



# SCHOOL RESILIENCY TEAM TRAINING PROGRAM REPORT AND PROGRESS

School-based resiliency trainings have steadily been growing in size and participation as South Jersey school districts work to help students suffering from **Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)**.

ACEs are traumatic events that negatively affect brain development in ways that cause lasting health challenges - both emotional and physical.



- Over 40% of children in NJ - more than 782,000 - are estimated to have experienced 1 ACE
- 18% of children are estimated to have experienced multiple ACEs

Statistics are from the report: *Adverse Childhood Experiences: Opportunities to Prevent, Protect Against, and Heal from the Effects of ACEs in New Jersey* - July 2019

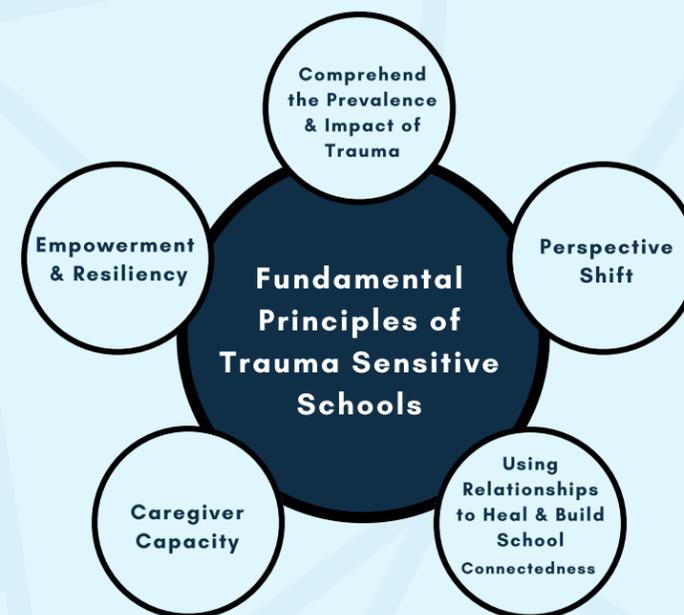
Research has shown that ACEs can be **counterbalanced through positive experiences** and **supportive/nurturing relationships**.



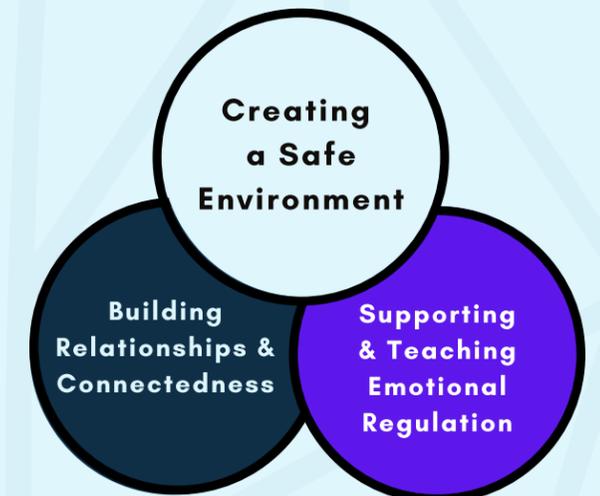
## FOUNDATION FOR THE TRAININGS THEN AND NOW

**Created in 2018**, Resiliency Team Trainings educate school level teams on the latest research, practices, and strategies addressing Applied Educational Neuroscience. Participants learn the tools to form their own **School Resiliency Teams (SRT)** that work to create trauma sensitive and **trauma responsive environments** within their own districts.

The three-day trainings are led by education specialists **Dr. Lori Desautels** and **Michael McKnight** and includes school administrators, teachers, counselors, Child Study Team (CST) members, school resource officers, nurses, and Intervention and Referral Services Team members (I&RS). The **3 Pillars** of Trauma Informed Care: **Safety, Connections,** and **Emotional Regulation** are the main focus of the training, which also includes information about brain state and development, stress, and adversity.



### COMPONENTS OF TRAUMA-INFORMED CARE



# COMMUNITY EFFORT

The Resiliency Team Trainings are a **collaborative effort** through many **organizations** in **Cape May** and **Atlantic Counties**, including Cape Regional Wellness Alliance – funded by New Jersey Health Initiatives, Cape Assist, Cape May County PRIDE Committee, Atlantic Prevention Resources, Join Together Atlantic County (JTAC), Cape May County Healthy Community Coalition, and the SRI & ETTC at Stockton University.



## TRAININGS BY THE NUMBERS

### 2018

Trainings began in Cape May County, exclusively.

- 17 School Resiliency Teams trained
- More than 130 people received the training
- Provided follow-up training in January 2019



### 2019

The program expanded to include Atlantic County, along with Cape May County.

#### **Cape May County Schools**

- 12 School Resiliency Teams trained
- 4 new School Resiliency Teams formed
- 80 educators received the training

#### **Atlantic County Schools**

- 18 School Resiliency Teams trained
- 118 educators received the training



### 2020

Virtual learning made it possible to offer the program on a much larger scale. More than 430 educators throughout NJ, as well out of state and out of country, participated over Zoom.

#### **Cape May County Schools**

- Expanded existing School Resiliency Teams

#### **Atlantic County Schools**

- Expanded existing School Resiliency Teams
- 3 new School Resiliency Teams formed



# FROM CONCEPT TO REALITY

Here are examples of how a few NJ school systems implemented strategies in their schools and/or across their district.

## LEADERS IN THE FIELD: HAMILTON TOWNSHIP SCHOOL DISTRICT (K-8)

The Hamilton Township School District in Mays Landing was one of the first districts in New Jersey to **focus on the mental health** of its students and among the first to work with Michael McKnight, **pre-Resiliency Trainings**.

The district was rocked after several student suicides within the same school year. While mental health training was always a part of the curriculum, it became clear that more work was desperately needed.

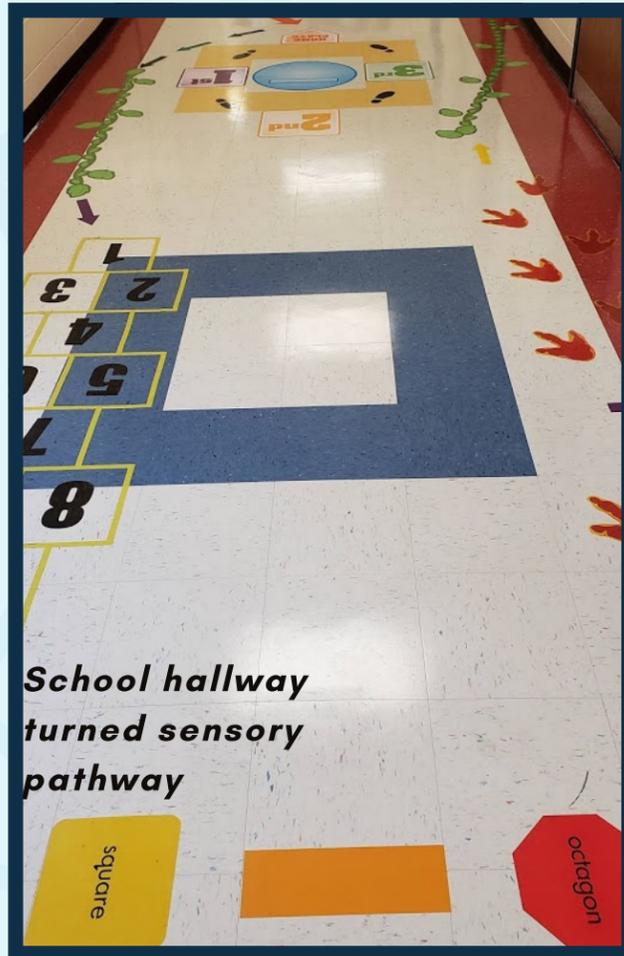
*“Unfortunately, we got really good at responding to those crisis situations, but not necessarily having a whole lot of prevention or intervention strategies in place to try to prevent them to try to intervene earlier,”* said Jeff Wellington, Supervisor of Special Projects for the district.

That’s when the district started working with Michael McKnight. He introduced them to the School Resiliency Teams (SRT), which they implemented the very first year. The district had already adapted, embraced a **social emotional learning program**, and put **ACES training** in place, but those efforts increased thanks to this specialized training. **Mindfulness training**, including breath work and brain breaks, are a regular part of teaching and learning – every classroom even has an amygdala reset station, where students can voluntarily excuse themselves to help regulate strong emotions.



Hamilton Twp. School District created this puzzle, which illustrates the program pieces fitting together, creating a whole-child approach to resiliency and learning.

## LEADERS IN THE FIELD (CONTINUED): HAMILTON TOWNSHIP SCHOOL DISTRICT (K-8)



During the 2019-2020 school year, the district introduced the **Student Risk Screening Scale** called the Threat Assessment Protocol or TAP, which helps identify students who may be at risk for suicidal or threatening behaviors toward others. The data collected is then used to provide support for these students based on their individual needs.

*"We know and love our externalizers because they're the ones who are biting or throwing things or are carrying on and they have connections with people - we talk to them a lot - but we really worry about our kids who are internalizers, who maybe we don't know are struggling. If nobody has beyond a surface connection with them, those are the kids we are worried about. We have people on the lookout, and make sure that we find those kids who need those connections and work to build those bridges," said Marylynn Stecher, Supervisor of Special Education and Child Study Teams.*

*Those connections are made through several evidence-based programs the district has put in place and seem to be working. While it is difficult to measure social emotional learning and assess if these new tools are "working," administrators say they are hopeful and seeing a shift.*

*"Anecdotally, we are seeing and experiencing **positive results** of the mental health initiatives the resiliency teams have helped with," said Wellington. "I think it's definitely given people a better understanding of ACEs and gives people a different perspective."*

## FROM SKEPTICS TO BELIEVERS: MIDDLE TOWNSHIP ELEMENTARY SCHOOL #1 (PRESCHOOL – 2ND)



Classroom  
amygdala  
reset station

Middle Township Elementary School #1 located in Cape May Court House, NJ, participated in one of the first summer **Resiliency trainings** led by Dr. Lori Desautels and Michael McKnight in 2018. **Principal Christian Paskalides** was a **member** of the **first cohort** for the school and admits he was a skeptic.

*"I thought it was a bunch of nonsense. My early experiences in education, I was kind of always in a disciplinary /enforcer role. Here we're talking about feelings and mindfulness and I had never heard of it in my life, these techniques I had never heard of before in education. My natural reaction to it was **skeptical.**"*

That same week, though, Paskalides had an **"aha" moment**, when he encountered a Kindergarten student having a meltdown. The student displayed some characteristics associated with ACEs.

*"On a whim, I just decided to do breathing techniques and stretching techniques I had just learned with that student - and it actually worked. The student de-escalated, I got the student to clean up all the furniture he was throwing, and I got him back into the classroom without incident. It was that moment that I realized, **wow, there's something to this.**"*

Now, Paskalides is a **firm believer** who feels **SEL** should be a necessary component in every school. He and the School Resiliency Team are working hard to make Elementary #1 a Trauma Informed School. They plan to apply multiple practices throughout the school, including adding reset areas to most classrooms, implementing daily **focused attention practices** and **mindfulness techniques**, using amygdala bags with co-regulation strategies built in, and teaching brain and body state with the students.

Teachers practice whole group mindfulness, understanding that a calm brain is prime for learning. They work with students to co-regulate and de-escalate, with the goal to help them learn how to self-regulate. As a result of these methods, students understand their brains and bodies better and know how to calm themselves down.

## DATA LEADS THE WAY: PINELANDS REGIONAL HIGH SCHOOL (9-12)

After analyzing discipline data from 2019, Pinelands Regional High School administrators realized their intervention tactics were not working. With data leading the way, they created an empowering learning environment using a school-wide trauma-informed approach.

### DATA COLLECTION

After the school established a **Student Success Team**, which served as the core team to pilot the CPS model and the new interventions that were brain aligned, and implemented staff-wide training, they *relationship mapped* their students to help identify those who may need more support or interaction.

They also developed and distributed a survey titled "How safe and connected do you feel at Pinelands?" to students - based on the **3 Pillars: Safety, Connections, and Managing Emotions** - and analyzed the feedback along with the discipline data. The survey was sent out twice to gauge progress. The numbers indicate the new tactics are working.

### SAFETY

OCT. 2020  
566 STUDENTS

FEB. 2021  
459 STUDENTS

I feel this school is a safe and secure place to learn	65%	83%
I feel in my building that teachers/administrators use an appropriate tone when speaking to their students	61%	86%
I feel in my building that teachers motivate students by providing positive feedback in an educational way that students can learn from	57%	82%
I feel in my building that teachers give privacy to students when providing constructive feedback and/or discipline	49%	76%
I feel the school climate emphasizes and demonstrates caring, kindness, empathy, and compassion towards others in my building	43%	70%
I feel students are treated with respect by teachers/administrators in my building	61%	78%

## DATA LEADS THE WAY (CONTINUED): PINELANDS REGIONAL HIGH SCHOOL (9-12)

### CONNECTIONS

	OCT. 2020	FEB. 2021
I feel connected to the teachers in my building	54%	78%
I feel connected to my peers in my building	52%	73%
I feel that I have access to at least one trusted adult to speak to in my building	74%	88%
I feel in my building teachers make it a priority to emphasize students strengths and interests	46%	73%
I feel in my building that I am a valuable asset, in which I am heard and seen by my teachers, peers, and administrators.	45%	71%

### MANAGING EMOTIONS

	OCT. 2020	FEB. 2021
I feel in my building students are taught how to cope with stress by using appropriate coping skills (Ex; breathing exercises, brain alignment strategies, meditation, FTC-requesting a break) on a regular basis	28%	50%
I feel I have received adequate education on how mental health can affect a person's psychological and emotional well-being and feel confident that I would know the right steps to take if I or someone I know began to exhibit warning signs	51%	78%
I feel that I have a safe place to go in my building when feeling escalated, emotionally drained, overwhelmed, and/or stressed out	44%	70%
I feel that COVID-19 has had a negative impact on my mental, emotional, and physical well-being within the last year	48%	71%

## DATA LEADS THE WAY (CONTINUED): PINELANDS REGIONAL HIGH SCHOOL (9-12)

### ACTION PLAN

The school actively involved students through **attention-focused practices**, **brain breaks**, and **Zen Dens** for students who need a place to regulate their emotions. Designated Resiliency Team members were also put in place to help regulate with students whenever needed. Each student had a trusted adult to go to in times of need.

### STAFF RESOURCES

The school provided staff with **resources** and learning opportunities, **staff development** on the CPS model and opportunities to learn more about trauma-responsive practices, and designated time during faculty and department meetings to delve into specific topics, like understanding behavior as a signal/communication.

They also held **monthly Q&A sessions**, hosted a **book club**, and launched a **Pinelands Connect Blog** for staff that includes helpful resources and tips to effectively share the information with students.



### LEARN MORE / PARTICIPATE IN FUTURE TRAININGS

To learn more about the School Resiliency Team trainings, including how to start a team in your school or district, contact Cape Assist Executive Director **Katie Faldetta** at [katie@capeassist.org](mailto:katie@capeassist.org) or **609-522-5960**.