of a school that can lead to success in implementing trauma-informed practices,

then the conceptual frameworks for professional development and trauma-informed practices guide the key research questions.

The research questions are:

1. To what extent do the Freedom Fellows receive training related to trauma-informed practices during year one of their training with the Institute?
2. How has the current Freedom Fellows Institute's training informed how fellows design their charter applications for trauma-informed practices?

Project Design

Data Collection

To answer the two research questions, I retrieved existing resources including the fellows' charter school applications, as well as training materials used by the Freedom Fellows Institute to train fellows on Trauma Informed Practices. I also conducted two surveys simultaneously - one for the Freedom Fellows and one for Freedom Fellows Institute's stakeholders. Lastly, I hosted interviews with the fellows. The existing documents, as well as the collected data, was gathered and analyzed to better understand the trauma-informed professional development fellows receive in their "learning year" of their training with FFI and their experiences with the trauma-informed training, which helped to answer research question one. The applications were collected to identify how FFI's training has informed how fellows designed their schools to include trauma-informed practices, which led to answers to the second research question.

Table 1. Data Collection Connected to Research Questions

<u>Data Source</u>	<u>Type of Data</u>	<u>Research Question</u>
Charter School Application	Existing	2
FFI Training Materials	Existing	1
Survey (for Fellows)	Collected	1 and 2
Survey (for Stakeholders)	Collected	1 and 2
Interviews	Collected	1 and 2

FFI Training Materials

The professional development training materials that the Freedom Fellows Institute used were critical to understanding the type of learning that occurred during year one in the institute. I reached out directly to the executive director and asked for him share all materials they used during sessions related to trauma-informed practices. I was able to obtain 16 total artifacts, which included six power point presentations that were used to facilitate training sessions, three handouts that were distributed to fellows during training sessions, one narrative written to explain their approach in a grant proposal, quotes about student connectedness that were used during a training session, pictures of the fellows in action, and research and resources around trauma-informed strategies. Based on the titles of documents, and the words and phrases that were repeated throughout materials, the trauma-informed training materials fell into four main categories: Social Emotional Learning, Student Connectedness, Learning Readiness, and Trauma-Sensitive Schooling.

The additional FFI training fellows attended, but are not represented in the training materials collected were from conferences they attended and vendors who partner with FFI to

provide training. The two conferences were: ASCD's Symposium on Building Trauma Sensitive Schools and State of Black Learning's Conference. The educational partner who provided some training was Transcend, which is an educational non-profit working towards equity. FFI did not provide training materials or session notes from these additional learning experiences, but information about these learning experiences did arise during fellow interviews.

Surveys and Interviews

The surveys and interview questions were developed based on the essential parts of the flexible framework and the effective professional development framework. The survey was broken into questions addressing the types of professional development fellows received in year one, as well as the specific trauma-informed practices they know and could implement (See Appendix B). Similarly, the interview questions were separated into two sections: trauma related questions, and professional development related questions, which asked about general experiences and then transition into FFI-specific questions regarding both topics (See Appendix E). The only difference between the fellow survey and stakeholder survey was that the fellow survey assessed their personal experiences, whereas, the stakeholder survey assessed the amount of knowledge they had about how FFI leads professional development on trauma-informed practices, how they should be planning for supporting fellows, and how the fellows are currently using their knowledge for designing (See Appendix C).

After training materials were obtained, I went over all survey and interview questions with the executive director for final approval before the launch phase. He had two minor suggestions for rewording and agreed for those to be the final questions that got used. I then collected the email addresses of all seven fellows from the executive director and sent an email to all of them as an invitation to participate in the 12 question, anonymous survey for fellows,

with the link to the survey attached. At the same time, I obtained email addresses from the executive director of anyone who contributed to the FFI as a stakeholder by providing training, financial support, programming, or insight, such as ongoing suggestions or resources. He shared the email addresses of five stakeholders and I sent them a similar invitation to participate in a nine-question, anonymous survey for stakeholders, with the link to the survey attached. Both surveys were created via Google Forms and all items were multiple choice. The surveys remained accessible to fellows and stakeholders for six weeks. During that time, I sent four reminder emails, requesting participation. At the end of the six weeks, I locked the surveys to make them inaccessible.

While survey submission windows were open, I sent a separate email to all seven of the fellows requesting time to interview them via Zoom. The purpose of the interview was to add more context and narrative beyond the information from the fellow surveys. As fellows responded to me, I confirmed dates and times of interviews and sent follow-up emails with Zoom links embedded. When the interviews began, I shared my purpose statement with each interviewee for them to better understand my purpose for the interview, the problem of practice, and the way I intended to use the information, and ensured them of confidentiality and got permission to record for later transcription. I asked the same nine open-ended questions for all interviews and asked clarifying questions when necessary. Five of the questions centered around trauma, based on the Flexible Framework's elements, and the other four questions focused on professional development derived from the Core Conceptual Framework for Studying Professional Development. At the end of each interview, I asked fellows if there was anything else they would like to share, beyond the questions I asked, that they thought would be helpful to my study.

Interview Questions

TRAUMA Questions

- 1. Tell me about your previous experiences in K-12 schools.**
- 2. Share with me your vision of the school you want to open.**
- 3. How do you define trauma-informed practices?**
- 4. What do you think your role is in designing your school to address trauma? (What did you think your role was before being a part of FFI?)**
- 5. What is your role in sustaining trauma-informed practices being used in your school beyond founding year?**

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT Questions

- 6. What professional development sessions/experiences have you had at FFI to prepare you to address trauma in your school? (Who led this? How often? When?)**
- 7. How has your charter design changed/shifted/evolved around trauma informed practices since being a part of FFI?**
- 8. What would you want more training on to be better prepared to design your school for trauma-informed practices?**
- 9. In your opinion, what key components make up a high-quality professional development for you to feel it is successful?**

At the end of each interview, I requested that the fellow 1) complete the survey if they had not already, 2) send me their charter school applications, and 3) send the survey for stakeholders to anyone who is already committed to being a board chair or board member for their school campus. It was important to request stakeholder participation from the fellow because they would have relationships with these potential participants and perhaps be able to convince them to engage, more than I could. The request was also sent via email along with a thank you note to each participant.

Data Analysis

FFI Training Materials

The first data I collected was the professional development training documents provided by the executive director. The focus of analyzing these artifacts were to understand research question one: to what extent do the Freedom Fellows receive training related to trauma-informed practices during year one of their training with the Institute? My goal was to better understand what the training experiences were for the fellows, based on the materials used during training, which would later be paired with the shared experiences fellows divulged during their interviews and survey responses.

For each training document (slide deck or handout), I used the language of the Core Conceptual Framework for Studying Professional Development, which names content focus, active learning, coherence, duration, and collective participation as the most critical practices for effective professional development. Here, I scoured the training documents looking for 1) a specific content focus on trauma, 2) ways that fellows were asked to actively engage, learn, and collectively participate, and 3) ways the material naturally builds with other training tools for coherence. I read through all of the content of the training materials shared with me. I used an Excel sheet to note specific words related to trauma, for content focus, directions given on handouts or presentation slides, for understanding of how the fellows were asked to engage with the material, each other, and their charter applications, and also for repeated phrases across trainings, to see where coherence existed (or did not).

Survey and Interview Responses

The fellow and stakeholder surveys and interviews were analyzed to understand research questions one and two: both clarifying the training on trauma-informed practices delivered

through the Freedom Fellows Institute, while also seeking to understand the impact that training had on the fellow's design of the charter school application. To analyze the interviews and surveys for seeking to answer question one, I used the same coding method that I had already established for the looking at training materials.

To answer the second research question, I focused on the Flexible Framework, which posits that leadership, professional development, access to resources and services, academic and non-academic strategies, policies and protocols, and collaboration with families are critical for designing a trauma-informed school. I specifically looked for ways the fellows were clear about how they were proposing to design their school for trauma-informed practices (TIP) related to the framework's six important elements for TIP design. The clarity and specificity of design did vary by fellows, based on if they are currently approved and in the implementation phase to open in the fall of 2021, versus fellows who are still waiting to get approved because their charter application was initially denied, or their district had a freeze on reviewing new school applications due to COVID-19.

Charter Applications

The third grouping of data were the charter applications. These served as evidence of how the second research question would get answered. I waited to read the charter applications until the end of the analysis to ensure that what I read in their applications did not influence my interviews. I used the same coding method, aligned with the Flexible Framework, to understand what their design proposal was in the charter application to get approved for opening their school.

Findings

In this section I will detail out the answers to my research questions, which encompasses the analysis of all data and documents collected.

Table 2. Data Collection Findings Snapshot

<u>Data Source</u>	<u>Quantity</u>	<u>Information Obtained</u>
Charter School Applications	5 of 7 collected	“Student well-being” showed up in all, but TIP was only explicitly in 1 of 5.
FFI Training Materials	16 artifacts collected	Several TIP strategies and frameworks were reviewed.
Survey (for Fellows)	3 of 7 completed	All 3 respondents reported wanting more training on TIP school design from FFI.
Survey (for Stakeholders)	5 collected	3 respondents said FFI should offer TIP development 3 or more times.
Interviews	5 of 7 conducted	All 5 respondents noted their own experiences of trauma being a catalyst for wanting to create nurturing schools.

Trauma-Informed Practices Training

Question One: To what extent do the Freedom Fellows receive training related to trauma-informed practices during year one of their training with the Institute?

Finding 1: FFI leads in a trauma-sensitive way.

Fellows reported that the FFI experience is trauma-informed because of the trauma-informed and trauma-sensitive way the executive director, program director, and consulting facilitators led sessions, and the way they engaged with fellows. One cohort 1 fellow noted, “The experience was trauma informed . . . They always honored everything we brought into the space-- all of our experiences and what we valued.” The FFI training materials had repeated themes and phrases such as: village, community, affirm, and commune. It was clear that these were important concepts for the fellows to understand as they planned for their schools.

In interviews, fellows explained that the experience during the “learning year” required them to uncover their own trauma, understand, historically, how black and brown communities and schools have disproportionately been impacted by trauma, and invested them in the need for trauma informed practices. Fellows reported that during their FFI interview process, during FFI’s professional trainings, and in one on one mentoring sessions, the programs’ leaders asked fellows about their childhood, their previous work and living settings, and their past relational ties, to better understand who they were, and how they think about different situations and types of people. Program leaders used that information about each fellow to inform how they facilitated workshops, who they paired together for tasks, and even, how they mentored leaders. They also repeated positive affirmations through a shared mantra whenever they convened. Because of that, fellows said that FFI is a space to tap into their own trauma and experiences and

ways they have or have not dealt with those experiences. Fellows reflected on how they had previous training experiences (outside of FFI) where they did not have this same opportunity.

Each fellow noted a sense of personal responsibility for ensuring that TIPs are a part of their school design and charter application. One cohort 1 fellow said, “When I started, I had a very white supremacist framework for what social emotional learning look like, right. And I think that what freedom fellows did was opened my eyes to how to deconstruct that and implement it in a culturally responsive way for children of color because I'm going to be serving predominantly black and Latino students.” This aligns with the training materials shared from the executive director, where he focused heavily on the themes of healing, affirmation, community, and belonging, as connectors to success and positivity when these components are present and consistent in schools.

Fellows also noted that after school visits, which were an integral learning experience, they always debriefed what they saw and heard, and the impact it had on them. They were called to not just consider what they thought, but also, what they felt, and how that may make students and adults feel in their future schools. Then, they would talk about how those practices could be used in their school design. Thus, FFI creates the conditions for a fellow to design for the culture that would be conducive for implementing trauma-informed practices. The Flexible framework notes that leadership is the first tier to tackle, and through the immersive experiences provided, fellows felt that they had a deeper sense of the reason why TIP was critical. One fellow shared “before I joined Freedom Fellows, being a trauma informed school wasn't part of our design at all. Now, we've folded that into the student wellness component. So, in the written charter, we talk about the wellness wheel, but we also talk about (the fact) that our staff will go through trauma-informed training, and we will have professional development aimed at equipping

everyone with trauma informed strategies, all of that came directly from being part of the fellowship.”

Finding 2: FFI offered flexibility and choice in the TIP training.

All fellows have not had the same trauma-informed practices training experience. FFI spent time making sure they were sensitive to the needs and desires of fellows, while also being cognizant of their start-up budget in year one, which led to inconsistencies. One cohort 1 fellow shared that “The group, except for me, went to a training in Philly. I think about working with African American children and the trauma that is unique to that particular community. I was informed that I didn't need to go ...but I think I probably could have used it.”

The program director noted how they were constantly working to make sure that when flying fellows in and out of Memphis, and other cities where school visits and conferences were taking place, that they were spending responsibly. Fellows noted that operationally, they would find out about travel itineraries late and may have scheduling conflicts. Likewise, fellows mentioned not having access to an ongoing professional development schedule to know what learning would be occurring, and in what order. Because of this, fellows did not all attend the same conferences, visit the same schools, or experience all in-house trainings led by FFI in the same way because of scheduling conflicts or travel logistics not working out.

Because FFI leaders were so flexible, some fellows missed out on certain trainings, which led to varying experiences or intake of information. Although all fellows noted that they received at least three or more trainings on trauma-informed practices, and all included some aspect of trauma-informed practices in their charter application, 2 of the 5 interviewed missed one or more trainings. Similarly, because trainings often offered access to multiple frameworks and trauma-informed school models, though it was interactive, as Desimone’s framework on

effective professional development encourages, it led to all fellows not having the same base of TIP knowledge. Based on the training documents, fellows were given frameworks, research, and suggestions on what to do to implement trauma-informed practices in their schools, but were not explicitly trained on what it would look like by health care professionals. One fellow explained “I would love to have actually gone through some practice. Also hearing from other experts or more experts would have been great.”

Similarly, when attending conferences, fellows attended different sessions and were sometimes given information, secondhand from another fellow during debriefs. It is clear that choice was important, but perhaps at the expense of certain fellows missing out on certain learning experiences that would be critical to their development around TIPs. Each person definitely noted desiring more training on TIP and were unaware of what they missed, or what was most important.

School Design Choices Based on TIP Training

Question two: How has the current Freedom Fellows Institute’s training informed how fellows design their charter applications for trauma-informed practices?

Finding 3: FFI contributed more to the clarity of fellows’ school designs, not the content for Trauma Informed Practices (TIPs).

Fellows noted that their ideas on trauma-informed practices to use in their charter school application were mostly formed before the FFI. As one said, “I came in with a strong (TIP knowledge) base. And I think, you know, Freedom Fellows did a great job of helping me clarify. I don't remember any, like, specific, like, I changed my model because of this. I think it was like, my model became more clear.” Because the leaders of FFI encouraged fellows to read multiple resources and understand several models for incorporating TIP, and then were immediately

asked to infuse those ideas into the charter application, they didn't always have time in-between to create new ideas, but rather, adopt what is already being done.

Freedom Fellows Institute currently relies on the executive director, contractors, school visits, and conferences to give fellows their knowledge of trauma-informed practices. As mentioned in finding two, because of the amount of choice that exists in the training, all fellows aren't necessarily obtaining the same information on TIP during their "learning year." Furthermore, the trainings do not require that certain information be taken and added directly into their charter applications, but rather, they are encouraged to take what they think will work, without fellows having expert knowledge on what the full needs of their communities are. As seen in the artifacts from FFI training sessions, they are shown what works in different communities, but they may not know the trauma that currently exists in the communities they will serve in.

Based on the survey and interview data, all fellows had more than three years of K-12 educational experience before the FFI where they attended other professional development, or saw models of how to respond to trauma. During fellow interviews, one noted experiencing school shootings, going on lockdown, and trying to support homeless students. Another fellow noted experiencing the loss of a student who had committed suicide. Other fellows shared about the ongoing poverty, racism, and bullying students in their previous schools encountered. Right now, FFI is not bringing in specialists such as psychotherapists, highly-trained trauma experts, or others in the healthcare field who have a vast knowledge of the subject matter. One fellow specifically stated that they wanted, "better training on crisis intervention", while another noted wanting more hands-on practice with TIP from professionals. Also, the institute currently does

not bring in regional or city specific experts to discuss the specific trauma that exists in the communities in which they will serve.

Fellows noted that the TIP training provided confirmation of knowledge they already had as educators, but did not bring a lens beyond that. Most fellows mentioned pre-existing TIP knowledge, such as one cohort 2 fellow that said, “I think what Freedom Fellows Institute has done is given me the best way of communicating and structuring ideas that I had already.” They also said that the FFI helped them to specify how they would do something, why they would do it (in alignment to their school’s vision), or how to phrase it to be in language that district authorizers would appreciate during the application review process.

Fellows mentioned the tension between what an authorizer would want to hear, versus what is most trauma-informed, and stated that as being a factor in design choices for the application. The leaders of FFI helped fellows understand what in their school design would get approval, such as buzz words around culture, discipline, and student engagement, but to be weary of adding too many details about specific programming. The way one fellow put it was: “you learn all of these nuanced pieces of trauma, so that when you get out on your own, the hope is that during freedom fellows Institute, you did enough research, you were exposed to enough that you start to see the fallacy in your own policies and procedures, so that you're not creating the same nonsense (that’s in lots of charters and schools, but it’s not serving students well).” This statement illuminated the need to get clear about plans that you will actualize later, but that the charter application writing is more for the purposes of being approved.

Finding 4: FFI does not have a shared definition for TIP.

The fellows do not have the same definition of trauma-informed practices or what it should look like in their schools. Key words and phrases that came up when fellows were asked to define trauma-informed practices during interviews: love and mindset, affirmation, “high expectations, and high support”, “adults are aware of experiences that impact children’s well-being”, healing, “seeing people as human”, and “making families feel safe.” While love and awareness are important to supporting children with adverse childhood experiences, having concrete knowledge, resources, and tools are imperative for school leaders.

FFI is not prescriptive in how fellows should make their trauma-informed practices, rituals, or even definitions. In one fellow’s charter application defines what adverse childhood experiences and trauma-invested environments are, contextually explains the hardships students in that community experience, and lists 11 TIPs their school will employ to combat the trauma that exists. However, in another fellow’s charter application, the word trauma is never mentioned, but socio-emotional learning is mentioned as a whole school support and all other support for students seems to only happen, if and when the child is already showing signs of struggle or trauma. Though all fellows have ideas of what could work, and some of those ideas are based on research shared with them during the FFI, they have different language for how it’s defined, and how it should be addressed. For some, that feels liberating and not constraining to be the innovative visionary that designs their own school. For others, that left them clearer about what they would do in the design phase, and less clear about how they would design for implementation and sustaining their ambitious TIP ideas past year one.

Having common language can lead to a coherent understanding of the subject matter (Desimone, 2019). Fellows noted a variety of conceptual understandings of TIP: listening and

understanding, love, taking care of people, making people feel safe. Beyond their varied definitions, two of the five fellows interviewed, noted that the schools they visited did not always serve as strong models to see proactive TIP in action, but more reactive healing that needed to occur. In order for leaders to change their school design, their minds have to first be changed, based on the type of information that is required for them to have shared knowledge of strong TIP.

Recommendations

FFI has completed 1.5 years of programming with seven fellows who are looking forward to opening their schools. The learning year, which is year one of the program, is critical in the learning of trauma-informed practices for fellows, because that year shapes how they design their application for charter approval and is the only year when they have recurring trainings from the FFI. Therefore, all following recommendations will address what FFI should do in year one with new fellows to address them learning TIPs and using that information to design for implementing TIPs in their future schools.

Recommendation 1: Keep modeling trauma-informed practices throughout FFI trainings.

FFI is reaching the leaders they select because of the way they tailor learning environments to meet the needs of the fellows. They see them as individuals, and they see them as people of color. They get to know the fellows as a means to use that information to craft learning, and the learning environments, to better reach fellows, while acknowledging past struggles and challenges. Over and over again, throughout interviews, fellows noted feeling heard and seen because of the attention leaders paid to bringing up their individual, and the shared experiences, backgrounds, and history of people of color in schools in America, which was both culturally responsive and trauma-informed. Their voices were valued, and their perspectives,

elevated. Modeling the act of affirming these leaders of color, and making them feel comfortable, confident, and brilliant allows fellows to experience, firsthand, what trauma-sensitive schooling and learning can feel like, and leads to an innovative learning and working environment (Chrobot-Mason, & Aramovich, 2013). Leaders of color need this type of environment, especially when taking on the large task of designing and preparing to found their school because being with other people of color, who affirm them sustains them in the work (Henderson et al, 2019; Lisle-Johnson & Kohli, 2020; Mosely, 2018).

Above all else, they should keep their existing culture and encourage fellows to model and create that same culture within their future schools. FFI should consider, how they created that culture. Was it serendipitous, or intentionally designed? As they grow, how could they institutionalize that knowledge and teach it to new team members who will lead trainings for the fellows? Also, when they recruit and hire new leaders for the institute, what are the qualities that currently exist within the executive director and program director that are key competencies (such as strong facilitator) or personality traits (such as good listener) that all employees of the institute should have? In this upcoming gap year, FFI should codify their best practices as it relates to being trauma-informed, culturally sensitive, inclusive, and affirming.

Recommendation 2: Collect data from fellows throughout year one to assess understanding of trauma-informed practices as new learning occurs.

Currently, FFI hosts professional development sessions and takes fellows to conferences and to visit schools, with a vision that these learning experiences will lead to increased knowledge of trauma-informed practices that will inform fellow's charter school design and applications. From the previously shared findings, it is evident that fellows learn a lot about how to think about what trauma-informed care is and why it matters, but they are not able to articulate

new learning on TIPs, nor a common definition of TIP from their “learning year” that leads to design implications. Assessing how much fellows are learning during the FFI is crucial.

One way to collect information and know what new TIP knowledge FFI is adding to fellows is to assess their prior TIP knowledge as soon as they begin FFI. Before they experience any TIP learning through FFI, a pre-test would serve as a diagnostic, but also help leaders to create learning experiences directly tailored to the gaps that currently exist for fellows. Then, after they attend FFI-led TIP professional development sessions, conferences, or school visits, they can assess at the midway point, and again at the end of year one. Or, they can undergo assessment at the beginning of the “learning year,” and at the end without a midpoint assessment.

Collecting pre and post data in the form of a survey can be quick and give clear insight into new knowledge gained (Law, 2019; McIntyre et al. 2019). Another way to collect similar data would be in the form of conducting structured stop-points throughout the learning year where the six fellows and the institute leaders discuss specific and concrete ways their TIP knowledge has grown, and tangibly show where in their charter application, changes have been made. This collection of more qualitative data can be just as effective (Herman & Whitaker, 2020). It also allows for the open discussion and document analysis to lead to findings like, perhaps they find out that fellows prefer TIPs showing up in one specifically named section of the charter application versus seeing it integrated throughout. Or, maybe they discover misalignment and misunderstandings coming out of trainings that should be shared knowledge.

To go about planning for and operationalizing a data collection cycle, it will be important for FFI to consider, what is the most important knowledge about trauma-informed practices that every fellow must know by the end of year one (such as shared definition or specific practices ever FFI school should embrace)? From there, FFI can generate a list of information to create the

assessment. Then they would decide how often to assess, and in what format the data would be collected. As a starting point, they can reference the list of TIPs that were asked about in the survey (full survey in appendices). The TIPs that survey respondents said they would like more training on were on: how to hire mental health professionals, how to design their school for incorporating TIP, how to design curriculum to support TIP, and how to design for TIP policies and practices to be evaluated and improved.

Recommendation 3: Make the TIP learning more concrete by utilizing trauma experts who are more knowledgeable about TIP.

It is clear to stakeholders, fellows, and the leaders of FFI that fellows must attend professional development centered on TIP, and that they must include TIP in their charter school application, describing their school design. It is currently unclear which components of designing for a trauma-informed schools are necessary for all fellows. In each of the charter applications that the fellows prepared, “trauma” showed up in various sections (school culture, serving at-risk students, professional development, community engagement, student connectedness), and sometimes it was labeled by different names other than trauma-informed. The specification used to articulate the vision for TIP implementation varied in charter applications. Additionally, some fellows reported not attending all of the same PD during the “learning year.” The Flexible Framework suggests that to design a school to be trauma-informed, it’s design must encompass all components of the school design layers, to reach all tiers of students, that includes leadership, professional development, access to resources and services, academic and nonacademic strategies, policies and protocols, and collaboration with families.

To solidify the TIP lens each school should have, and the brand standard of a FFI school, FFI has to clarify the non-negotiable knowledge necessary, and the training that’s paramount in

getting to that for fellows. The FFI must norm on the inputs to get a normed output. Three critical inputs to make the TIP learning more substantial during the “learning year” would be to 1) Define the key TIP trainings and information all leaders need to know about TIP 2) Find and secure content experts (healthcare professional trained on trauma) who will lead that training as the foundational knowledge all fellows must know, and 3) Require all fellows to attend these sessions and be assessed on their knowledge after. Desimone notes that to improve professional development, it has to increase the participant’s knowledge and skills, or change their attitudes and beliefs (2019). In following these steps, FFI can better guarantee a similar learning experience and outcome for all fellows.

Other ideas to consider after the foundational TIP knowledge is defined and an expert is secured, then FFI should also consider: how can they find and visit more trauma-informed schools? Who can they access in the communities which fellows will found in to better understand the specific types of trauma that exist there, and which community resources are available? How can they expand their network and partnerships to include more trauma professionals for fellows to connect with on an ongoing basis as they continue to design? How can they assess the quality of the TIP PD and not just the content? How can they find and partner with more schools to visits in states where TIP are a standard that schools must design for? All of these questions will guide them to determining what is most critical to know, and it will ensure that fellows get TIP information from a trained professional.

Conclusion and Discussion

The Freedom Fellows Institute has been operating for just under two full years to serve leaders of color by properly preparing and training them on how to apply for and open high quality, innovative schools, designed to cater to the unique needs of marginalized communities.

To help the Freedom Fellows Institute better understand which parts of their trainings for trauma-informed practices were effective and led to fellows' design process, the framework for effective professional development, and the flexible framework for creating trauma-informed schools were utilized. Analysis was done on the FFI's training documents and fellows' charter applications, as well as collected survey and interview data from fellows and stakeholders to understand their perceptions and attitudes toward the TIP training and their design choices.

Analysis led to the discovery that FFI has established a strong culture, whereby, fellows feel emotionally safe, and acutely aware of their own trauma and the need for trauma-informed practices to exist in their schools to support students to access the freedom to learn and heal. Fellows were enamored by the amount of attention FFI leaders paid to unique needs of the fellows and the populations they will serve. The research and presentations about TIP presented in trainings laid a strong foundation for the fellows to have an acute awareness of the necessity for TIP. One fellow noted, "before I joined Freedom Fellows, being a trauma informed school wasn't part of our design at all. Now, we've folded that into the student wellness component. So, in the written charter, we talk about the wellness wheel, but we also talk about (the fact) that our staff will go through trauma-informed training, and we will have professional development aimed at equipping everyone with trauma informed strategies, all of that came directly from being part of the fellowship."

Though one fellow felt more prepared than ever to incorporate TIPs into her school, most fellows noted not having enough TIPs training, or it not being hands-on or salient enough to directly inform their school design in the charter application. What was most noted was that the trainings helped the fellows develop ideas they already had from previous trainings, outside of the FFI. Through these discoveries and consideration of both frameworks, three

recommendations emerged: the FFI should keep the culture they have built, but hire content experts to train on TIP, and assess fellow's learning throughout year one to ensure the TIP learning directly impacts their design process. Arriving at the recommendations allowed FFI to have concrete action steps to take during the next year, before they welcome their third cohort of fellows.

While FFI will be able to learn and evolve, conducting this quality improvement project helped me better understand the challenges that exist for them. Having COVID-19 arise during year one of the institute, to halt all travel to schools and conferences, and switch all learning to happen virtually was interesting. It added a layer of trauma to school leaders who were already nervous and anxious about finishing their charter writing and subsequently, stopped a lot of school districts from approving new schools from opening. Because of these shifts, most leaders did not get approved to open in the fall of 2021, as initially anticipated, and two leaders became very frustrated and did not utilize the leaders at FFI in year two. Also, coming into year two of the program, the institute lost funding, causing them to change PD delivery methods, and the numbers of fellows.

Because of the strain COVID-19 caused the institute and the fellows, fellows' attitudes towards the learning and their design decisions might have been different in a "normal" year, and gives hope for the cohort that will begin in the spring of 2022. In the meantime, FFI can reach out to other institutes, incubators, and organizations who train leaders to open schools to see, comparatively, how COVID-19 impacted their funding, training, and cohort model. Also, from those competitors, FFI can analyze their demographic data to see the percentage of people of color who apply, and then get into other fellowships, as well as seeing how much TIP is emphasized in their trainings.

FFI has a unique approach to training leaders from a trauma-sensitive and culturally responsive lens. To become an even more viable choice for leaders of color, they should emphasize their TIP training, network with other school leaders of color, and school visits run by school leaders of color into their marketing strategy. They should also leverage cohort 1 and 2 fellows to provide counsel and suggestions to new cohort fellows. It is my hope that the institute takes these recommendations and considerations into account as they enter their pause year, in order to restart in the spring of 2022, ready to increase their impact with new fellows.

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Appendix A Survey Invitation

Invitation to Participate (Survey)

Subject Line: Designing for Trauma-Informed Practices

Dear Freedom Fellows Institute Stakeholder,

I am conducting a study through Vanderbilt University, as a part of my Capstone Project. My study aims to better understand and assess the needs of the Freedom Fellows Institute in training fellows around trauma-informed practices that leads to intentional design in the charter writing, founding, and implementation processes. I am seeking to learn more about your current understanding of trauma-informed practices as an essential stakeholder in the FFI. The survey should take less than 10 minutes.

This study is for quality improvement, meaning, the survey results will only be used for the sake of learning more about FFI's current training and design choices which will inform recommendations I make to the Institute to improve for future cohorts. Your survey responses will remain anonymous.

To participate, please click the below link.

<insert Survey link>

Thank you in advance for participating!

Sincerely,

Kristle Hodges Johnson

Appendix B Survey for Fellows

Survey (for all Freedom Fellows)

1. What is your gender?
 - Female
 - Male
 - Non-binary
 - Prefer to self-describe (please specify) - _____
 - Prefer not to disclose

2. What is your ethnicity?
 - White
 - Black or African American
 - Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish Origin
 - American Indian or Alaska Native
 - Asian
 - Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - Prefer to self-describe (please specify) _____
 - Prefer not to disclose

3. How many years have you worked in K-12 education prior to joining FFI?
 - None
 - Three or fewer
 - More than three and less than ten
 - More than ten

4. What is your current role at the Freedom Fellows Institute?
 - I am a fellow from cohort 1, in year 2 of designing my school.
 - I am a fellow in cohort 2, in year 1 of designing my school.
 - I am a board member who will be supporting a FF-led school.
 - I am a stakeholder who contributes funds, training, or insight into the design of FFI.
 - Other (please specify) _____

Traumatic experiences in a child's life can have interfere with their emotional and physical well-being, and have negative short and long-term impacts on a child's school experience. In communities most impacted by trauma, creating trauma-informed practices in schools can mitigate the risks and allow students to learn and heal. The following questions will assess the degree to which the Freedom Fellows Institute trains fellows to understand trauma and support fellows to respond to trauma through strategic school design choices.

5. How often is training specifically on trauma-informed practices covered in year one of the FFI?
 - Not at all

- Once
 - Twice
 - Three or more times
 - Unsure
6. Given the wide scope of topics a fellow must know to submit a strong charter school application, how much time should the FFI spend to educate fellows about trauma-informed practices during year one of the program?
- Not at all
 - Once
 - Twice
 - Three or more times
 - Unsure
7. Given the wide scope of topics a fellow must cover in their charter school application to get approved, should the FFI require fellows to include trauma-informed practices as a part of their charter design?
- Yes
 - No
 - Not Sure
8. Which of the below trauma-informed practices would you want to be present in professional development FFI provides to year one fellows? (Check top 3):
- How to identify students who have had Adverse Childhood Experiences and get them age-appropriate information about stress, trauma, and emotional/behavioral regulation
 - How to hire and retain mental health professionals and social workers knowledgeable in Adverse Childhood Experiences and the impact of trauma in students and their families
 - How to design school for incorporating trauma-informed practices such as meditation, breathing techniques, stress management, self-regulation, exercise and nutrition, restorative practices
 - How to build trusting and caring relationships with staff
 - How to design for staff to have access to needed supports, including coaching, consultation, and meaningful professional development as well as meaningful leadership opportunities and are supported in trying new and meaningful trauma-informed techniques
 - How to actively engage parents, caregivers, and partners with community organizations to meet the needs of students and staff
 - How to design curriculum across grade levels and subject areas to support the trauma informed process
 - How to design so schools have a system in place to continually evaluate and improve trauma-informed practices and policies
9. (ONLY FOR FELLOWS) To what extent have you attended professional development on trauma-informed practices in schools before being a FF?

- None
 - Attended three or fewer learning experiences
 - Attended more than three and less than ten learning experiences
 - Attended more than ten learning experiences
10. To what extent have you attended professional development on trauma-informed practices in schools while being a FF?
- None
 - Attended three or fewer learning experiences
 - Attended more than three and less than ten learning experiences
 - Attended more than ten learning experiences
11. To what extent have you received professional development to support students who experience trauma before being a FF?
- None
 - Attended three or fewer learning experiences
 - Attended more than three and less than ten learning experiences
 - Attended more than ten learning experiences
12. To what extent have you received professional development to support students who experience trauma while being a FF?
- None
 - Attended three or fewer learning experiences
 - Attended more than three and less than ten learning experiences
 - Attended more than ten learning experiences
13. I feel prepared to lead other educators (teachers, leaders, or counselors) on trauma-informed practices in schools.
- Agree
 - Somewhat agree
 - Somewhat disagree
 - Disagree
14. I am confident that I can support a student who has been exposed to trauma.
- Agree
 - Somewhat agree
 - Somewhat disagree
 - Disagree
15. (ONLY FOR FELLOWS) Have you experienced students who have been exposed to trauma in your previous K-12 education experiences?
- Yes
 - No

- Not Sure

16. I have the knowledge necessary to support students experiencing trauma?

- Agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Disagree

17. Which trauma-informed practices have been used in schools you have worked in before?
Check all that apply:

- Identifying students who have had Adverse Childhood Experiences and get them age-appropriate information about stress, trauma, and emotional/behavioral regulation
- Hiring and retaining mental health professionals and social workers knowledgeable in Adverse Childhood Experiences and the impact of trauma in students and their families
- Incorporating trauma-informed practices such as meditation, breathing techniques, stress management, self-regulation, exercise and nutrition, restorative practices
- Building trusting and caring relationships with staff
- Giving staff access to needed supports, including coaching, consultation, and meaningful professional development as well as meaningful leadership opportunities and are supported in trying new and meaningful trauma-informed techniques
- Actively engaging parents, caregivers, and partners with community organizations to meet the needs of students and staff
- Designing curriculum across grade levels and subject areas to support the trauma informed process
- Having systems in place to continually evaluate and improve trauma-informed practices and policies

Appendix C Survey for Stakeholders

Survey (for all Freedom Fellows Institute Stakeholders)

18. What is your gender?

- Female
- Male
- Non-binary
- Prefer to self-describe (please specify) - _____
- Prefer not to disclose

19. What is your ethnicity?

- White
- Black or African American
- Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish Origin
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- Prefer to self-describe (please specify) _____
- Prefer not to disclose

20. How many years have you worked in K-12 education prior to joining FFI?

- None
- Three or fewer
- More than three and less than ten
- More than ten

21. What is your current role at the Freedom Fellows Institute?

- I am a fellow from cohort 1, in year 2 of designing my school.
- I am a fellow in cohort 2, in year 1 of designing my school.
- I am a board member who will be supporting a FF-led school.
- I am a stakeholder who contributes funds, training, or insight into the design of FFI.
- Other (please specify) _____

Traumatic experiences in a child's life can have interfere with their emotional and physical well-being, and have negative short and long-term impacts on a child's school experience. In communities most impacted by trauma, creating trauma-informed practices in schools can mitigate the risks and allow students to learn and heal. The following questions will assess the degree to which the Freedom Fellows Institute trains fellows to understand trauma and support fellows to respond to trauma through strategic school design choices.

22. How often is training specifically on trauma-informed practices covered in year one of the FFI?

- Not at all
 - Once
 - Twice
 - Three or more times
 - Unsure
23. Given the wide scope of topics a fellow must know to submit a strong charter school application, how much time should the FFI spend to educate fellows about trauma-informed practices during year one of the program?
- Not at all
 - Once
 - Twice
 - Three or more times
 - Unsure
24. Given the wide scope of topics a fellow must cover in their charter school application to get approved, should the FFI require fellows to include trauma-informed practices as a part of their charter design?
- Yes
 - No
 - Not Sure
25. Which of the below trauma-informed practices would you want to be present in professional development FFI provides to year one fellows? (Check top 3):
- How to identify students who have had Adverse Childhood Experiences and get them age-appropriate information about stress, trauma, and emotional/behavioral regulation
 - How to hire and retain mental health professionals and social workers knowledgeable in Adverse Childhood Experiences and the impact of trauma in students and their families
 - How to design school for incorporating trauma-informed practices such as meditation, breathing techniques, stress management, self-regulation, exercise and nutrition, restorative practices
 - How to build trusting and caring relationships with staff
 - How to design for staff to have access to needed supports, including coaching, consultation, and meaningful professional development as well as meaningful leadership opportunities and are supported in trying new and meaningful trauma-informed techniques
 - How to actively engage parents, caregivers, and partners with community organizations to meet the needs of students and staff
 - How to design curriculum across grade levels and subject areas to support the trauma informed process
 - How to design so schools have a system in place to continually evaluate and improve trauma-informed practices and policies

Appendix D

Interview Invitation

Invitation to Participate (Interview)

Subject Line: Designing for Trauma-Informed Practices

Dear Freedom Fellows Institute Fellow,

Thank you for participating in the survey. In an attempt to better understand your unique experiences, and get to know your perceptions and intentions around school design for trauma-informed practices, I would like to schedule a 45-minute Zoom call. On the call, I will interview you to discuss more about your experience with FFI, upcoming plans for school design, and trauma informed practices. I know you are extremely busy, so I will work around your schedule. Please see below for days and times that work for me to meet over the next two weeks and I will set up a Zoom link and send you a calendar invite.

Thank you in advance for your insights, honesty, and time.

Sincerely,

Kristle Hodges Johnson

Appendix E Interview Questions

Interview Script and Questions (for all participating Freedom Fellows)

Purpose Statement:

I am Kristle Hodges Johnson and I am a student at Vanderbilt University in the Leading and Learning in Organizations program through Peabody College. I am deeply interested in how organizations design programs to maximize the impact of the leaders in those organizations. When I initially spoke with Mr. Brown, the Freedom Fellows director, he was transparent that in year one, he wished he had done a better job designing training opportunities for fellows centered around trauma because of the communities you all will open schools in.

As fellows like yourself design the type of schools that will support students academically, a positive and resilient culture is needed in the face of trauma that exists for students. To create a strong school culture, founding school leaders must consider every component of the school day's design, and the impact of those choices. With the Freedom Fellows Institute in its second year, I am working as a consultant to the Institute to better understand the impact of trauma training on FFI's outcomes, and the school leaders' intentional design decisions. I will ask you a series of questions to understand what you have experienced in and beyond the FF experience. I ask that you be honest and open. Feel free to share additional information and context as it could be helpful. Please know that I will know name you in any of my research, nor will I share any of your specific experiences, by name, in my final findings with FFI leaders.

TRAUMA Questions

1. Tell me about your previous experiences in K-12 schools.
2. Share with me your vision of the school you want to open.
3. How do you define trauma-informed practices?
4. What do you think your role is in designing your school to address trauma? (What did you think your role was before being a part of FFI?)
5. What is your role in sustaining trauma-informed practices being used in your school beyond founding year?

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT Questions

6. What professional development sessions/experiences have you had at FFI to prepare you to address trauma in your school? (Who led this? How often? When?)
7. How has your charter design changed/shifted/evolved around trauma informed practices since being a part of FFI?
8. What would you want more training on to be better prepared to design your school for trauma-informed practices?
9. In your opinion, what key components make up a high-quality professional development for you to feel it is successful?

Appendix F

FFI Job Description for Fellows

Founding a high quality charter school is an intense 24-month process which begins long before the first student arrives. The Freedom Fellows Institute partners with you as a strong entrepreneurial educator and supports you through months 0-12 of the founding journey.

With the launch of a high performing charter school of innovation, “change is a constant.” Fellows selected to participate in the Freedom Fellows Institute are ready to thrive in this environment with an entrepreneurial spirit and drive.

The first 12 months of launching requires 100% of Fellows’ attention and dedication. **During year “0” of planning and preparation, Fellows will work with a relentless commitment to students through innovative schooling, trauma sensitive learning environments, and culturally empowering practices, while balancing the need for gap-closing instruction to meet and surpass state and local academic goals.**

Freedom Fellows spend year “0” on the following tasks:

- Attending and engaging in extensive training in six mission-critical areas of leadership development: 1) School Design, 2) Curriculum Evaluation & Selection, 3) Instructional Leadership, 4) Organizational Leadership, 5) Operations & Finance, and 6) Board Development.
- Establishing and leading a founding board of directors to guide the proposed charter in fulfilling its mission and promise to students and families.
- Assembling neighborhood, political, financial support for the proposed school.
- Translating educational vision into a well-crafted and thorough charter application to be submitted for approval by local authorizers

As a Fellow, I am directly responsible for:

- The full-time creation, development, and oversight of my charter application and school launch
- Attending all fellowship trainings (local & virtual)
- Completing all assignments in a professional and timely manner
- Attending all school visits sponsored by the Institute
- Successfully vetting, selecting, and leading the executive board.
- Successfully completing both 21-day residency assignments with an 80% rating
- Being a supportive teammate to my cohort

As a Fellow I possess following professional qualifications:

- A bachelor’s degree
- Three or more years of educational, non-profit, or business work experience
- Reflective practice
- Transparent and high integrity leadership
- Strong organizational abilities including planning, delegating, program development and task facilitation
- Ability to convey a concise vision and strategic future to staff, board, community, and educational stakeholders
- Strong written and oral communication skills
- Ability to interface and engage diverse stakeholders
- Strong public speaking ability

Appendix G
FFI Training Material – Meeting Students Basic Needs

<p>What Need Can Your School Meet to help students become learning-ready?</p>	<p>Consider how your school can help students become learning-ready by considering the following:</p>
	<p>What is your intended goal?</p> <p>Why is there a need?</p> <p>Explain the details of how your school will meet this need.</p> <p>How many staff members will be needed to carry out this task? How often? What time of day?</p> <p>How much will this cost? What is needed?</p>

Appendix H

FFI Training Material – Social Emotional Learning Model

DIRECTIONS: Use the following online resource below to inform your development of a research-based, evidentiary social emotional program.

As you engage the site, respond to each of the following questions below.

1. What vocabulary (terms and phrases) will you use to explain trauma, its various forms, and treatments offered by your school?
2. What are common symptoms of trauma you have seen and can expect to see in your school?
3. What does the research suggest as high level treatments for children dealing with trauma?

Resource:

By Karen Onderko, Director of Research and Education

https://integratedlistening.com/what-is-trauma/?utm_source=bing&utm_medium=cpc&utm_campaign=what-is-trauma&utm_term=trauma&msclkid=26a28a27c1ec1327a2b2d76349ce3643

Appendix I
FFI Training Material – Trauma Informed Strategies

THE SOLUTION: TRAUMA SENSITIVE SCHOOLS

<https://traumasensitiveschools.org/trauma-and-learning/the-solution-trauma-sensitive-schools/>

Trauma-sensitive schools help children feel safe to learn.

Once schools understand the educational impacts of trauma, they can become safe, supportive environments where students make the positive connections with adults and peers they might otherwise push away, calm their emotions so they can focus and behave appropriately, and feel confident enough to advance their learning—in other words, schools can make trauma sensitivity a regular part of how the school is run. Trauma sensitivity will look different at each school. However, a shared definition of what it means to be a trauma-sensitive school can bring educators, parents, and policymakers together around a common vision. We define the core attributes of a trauma sensitive school to include the following:

1. **A shared understanding among all staff**—educators, administrators, counselors, school nurses, cafeteria workers, custodians, bus drivers, athletic coaches, advisors to extracurricular activities, and paraprofessionals—that adverse experiences in the lives of children are more common than many of us ever imagined, that trauma can impact learning, behavior, and relationships at school, and that a “whole school” approach to trauma-sensitivity is needed.
2. **The school supports all children to feel safe physically, socially, emotionally, and academically.** Children’s traumatic responses, and the associated difficulties they can face at school, are often rooted in real or perceived threats to their safety that undermine a sense of well-being in fundamental ways. Therefore, the first step in helping students succeed in school, despite their traumatic experiences, is to help them feel safe—in the classroom, on the playground, in the hallway, in the cafeteria, on the bus, in the gym, on the walk to and from school. This includes not only physical safety but also social and emotional safety, as well as the sense of academic safety needed in order to take risks to advance one’s learning in the classroom.
3. **The school addresses students needs in holistic ways, taking into account their relationships, self-regulation, academic competence, and physical and emotional well-being.** The impacts of trauma can be pervasive and take many forms, and the way in which a child who has experienced traumatic events presents him or herself may mask—rather than reveal—his or her difficulties. A broader more holistic lens is needed to understand the needs that underlie a child’s presentation. Researchers tell us that if we bolster children in four key domains—

relationships with teachers and peers; the ability to self-regulate behaviors, emotions, and attention; success in academic and non-academic areas; and physical and emotional health and well-being—we maximize their opportunities to overcome all kinds of adversity in order to succeed at school. A trauma sensitive school recognizes the inextricable link that exists among these domains and has a structure in place that supports staff to address students' needs holistically in all four areas.

4. **The school explicitly connects students to the school community and provides multiple opportunities to practice newly developing skills.** The loss of a sense of safety resulting from traumatic events can cause a child to disconnect from those around him or her. Typically, children who have experienced traumatic events are looking to those at school to restore their feeling of security and to help reconnect them with the school community. Schools can meet this need if they foster a culture of acceptance and tolerance where all students are welcomed and taught to respect the needs of others. Individual support services and policies that do not pull children away from their peers and trusted adults, but rather assist children to be full members of the classroom and school community, are also essential.
5. **The school embraces teamwork and staff share responsibility for all students.** Expecting individual educators to address trauma's challenges alone on a case-by-case basis, or to reinvent the wheel every time a new adversity presents itself, is not only inefficient, but it can cause educators to feel overwhelmed. A trauma sensitive school moves away from the typical paradigm in which classroom teachers have primary responsibility for their respective students to one based on shared responsibility requiring teamwork and ongoing, effective communication throughout the school. In a trauma-sensitive school educators make the switch from asking "what can I do to fix this child?" to "what can we do as a community to support all children to help them feel safe and participate fully in our school community?" Trauma sensitive schools help staff—as well as those outside the school who work with staff—feel part of a strong and supportive professional community.

Leadership and staff anticipate and adapt to the ever-changing needs of students. In a trauma sensitive school, educators and administrators take the time to learn about changes in the local community so that they can anticipate new challenges before they arise. They do their best to plan ahead for changes in staffing and policies that are all too common in schools. Trauma sensitive schools also try to adapt to all of these challenges flexibly and proactively so that the equilibrium of the school is not disrupted by inevitable shifts and changes.