

Professional Educator Licensure Review Committee Report

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Background

Pursuant to [Public Act 103-0413](#), signed into law by Governor JB Pritzker on August 3, 2023 and effective January 1, 2024, this committee was formed and respectfully submits this report to the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE). The Whole Child Task Force made recommendations in 2022 that led to the passage of House Bill 342 (PA 103-0413). The legislation includes a number of directives for ISBE pertaining to trauma-informed schools.

The Whole Child Task Force was created in 2021 and led by ISBE. Its charge was to recommend ways to establish an equitable, inclusive, safe, and supportive environment in all schools for every student in Illinois. While this report outlines recommendations related to a few smaller components of a whole-child approach to education, it adds to the growing call for schools to approach trauma and matters of discipline with intention via an equity lens.

Public Act and Committee Charge

Public Act 103-0413 required ISBE to create the Professional Educator Licensure Review Committee (PERLC). It is stated in 105 ILCS 5/21B-12:

Sec. 21B-12. Professional educator licensure review committee.

(a) The State Superintendent of Education shall establish a committee of no more than 21 members to make recommendations to the State Board of Education to change the professional educator licensure requirements and Professional Educator License renewal requirements for kindergarten through grade 12 teachers to include demonstrated proficiency in adverse childhood experiences, trauma, secondary traumatic stress, creating trauma-responsive learning environments or communities, as defined in subsection (b) of Section 3-11 of this Code, restorative justice, and restorative practices on or before October 1, 2024. The members of the committee shall be appointed by the State Superintendent of Education, unless stated otherwise, and shall include the following members:

- (1) the State Superintendent of Education or a designee;*
- (2) one member of a statewide professional teachers' organization;*
- (3) one member of another statewide professional Teachers' organization;*
- (4) one member who represents a school district serving a community with a population of 500,000 or more;*
- (5) one member of a statewide organization representing school social workers;*
- (6) one member of a statewide organization representing school counselors;*
- (7) one member of an organization that has specific expertise in trauma-responsive school practices and experience in supporting schools in developing trauma-responsive and restorative practices;*
- (8) one member of another organization that has specific expertise in trauma-responsive school practices and experience in supporting schools in developing trauma-responsive and restorative practices;*

- (9) one member of a statewide organization that represents school principals and assistant principals;*
 - (10) 3 members representing a State-approved educator preparation program at an Illinois institution of higher education recommended by the institution of higher education;*
 - (11) one member representing regional superintendents of schools recommended by a statewide association that represents regional superintendents of schools;*
 - (12) one educator from a school district that has actively worked to develop a system of student support that uses a trauma-informed lens;*
 - (13) one member representing district superintendents recommended by a statewide organization that represents district superintendents;*
 - (14) the Secretary of Human Services, the Director of Children and Family Services, the Director of Public Health, and the Director of Juvenile Justice, or their designees; and*
 - (15) a child advocate.*
- (b) This Section is repealed on October 1, 2025.*

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Meeting Dates

- | | | |
|---------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| ● January 26, 2024 | ● April 19, 2024 | ● June 28, 2024 |
| ● February 23, 2024 | ● May 3, 2024 | ● July 26, 2024 |
| ● March 22, 2024 | ● May 24, 2024 | ● August 23, 2024 |

Supporting Research

The work to improve the response of Illinois school personnel to trauma is not new, and much evidence supports the need for it to grow. The incidence of trauma among children and youth is increasing, disproportionately impacting schools and colleges (Wuest & Subramaniam, 2022). As early as 2013, 61.8% of adolescents reported experiencing at least one potentially traumatic event in their lifetime (McLaughlin et al., 2013). Recent data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention suggests that 64% of adults experienced at least one adverse childhood experience by age 16 (Swedo et al., 2023). The COVID-19 pandemic contributed to the increased incidence of trauma with school closures resulting in amplified personal traumas experienced at home, isolation, and learning loss (Reddig & VanLone, 2022). We are now seeing these impacts surfacing in students of all ages (Garfield & Chidambaram, 2020).

The increasing incidence of trauma among the students in our classrooms is disproportionately affecting historically marginalized populations, including children of color and children living in poverty (Blitz et al., 2016; Helton et al., 2019). Children with disabilities are more likely to experience trauma; 87.3% of youth who identified as LGBTQ reported being harassed or assaulted at school (Kosciw, 2018). Research suggests that the increase in trauma caused by the COVID-19 pandemic was accompanied by an increase in the disparities in academic performance among children in historically marginalized populations who are at the highest risk for trauma (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). Additionally, recent research confirms that historical and current social injustices and systemic inequities (e.g., poverty, racism, oppression, school policies and practices) contribute to trauma among children from historically marginalized populations (National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2017; Venet, 2021). Trauma can impact children's cognitive, behavioral, emotional, and relational skills resulting in poor academic performance (Delaney-Black et al., 2002; DePrince et al., 2009; Mayes et al., 2009; Viesel et al., 2015), low attendance rates, increased suspensions and expulsions (Bethell et al., 2014), and difficulty forming relationships (Aspelmeier et al., 2007; National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2008). However, despite the obvious need for the development of educators' knowledge and skills to support the increasing number of students who are experiencing the impacts of trauma, trauma as a topic for professional development for educators during in-service programming is new (Hobbs et al., 2019) and is not yet implemented systematically in educator preparation programs (Atwood et al., 2022). A review by Reddig and VanLone (2022) revealed that only 12 states required some form of training in trauma or trauma-informed education for practicing teachers, and only five states had specific requirements for training in trauma and trauma-informed practices for either general education or special education initial licensure. As a result, there are educators in our schools who do not have the required knowledge and skills to support children experiencing the impacts of trauma and guard against the re-traumatization of the impacted children (Hobbs et al., 2019; Patterson et al., 2020; Sonsteng-Person & Loomis, 2021).

The definitions of trauma are inconsistent across fields (Griffen, 2020) and even among education researchers, which compounds the challenges for training of the full education work force. The terms used to describe the efforts to prevent trauma and support students who are experiencing trauma (e.g., trauma-informed practice, trauma-informed strategies, trauma-informed care) are equally inconsistent. The lack of consistency in the language of trauma and trauma-informed education is problematic

(Griffen, 2020). In their review of licensure and professional development requirements, Reddig and VanLone (2022) recognized the inconsistencies in language and called for the development of a set of state competencies based on the work being done in states currently. The recommendations of the PELRC include the development of standard language, knowledge, and skills across all individuals holding a Professional Educator License (PEL) as well as those preparing pre-service teacher candidates for licensure. That content would include, but not be limited to, the six focus issues of PA 103-0413 (adverse childhood experiences, trauma, secondary traumatic stress, creating trauma-responsive learning environments or communities, restorative justice, and restorative practices).

Finally, regarding restorative justice and restorative practices, there is much evidence that alternatives to exclusionary discipline practices need to be expanded in schools. Harsh and punitive discipline in response to students' misbehavior is disproportionately applied to students from historically marginalized populations, including students with disabilities (Mayworm & Sharkey, 2014; Skiba et al., 2011). Harsh discipline policies contribute to the overrepresentation of marginalized populations among those who experience trauma (Sedlak, 2010; Statman-Weil, 2015). Moreover, there is a clear connection between teaching about trauma-informed practices and reduction in exclusionary discipline. Patterson et al. (2020) found that harsh and exclusionary discipline is reduced for all students, including students from marginalized populations, in classrooms taught by teachers using trauma-informed practices.

2024 Professional Educator Licensure Review Committee Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION #1

Part 24 “Standards for All Illinois Educators” of the 23 Illinois Administrative Code is part of what governs the preparation of new educators. The PELRC determined that current standards that impact the preparation of new educators need further investigation to determine if they align to demonstrating proficiency in the six focus issues of PA 103-0413. The State Educator Preparation and Licensure Board (SEPLB) oversees these standards. ISBE should recommend that SEPLB review both the Illinois Professional Educator Standards and the Illinois Culturally Responsive Teaching and Leading (CRTL) Standards from Part 24 “Standards for All Illinois Educators” in 2025 to determine how current standards align to the requirements listed in PA 103-0413 and consider if additional standards are needed to encompass all requirements of the law. If SEPLB determines that additional standards are needed, this could be done by adopting an already existing set of national standards related to the six focus areas of PA 103-0413 if one is identified, updating an existing set of standards, or creating a new set of standards in consultation with stakeholders. When reviewing Part 24, SEPLB should recommend stakeholders and subject matter experts in trauma and restorative justice who may assist with future standard development.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATION

It is essential for ISBE and SEPLB to collaborate with trauma and restorative justice content experts and institutions of higher education (IHEs) to review standards. IHEs have discretion over the manner in which they address standards in their preparation programs; using a needs assessment developed by content experts and collaborating to agree on competencies, language, and content is essential to increase the field’s understanding of these issues. It also may make sense to align these competencies, language, and content to the mandated training standards encompassed in Recommendation No. 3 on page 10.

RATIONALE

Comparisons between the CRTL Standards, the Illinois Professional Educator Standards, and the six focus issues of PA 103-0412 were shared in initial meetings of the PELRC. The PELRC reviewed these comparisons and found that there is some alignment of these standards and issues, but it is incomplete. The preliminary identification of some alignment suggests there may be a need for additional standards to create a common language to guide informed integration of these six focus issues and additional trauma-informed education content in both teacher preparation and licensure renewal.

Members of the PELRC contacted representatives of educator preparation programs across the state to determine what work is currently being done in trauma-informed education. The results of those interviews suggested that IHEs are approaching trauma-informed education in different ways and in different departments or colleges at the universities, including social work, speech pathology, and education. It is necessary to include the subject matter experts currently doing the work in any future discussions of standards or guidelines. Their involvement will help establish a goal for common knowledge and language across programs while still ensuring that preparation programs maintain discretion over how they address standards. Both of these concerns were voiced by representatives of

the programs currently integrating trauma-informed education.

RECOMMENDATION #2

The PELRC determined that two existing mandated trainings include information about trauma and trauma-responsive learning environments or communities; however, the field may be confused as to whether these existing mandates can count toward professional development hours required for license renewal. Recent efforts by K-12 education stakeholders in Illinois have resulted in changes to statute regarding mandated training and its relation to the PEL renewal process. The PELRC determined that despite these recent changes, confusion may still exist as to whether mandated trainings can count toward professional development hours required for license renewal. ISBE should provide guidance to the field, including directly to educators, on the following sentences:

- 105 ILCS 5/3-11 – *“Institute programs in these topics shall be credited toward hours of professional development required for license renewal as outlined in subsection (e) of Section 21B-45.”*
- 105 ILCS 5/10-22.39 – *“In-service training programs in these topics shall be credited toward hours of professional development required for license renewal as outlined in subsection (e) of Section 21B-45.”*

RATIONALE

This committee determined through many discussions that more time is needed to find out what is already being done and define terms before we recommend additions to what is already required of new and veteran teachers. This recommendation seeks to encourage ISBE to provide as much clarity as possible to the field that existing mandates cover some of the content from the six focus areas of PA 103-0413.

ISBE has produced a new Activity Summary for Professional Development (Form 73-58). All approved providers must complete this form for each activity that is offered to award professional development. The activity summary now lists the mandated trainings that are approved for PD credit. There are a few that are listed (e.g., Mental Illness, Trauma, & Suicide; Trauma-Informed Practices; Social-Emotional Learning) that relate to the six topic areas. This recommendation will help emphasize the availability of earning credit when learning about these important topics.

RECOMMENDATION #3

Current mandated trainings about trauma do not include any standards that provide direction as to what content the trainings should cover. Content experts and stakeholders, including, but not limited to those who participated in this committee, should collaborate across disciplines statewide to develop or modify standards for existing mandated trainings on the topics of trauma to improve the education that school personnel receive on these topics. See [Illinois Mandated School Trainings for Public Schools](#). The standards should include specific direction on how to provide instruction to educators on adverse childhood experiences, trauma, secondary traumatic stress, and creating trauma-responsive learning environments or communities, as defined in subsection (b) of Section 3-11 of this Code. Relevant stakeholders also may consider whether these standards should include information about restorative justice and restorative practices, or if those components should be incorporated into required training outside of trauma trainings. ISBE will reconvene the Whole Child Task Force in March of 2027 or earlier and can consider such standards within the work of the reconvened task force. Standards developed under this recommendation should align to standards considered under the committee's first recommendation.

RATIONALE

PreK-12 teachers report having little or no training to support the students in their classrooms who are impacted by trauma (Hobbs et al., 2019; Patterson et al., 2020; Sonsteng-Person & Loomis, 2021). The research on the impact and incidence of trauma suggests all educators should be trained in trauma-informed education and the implementation of trauma-informed practices to support all students (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [SAMHSA], 2014). There is no list of accepted trauma-informed practices that teachers should use to prevent and respond to trauma among their students. Researchers differ in their identification of the most important trauma-informed practices or categories of practice (Brunzell et al., 2016; Honsinger & Brown, 2019; Kinniburgh et al., 2005). There is no accepted model for delivering [Trauma-Informed Excellence](#) (TIE) training in the literature. One model suggests a focus on educational strategies across a continuum of multi-tiered systems of support (Dorado et al., 2016; Keels et al., 2021), which encourages collaboration between general and special educators, social workers, and other related service providers. Other researchers suggest training on TIE should be guided by a framework. One example of a widely accepted framework is SAMHSA's key assumptions, the Four Rs (realize, recognize, respond, resist re-traumatization) for a trauma-informed organization (Menschner & Maul, 2016). Patterson et al. (2020) suggests TIE training should be done through pre-service teacher preparation programs.

RECOMMENDATION #4

PA 103-0413 called for this committee to recommend changes related to how educators learn about “restorative justice” and “restorative practices”; however, the committee noted in its discussions that neither of these terms is universally defined in the School Code. ISBE should work with external stakeholders to come up with definitions for each term that will inform the field and better direct educator preparation and license renewal activities. The PELRC recommends that ISBE consider adding these definitions to the guidance it is required to publish by no later than July 1, 2025, pursuant to PA [103-0896](#).

RATIONALE

Definitions of these terms were called for in Recommendation No. 26 in the 2022 [Whole Child Task Force Report](#), but have not yet been incorporated into law. Lack of clarity and the absence of universally accepted definitions for “restorative justice” and “restorative practices” and other relevant terms in the School Code leads to inconsistency in understanding and implementation across different educational institutions. This ambiguity can hinder effective training and application. Additionally, clear definitions can guide educator preparation programs, ensuring that teacher training includes comprehensive and consistent information about these concepts. This allows future educators to approach restorative practices with a solid foundation, enabling them to implement strategies effectively in their classrooms.

Regarding license renewal activities, these universally defined terms will provide a framework for ongoing professional development. Educators must understand these concepts to apply them in their practice; well-defined terms will enable ISBE and other providers to create relevant training modules that align with current educational needs. Collaborating with external stakeholders (educators, community organizations, and restorative justice experts) ensures that the definitions that are developed are practical, relevant, and reflective of diverse perspectives. This inclusive approach can enhance buy-in from the education community and promote sustainability in applying restorative practices. Ultimately, a clearer understanding of restorative justice and practices can lead to more effective implementation, which has the potential to improve student outcomes by fostering a supportive and inclusive school environment. This aligns with the broader goals of equity and social-emotional learning in education.

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