Educational Performance Impact of Trauma on Students in Foster Care (HB 855) 2020 Legislative Session

Guidance relating to the immediate and deliberate assessment of newly enrolled foster care students to determine whether exposure to trauma has had or is likely to have an adverse impact on the student's educational performance.

GaDOE
Georgia Department of Education

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During the 2021 legislative session, the Georgia General Assembly passed House Bill 855, amending O.C.G.A. § 20-2-152.2 requiring local school systems to immediately and deliberately assess whether exposure to trauma has had or is likely to have an adverse impact on the educational performance of students in foster care. This guidance and the resources included are designed to assist local systems with meeting these requirements and, more importantly, supporting foster care students with the tools they need for a successful educational experience.

Definitions

1. **Division of Family & Children Services (DFCS)** – A division within the Georgia Department of Human Services that investigates reports of child abuse; finds foster and adoptive homes for abused and neglected children; issues funding from federal programs designed to assist families in need; and provides support services and programs to help families in need.

2. **Foster Care Student** – A student who is placed in a foster family home, child-care institution, or another substitute care setting approved by DFCS.

3. **Newly Enrolled Foster Care Student –** A foster care student who is newly enrolled in the school or school system OR a current student who is new to foster care.

4. **Educational Impact Screener –** An instrument that is completed by relevant parties (i.e., biological parents, former teachers, foster parents, and/or DFCS staff) with knowledge of the child's learning style and needs, mental and emotional wellbeing, characteristics a child might need in a teacher, and any additional information that may impact the educational setting.

5. **State Longitudinal Data System (SLDS) Foster Care Report –** The section of the Georgia Department of Education's SLDS that allows for DFCS identification of students in foster care to ensure continuity of educational supports and services.

6. **Local Education Agency (LEA)** – The public authority legally constituted by the state as an administrative agency to provide control of and direction for kindergarten through Grade 12 public education institutions.

7. **Student Support Team (SST)** – An interdisciplinary group that uses a systematic process to address learning and/or behavior problems of students, K-12, in a school, as set forth in Stat Board of Education Rule 160-4-2-.32.

8. **Trauma** – Exposure of a foster care student, as a witness or direct participant, to one or more traumatic events or traumatic situations. According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), research has shown that traumatic experiences are associated with both behavioral health and chronic physical

health conditions, especially those traumatic events that occur during childhood. Substance use (e.g., smoking, excessive alcohol use, and taking drugs), mental health conditions (e.g., depression, anxiety, or PTSD), and other risky behaviors (e.g., self-injury and risky sexual encounters) have been linked with traumatic experiences.

Protocols and Procedures (for LEAs to Determine Educational Impact of Exposure to Trauma for Newly Enrolled Foster Care Students)

HB 855 states that "upon the enrollment of a foster care student, a local school system shall immediately and deliberately assess whether exposure to trauma has had or is likely to have an adverse impact on the foster care student's educational performance, including both academics and classroom behavior. The local school system's assessment shall be part of its overall determination of whether the initial evaluation process for determining eligibility for special education and related services should be commenced for such foster care student."

The following protocols are required for Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) to meet this requirement. Nothing in this guidance should be construed as a reason or cause to delay the enrollment of a foster care student within an LEA. The student should be immediately enrolled in accordance with State Board of Education Rule 160-5-1-.28 Student Enrollment and Withdrawal. LEAs should refer to FERPA guidelines to ensure the privacy of all students involved in this process.

1. **Student Case Management Collaboration** – LEAs should identify the following Points of Contact:
   - LEA staff persons
     - LEA Foster Care Point of Contact (and school Point of Contact, if available)
     - LEA Social Worker (and school Social Worker, if available)
     - LEA or School Case Manager (as identified)
   - Points of Contact for Collaborating Agencies
     - Local DFCS Foster Care Case Manager
     - DFCS Regional Education Support Monitor

2. **Screening for Educational Impact Related to Trauma:** The LEA should complete the following steps within 30 days of a foster care student's enrollment or when an enrolled student enters a foster care placement.
   - Coordinate with the student's Foster Care Case Manager or DFCS Regional Education Support Monitor to ensure the student is identified in the State Longitudinal Data System (SLDS) for continuity of care and services.

- **Ensure consent is received from the current legal parent/guardian prior to the commencement of any screening.**
- Provide the student's Foster Care Case Manager or DFCS Regional Education Support Monitor with LEA identified Educational Impact Screener(s) to be completed by Points of Contact for Collaborating Agencies.
- Coordinate with the student's Foster Care Case Manager or DFCS Regional Education Support Monitor to ensure that Educational Impact Screeners are completed and uploaded to SLDS.
- Collaborate with the student's Foster Care Case Manager or DFCS Regional Education Support Monitor in the development of the student's Trauma-Informed Education Support (TIES) plan (see Appendix B).

3. **LEA Plan of Support based on Education Impact Screening:** Once the Educational Impact Screener is completed and collected by the LEA and/or DFCS, the LEA should:
   - Convene a team meeting (ex. SST, RTI) to review the student's screening results and discuss any recommendations. For maximum impact at the team meeting, LEAs are strongly encouraged to consider including the LEA Foster Care Point of Contact, School Social Worker, School Psychologist, Counselor, Child Welfare Representative, or other appropriate support staff. (Please refer to Georgia Board of Education Rule 160-4-2-.32 Student Support Team for more information)
     - *Please Note:* For foster care students with an existing IEP or a special education eligibility, the LEA should convene an IEP meeting to review the results of the Educational Impact Screener and discuss recommendations.
   - The SST/RTI team should review multiple sources of data to ensure that a holistic, whole child approach is used to determine whether exposure to trauma has adversely impacted a foster care student's educational performance. Data sources and examples could include, but are not limited to:
     - Educational Impact Screener
     - Available and current psychological or other evaluations (redacted as necessary for HIPAA compliance)
     - Student Academic Records
     - Student Attendance and Discipline Records
     - Form 3300 (GaDPH Certificate of Vision, Hearing, Dental, and Nutrition Screening)
     - Form 3231 (GaDPH Certificate of Immunization)
   - After review of relevant documents and data sources:
     - If the SST/RTI team suspects the student of having a disability, the team must refer the student for a special education evaluation. (Please refer to Georgia Board of Education Rule 160-4-7-.04

[Evaluations and Reevaluations](#) and related [GaDOE Guidance on Evaluations and Reevaluations](#))

- If the SST/RTI team does NOT suspect the student of having a disability, the team must continue to use the local SST process to consider and identify resources to address the holistic needs of the student (Please refer to [Georgia's Tiered System of Supports for Students](#) for resources to support your local SST process), including educational placement and settings that are in the best interest of the student.

- The SST or IEP team should ensure all appropriate school and foster care staff receive an appropriate summary of results for the foster care student.

Resources and Supports: The Impact of Trauma on Students

Exposure to traumatic events and situations can have far reaching and long-lasting impacts that may not be immediately apparent. To support LEAs with their efforts to recognize the existence of trauma in children and address the impact of trauma on students' educational experience, GaDOE has provided details on trainings and resources that are available to LEA and school staff throughout the school year.

1. **Training Opportunities -** Training on child trauma, the impact on brain development and executive functioning, and how schools can help mitigate the effects is available at no cost through the GaDOE/RESA MHAT (Mental Health Awareness Training) Project. Developed by the [Child Welfare Training Collaborative at Georgia State University](#) with Continuing Education Units (CEUs) made available for core MSW related LPC and MFT, DECAL hours, Nursing, and POST CEUs, the following trainings can be scheduled for your school or district either virtually or in person, beginning October 1, 2021:

   - **Trauma 101: Understanding the Impact of Trauma on Children** This course will provide participants with foundational knowledge about child trauma and child traumatic stress. Three types of child trauma are defined. The course focuses on the impact of complex trauma on behavior and development, and helps participants identify strategies for working with children who have experienced trauma. Topics include a) definitions and types of child trauma; b) how trauma affects children and youth; c) overview of impact of trauma on the brain; d) managing physical and psychological safety for children; and d) enhancing child well-being and resilience.

   - **Brain 101: Understanding the Impact of Trauma on the Brain** This course provides participants with foundational knowledge about how adversity and trauma can impact brain development. The course introduces brain architecture and early brain development in children and focuses on the impact of adverse experiences in child trauma on the brain. Topics and learning objectives include a) adversity & trauma and the impact on brain development; b) brain systems; c) adverse childhood experiences and brain development; and d) resilience and brain development.

   - **Trauma to Resilience: Strategies to Support Children's Well-being** In this course, participants will build on knowledge gained from Trauma 101 and Brain 101 courses. Participants will learn the characteristics of resilience, examine myths and facts about resilience, and learn specific strategies for building resilience in children and Youth. Topics and learning objectives include a) the concept of resilience, including key characteristics; b) the relationship between resilience and safety; and c) the role that relationships, responsibilities, and regulation play in building resilience.

- **Recognizing and Managing Secondary Trauma Stress** This course is designed to improve school personnel's understanding of Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS) and its impact. Participants will learn how to assess STS symptoms in themselves and others, explore factors that help to protect professionals from the negative effects of STS, and discover strategies to use these protective factors to manage STS. Participants will also assess their own personal and professional self-care and develop self-care plans.

- **Psychological Safety: A Pathway to Resilience** This course is designed to explore the concept of psychological safety as a pathway to building resilience in children. Participants examine their role in building a culture of psychological safety for the children and families they serve. Additional emphasis is placed on creating psychological safety in the context of traumatic experiences. Topics and learning objectives include a) the concept of "psychological safety" and how it impacts children's development and well-being; b) the relationship between psychological safety and resilience; c) the four stages of psychological safety and factors associated with each; and d) strategies for creating psychological safety in the home and organizations.

The RESA/GaDOE MHAT Project Menu includes additional trainings that can help to address and/or mitigate risk factors and risk behaviors that may be exacerbated by trauma. **For more information or to schedule training, please send questions to MHATScheduling@doe.k12.ga.us or contact your local RESA.**

2. **Additional Resources**
   - **Georgia Resources**
     - Blueprint for Family First in Georgia (Georgia DFCS - https://www.blueprintfamilyfirst.org/)

     - Prevent Child Abuse Georgia (Georgia State University - https://abuse.publichealth.gsu.edu/)

     - Resilient Georgia (Resilient Georgia - https://www.resilientga.org/)

   - **National Resources**
     - *Using Screening & Assessment Evidence of Trauma in Child Welfare Cases* (American Bar Association - (https://www.americanbar.org/groups/public_interest/child_law/resources/child_law_practiceonline/child_law_practice/vol-34/may-2015/using-screening-and-assessment-evidence-of-trauma-in-child-welfa/)
     - *Why become trauma-informed?* (Casey Family Programs - https://www.casey.org/why-become-trauma-informed/)

- *Screening and Assessment of Child Trauma* (Child Welfare Information Gateway - https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/systemwide/assessment/family-assess/childneeds/trauma/)

- *Understanding Childhood Trauma* (Foster Club [National Youth Leaders] - https://www.fosterclub.com/foster-parent-training/course/understanding-childhood-trauma)

- *Creating Trauma-Sensitive Classrooms* (National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC] - https://www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/yc/may2015/trauma-sensitive-classrooms)

- *Child Trauma* (National Child Traumatic Stress Network - https://www.nctsn.org/)

- *Trauma Sensitive Schools Training Package* (National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments - https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/trauma-sensitive-schools-training-package)

- *Trauma-Informed Schools* (National Education Association [NEA] - https://www.nea.org/professional-excellence/student-engagement/trauma-informed-schools)

- *Positive & Adverse Childhood Experiences* (PACES Connection - https://www.pacesconnection.com/)

- Trauma-Informed Schools (Treatment and Services Adaptation Center - https://traumaawareschools.org/)

GaDOE Contacts for Questions and Information	
Foster Care	Eric McGhee Federal Programs, Grants Program Manager (Foster Care) emcghee@doe.k12.ga.us
Special Education	Wina Low Interim State Director, Special Education Services and Supports wlow@doe.k12.ga.us
Whole Child	Cheryl Benefield Coordinator, Mental Health and Wellbeing cbenefield@doe.k12.ga.us

Appendix A

Educational Performance Impact on Trauma Screener Examples

The purpose of this document is to provide LEAs an example of screening tools that may assist in establishing procedures and protocols to immediately and deliberately address the holistic needs of a student in foster care. Below you will find sample assessments that can be utilized for all students and do not single out youth who are in care. The assessment can be completed by several audiences to gather additional information necessary to determine whether exposure to trauma has adversely impacted a student's educational performance.

Educational Impact Screener Example
1. Child's Name
2. Child's Current Grade Level
3. Child's Current Teacher
4. Please describe the child's learning style and needs.
5. Please describe the child's mental and emotional needs/wellbeing.
6. Please describe the characteristics the child needs in a teacher.
7. Please provide any additional information you would like to provide regarding the child.

SST/RTI Questionnaire Example: These questions may assist in leading the conversation and providing additional resources. *The following questions were provided by the Cobb County School District. Adjustments have been made.*

1. Please provide the student's last name.
2. Please provide the student's first name.
3. Please provide the student's GTID number.
4. What is the student's current school name?
5. What is the student's current grade?
6. What is the date of the Best Interest Determination (BID) Meeting?
7. Has the enrolling adult been changed?
8. Is transportation needed?
9. If transportation is needed, has a transportation request been submitted?
10. List the members of the meeting.
11. List the student's strengths/current supports (in school and outside of school).
12. What are the concerns of exposure to trauma impacting the student's learning and behaviors?
13. What academic supports are currently in place for this student?
    a. Early Intervention Program, K-5 (EIP)
    b. Response to Instruction and Intervention (RTI2)
    c. Individualized Education Program (IEP)
    d. Tutoring arranged through school

  e. English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)
  f. Remedial Support (MS-HS)
  g. Read 180/System 44
  h. Educational Programming and Consultation (E.P.A.C.) tutoring

14. Does the student have mental health needs?
15. Indicate all mental health supports currently in place for this student.
  a. Counseling Groups at School
  b. Adult mentor in the local school (assigned)
  c. Supportive relationship with adult(s) in the building
  d. Response to Instruction & Intervention (RTI2) for behavioral needs
  e. Counseling from outside agency during school
16. Additional supports needed
  a. Extracurricular activities
  b. Mentor
  c. Clothing
  d. School Supplies
  e. Technology
  f. After school programming
17. Number of foster homes/placements
  a. 1
  b. 2
  c. 3+
18. Is the student currently learning virtually or face to face?
19. How does the student get along with peers?
20. How does the student get along with adults?
21. How does the student feel about school?
22. What interventions help with behaviors?
23. Does the student have any documented diagnosis?
24. Does the student have any known or suspected responses to traumatic experiences?
25. Is there a recommendation for classroom placement?
26. What team will be responsible for monitoring the student's outcome or TIES plan?
  a. Response to Intervention (RTI)
  b. Core Team
  c. IEP Team
27. What is the name and title of the individual completing the BID form?

Appendix B

DFCS Trauma-Informed Education Support (TIES) Plan

For many LEAs, the SST is embedded within a Multi-Tiered Systems of Support ("MTSS") including the Response to Intervention ("RTI") process. Using these existing systems of support can be an ideal way to use information from the Case Management Consultation to develop a supportive TIES Plan. The development of the TIES plan does not replace any other necessary education services and supports (e.g., special education and related services).

Student Name:
_____

Student Date of Birth:
_____

Student GTID Number:
_____

Date Student Entered Care:
_____

Number of Placements to Date (include age(s) at time of placement(s) if available)**:**
_____

Case Manager Name and Contact:
_____

Trauma-Informed Recommendation Sheet (TIRS) Available? Circle Yes or No

List of Preexisting Records Reviewed:
_____

_____

_____

Current Diagnoses:
_____

_____

_____

Known or Suspected Impacts of Trauma on Academic or Behavioral Performance:
_____

_____

_____

Student Strengths/Resilience Protective Factors: *(e.g., healthy, collaborative, tenacious, vision-oriented, maintains composure, uses sound reasoning)*
_____

_____

_____

Student Needs/Risk Factors: *(e.g., learning and behavioral challenges, poor communication, emotionalregulation challenges)*
_____

_____

_____

Known or Suspected Triggers: *(e.g., close proximity discomfort, adults screaming, large crowds, etc.)*
_____

_____

_____

Above, At or Below Grade Level Proficiency:

- Math:_____

- Reading:_____

- Science:_____

- Social Studies:_____

Current Supports (in school and out of school)**:**

- Academic:
  _____

- Behavioral/Mental Health:
  _____

  _____

- Extra-Curricular:
  _____

- Physical Health:
  _____

  _____

- Language/Communication:
  _____

- Other:

  _____

  _____

Needed Supports (in school and out of school)**:**

- Academic:

  _____

  _____

- Behavioral/Mental Health:

  _____

  _____

- Extra-Curricular:

  _____

  _____

- Physical Health:

  _____

  _____

- Language/Communication:

  _____

- Other:

  _____

  _____

TIES Recommendation(s) for School/Classroom Environment:

- Classroom Placement(s):

  _____

  _____

- Consistent Routine(s):

  _____

  _____

- Positive Response(s):

  _____

  _____

- Proactive Support(s):

  _____

  _____

- Peer Interaction(s):

  _____

  _____

- Adult Interaction(s):

  _____

  _____

- Language and Communication (expressive and pragmatic):

  _____

  _____

- Classroom Climate:

  _____

  _____

- School Climate:

  _____

  _____

TIES Team Progress Monitoring/Check-Ins Frequency (weekly, bi-weekly, monthly, etc.)**:**

_____

Process for Measuring and Determining Positive Outcomes (e.g., weekly progress sheets, daily check-ins with student, review of academic, attendance and behavior records, etc.)**:**

- *Recognizing Resilience Factors (e.g., healthy, collaborative, tenacious, vision-oriented, maintains composure, uses sound reasoning)*
- *Recognizing Risk Factors (e.g., learning and behavioral challenges, poor communication, emotional regulation challenges)*

_____

_____

_____

Current Transportation Plan:

_____

TIES Team Member(s) and Role(s):

(Members may include DFCS Case Manager, Education Support Monitor, Student, School Counselor, School Psychologist, School Social Worker, General Education Teacher, Special Education Teacher, Behavioral Therapist, Education Advocate, Administrator, School-Based Mental and Behavioral HealthProvider and other appropriate personnel.)

- Name and Role:_____
- Name and Role:_____
- Name and Role:_____
- Name and Role:_____
- Name and Role:_____
- Name and Role:_____

Current Meeting Date: _____

Type of Meeting (e.g., initial TIES planning, TIES progress monitoring, TIES check-in)**:**

_____

Next Meeting Date(s): _____