Project Transform: A Trauma-Engaged Approach to Improve Social, Emotional, and Academic Outcomes
EIR/Early Phase Grant Proposal
The Association of Alaska School Boards

Rural LEA partners: Chatham School District, Copper River School District, Juneau School District, Ketchikan Gateway Borough School District, and Lower Kuskokwim School District

Additional Partners: State of Alaska Department of Education and Early Development

CFDA: 84.411C

Absolute Priorities Addressed: AP1, AP4
Competitive Preference Priority Addressed: CPP2

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A. Significance

Absolute and Competitive Preference Priorities AP1, AP4, CPP2

Trauma can impact a child's social and emotional development, academic performance, and behavior (Frieze, 2015; Perfect et al., 2016; Stein & Kendall, 2004). Students who experience trauma are less likely to be engaged in school and display appropriate school skills (Shonk & Ciccetti, 2001) and more likely to have poor school performance, lower grade point averages, and more days of school absence (Stein & Kendall, 2004). In Alaska, students with adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are 3.6 times more likely to have learning disabilities and 5.4 times more likely to repeat a grade (AMHB, 2016). Educators who are unaware of the complexities of trauma, are unprepared to respond with support, or provide a negative school environment can exacerbate or even cause difficulties for students (Tanyu, 2020).

With intentional approaches and systems, schools can help buffer children from the negative effects of trauma. Evidence shows that social and emotional learning (SEL), schoolwide trauma-informed approaches, and positive school climate are all linked to improved academic achievement (Durlak et al., 2011; Roseby & Gascoigne, 2021; Thapa et al., 2013). More specifically, two recent systematic reviews of evaluated schoolwide trauma-informed approaches indicate that a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) model is an effective intervention for academic, social and emotional, and other outcomes (Avery et al., 2020; Berger, 2019). Despite this promising evidence, there is still much to learn about effective approaches for embedding and sustaining a schoolwide trauma-informed model. There is also a need for further studies that investigate the academic impact of trauma-informed approaches, measure shifts in school safety and climate, and measure program fidelity (Avery et al., 2020).

Project Transform will implement and evaluate a comprehensive model for integrating a trauma-engaged approach into schools through school-based professional learning and

Transforming Schools: A Framework for Trauma-Engaged Practice in Alaska ("Transforming Schools" or "TS").__ Project Transform will build on the existing evidence base for creating trauma-informed school environments and use evidence-based strategies for changing educator practices to effectively implement the model (Table 1; **absolute priority [AP] 1**).

In doing so, Project Transform responds to the needs to develop and sustain educator and school capacity to support social and emotional learning and development; create educational settings that are supportive, positive, identity-safe, and inclusive; and provide MTSSs that address student mental health and learning barriers using evidence-based trauma-informed professional development (PD) and intervention supports for educators **(AP4).**

Project Transform also supports the need of school districts to respond to challenges exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic **(competitive preference priority [CPP] 2)**. During the pandemic, Alaska school districts saw an increase in student mental health concerns such as isolation, trauma, depression, and anxiety (Stellar Group, 2021). Rural students, students of color, and students from low-income backgrounds were more likely to experience increased trauma during the pandemic (Absher et al., 2021; U.S. Department of Education, 2021). Districts also saw increased burnout, stress, and anxiety among staff members. Fifty eight percent of Alaska educators surveyed via the School Climate and Connectedness Survey (SCCS) reported that during the pandemic they felt overwhelmed trying to support students and 72 percent continue to feel worn out in their work in ways that interfere with other parts of their life (AASB, 2021; AASB, 2022). Project Transform addresses these needs through evidence-based instructional approaches and supports, including PD, coaching, professional learning communities, and reflective practices **(CPP2).**

The core of Project Transform is the _Transforming Schools_ framework, which was

developed in Alaska with input from more than 200 school staff members, Tribal members, and families. The TS framework incorporates evidence-based strategies for creating a trauma-engaged school with a flexible MTSS framework (see Figure 1 and Appendix J1). The framework and accompanying resources and training are designed to build 11 components of a trauma-engaged school model, and use a place-based and culturally specific perspective to respond to the strengths and needs of underserved communities in Alaska. It is structured as a collection of research, stories, Elder wisdom, Alaska case studies, resources, reflection questions, and evidence-based practices. It also incorporates best practices from the research on SEL, culturally responsive learning, school climate, and cognitive behavioral supports.

Figure 1: Transforming Schools MTSS Model
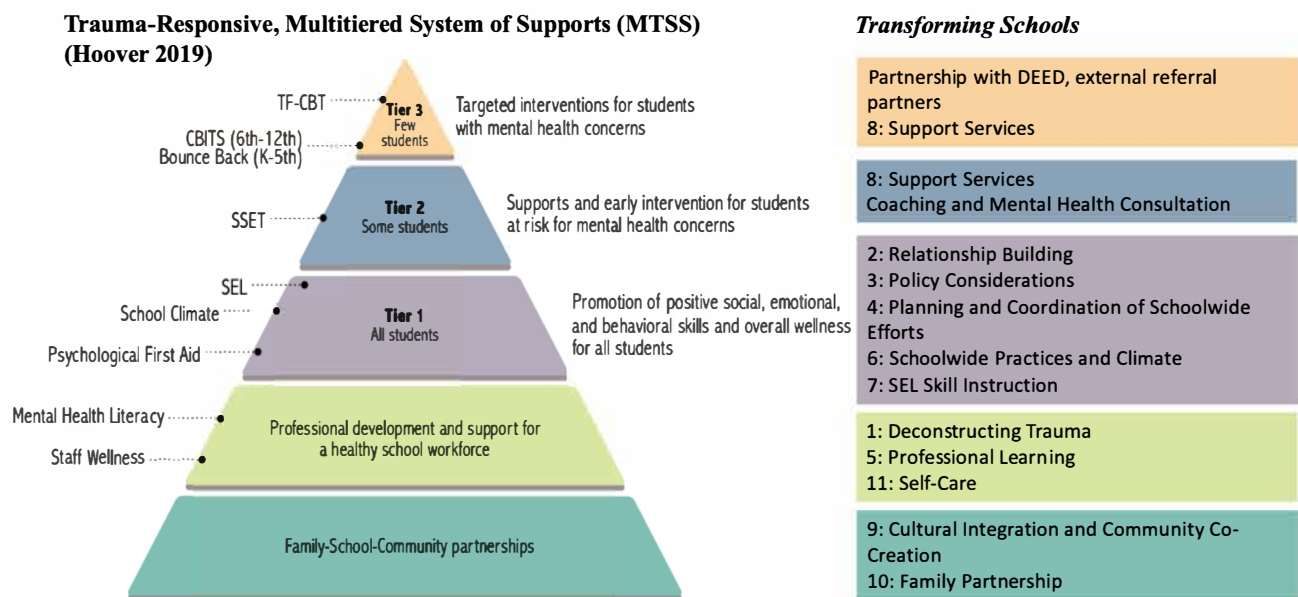
In addition to the TS Framework, a key component of Project Transform is school-based PD. In a systematic review of trauma-informed school models, Avery and colleagues (2020) found that PD was an important change catalyst across all reviewed studies. Similarly, Dorado and colleagues (2016) found that PD using a flexible trauma-informed framework impacted behavioral and student outcomes. However, these studies raised several outstanding questions

regarding what comprises effective training, the significance of staff well-being (Avery et al., 2020), and the importance of aligning training with school-based structures (Dorado et al., 2016). There is still much to learn about the precise structures for trauma-informed site-based leadership (Rumsey, 2019), collaborative learning and integrating evidence-based practices (Learning Forward, 2019), and addressing the complexities of school contexts (Chafouleas et al., 2016).

Project Transform uses a comprehensive, sequenced, and collaborative structure for professional learning and development to embed a trauma-engaged MTSS model into schools. Like other trauma-informed approaches, Project Transform includes foundational training for all school staff members (95% of the staff in intervention schools). However, it also offers sequenced high-level and tailored learning structures that include collaborative learning, self-paced learning content, individual coaching to address educator practices and cultural contexts, and on-site support for participating schools (team planning, site-based coaches, and peer observation structures; 65% of the staff in intervention schools). Activities are designed to improve the integration of evidence-based trauma-informed practices into schools and classrooms.

Project Rationale

Table 1 details the project rationale, including evidence base for each project component.

Table 1: Project Rationale (AP1)

Project Transform Component	Evidence Base	Relevant Outcomes
Trauma-responsive MTSS that includes organization- and educator-level components (for specific components within MTSS model, see Figure 1)	Avery et al., 2020 Berger, 2019 HEARTS (Dorado et al., 2016) Hoover, 2019	Improvements in student academic achievement and behavior Decrease in behavioral problems/disciplinary measures Improvement in student school engagement Increase in student coping (SEL) skills Increase in emotional and physical safety

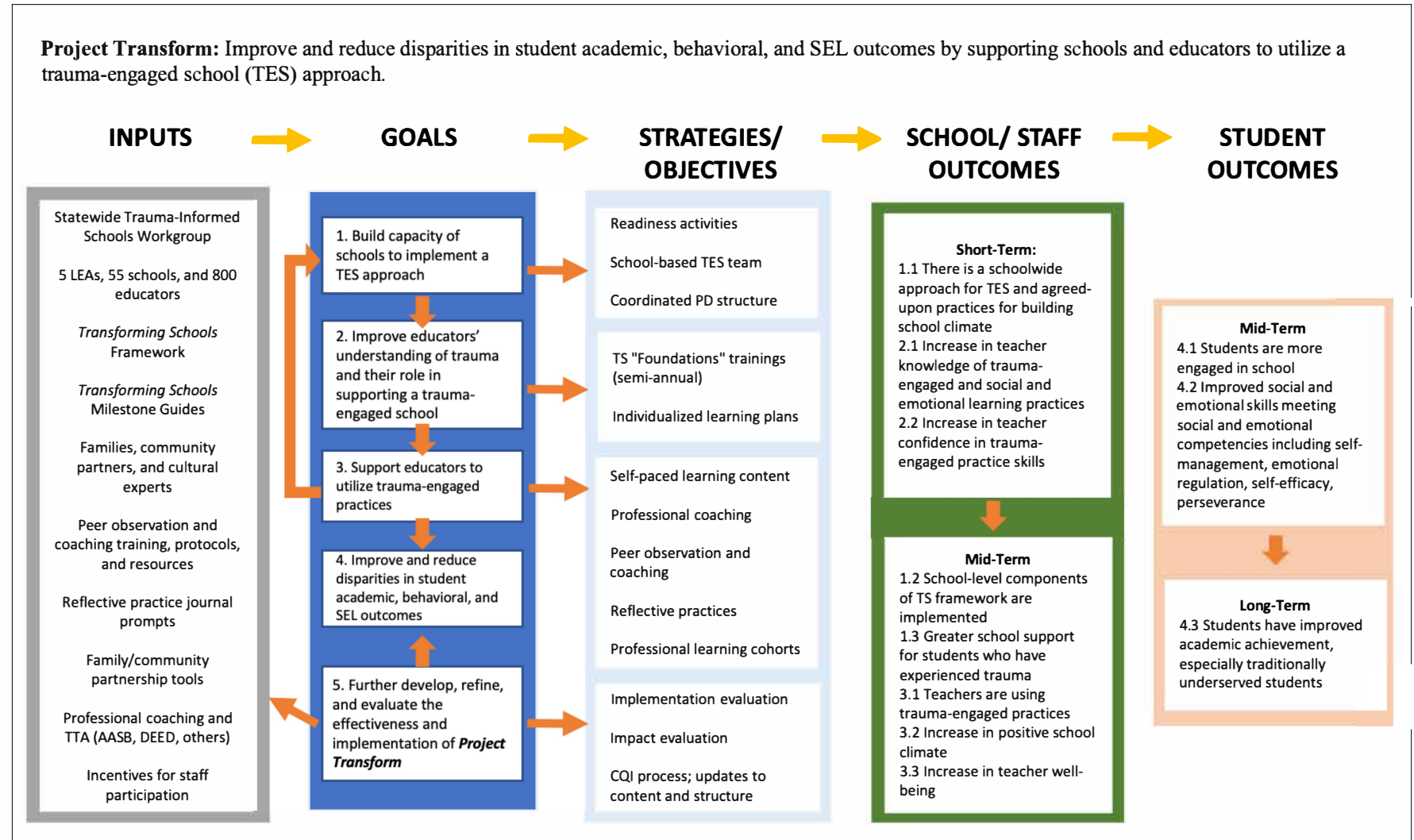|		Including targeted school climate strategies increased the effects of the MTSS model (Hoover, 2019)
Integrated SEL and development	Astor et al., 2017 Hoover, 2019 IES (Cole et al., 2013; Maynard et al., 2019) Mahoney et al., 2018	Improved academic performance, including reading and math achievement Increase in student social and emotional skills Decrease in student behavioral problems Better school safety, school climate More positive peer and student-teacher relationships
Professional development on trauma, ACES, and stress	HEARTS (Dorado et al., 2016)	Increased educator understanding of trauma Increased use of trauma-informed practices in school and classroom
Educator coaching support structures	CARES (Jennings et al., 2017)	Increased educator use of targeted practices
Educator reflective practice cohorts	Schön, 1987	Increased educator use of targeted practices
Professional learning communities	Borko, 2004	Increase in teacher growth and development
Addressing staff mental health and wellness	Bloom, 2017 CARES (Jennings et al., 2017)	Increased quality of classroom interactions Improved delivery and sustainability of trauma-sensitive practice
Educator content is specific, collaborative, structured, data driven, coordinated, and reflective	LEAP (Darling-Hammond, 2017; Olson, 2019) Poekert, 2012 Wei et al., 2009	Change in mindset, teacher practice Increased confidence in implementation Increased use of targeted practices

B. Project Design

Conceptual Framework

The logic model in figure 2 (see also **Appendix G**) illustrates the relationships between the

project inputs, goals, strategies to achieve the goals, and hypothesized outcomes.

Figure 2: Project Transform Logic Model

Project Transform: Improve and reduce disparities in student academic, behavioral, and SEL outcomes by supporting schools and educators to utilize a trauma-engaged school (TES) approach.

INPUTS → **GOALS** → **STRATEGIES/ OBJECTIVES** → **SCHOOL/ STAFF OUTCOMES** → **STUDENT OUTCOMES**

INPUTS

Statewide Trauma-Informed Schools Workgroup

5 LEAs, 55 schools, and 800 educators

Transforming Schools Framework

Transforming Schools Milestone Guides

Families, community partners, and cultural experts

Peer observation and coaching training, protocols, and resources

Reflective practice journal prompts

Family/community partnership tools

Professional coaching and TTA (AASB, DEED, others)

Incentives for staff participation

GOALS

1. Build capacity of schools to implement a TES approach

2. Improve educators' understanding of trauma and their role in supporting a trauma-engaged school

3. Support educators to utilize trauma-engaged practices

4. Improve and reduce disparities in student academic, behavioral, and SEL outcomes

5. Further develop, refine, and evaluate the effectiveness and implementation of *Project Transform*

STRATEGIES/ OBJECTIVES

Readiness activities

School-based TES team

Coordinated PD structure

TS "Foundations" trainings (semi-annual)

Individualized learning plans

Self-paced learning content

Professional coaching

Peer observation and coaching

Reflective practices

Professional learning cohorts

Implementation evaluation

Impact evaluation

CQI process; updates to content and structure

SCHOOL/ STAFF OUTCOMES

Short-Term:
1.1 There is a schoolwide approach for TES and agreed-upon practices for building school climate
2.1 Increase in teacher knowledge of trauma-engaged and social and emotional learning practices
2.2 Increase in teacher confidence in trauma-engaged practice skills

Mid-Term
1.2 School-level components of TS framework are implemented
1.3 Greater school support for students who have experienced trauma
3.1 Teachers are using trauma-engaged practices
3.2 Increase in positive school climate
3.3 Increase in teacher well-being

STUDENT OUTCOMES

Mid-Term
4.1 Students are more engaged in school
4.2 Improved social and emotional skills meeting social and emotional competencies including self-management, emotional regulation, self-efficacy, perseverance

Long-Term
4.3 Students have improved academic achievement, especially traditionally underserved students

AASB is the Association of Alaska School Boards. CQI is continuous quality improvement. DEED is the State of Alaska Department of Education and Early Development. LEA is a local education agency. PD is professional development. SEL is social and emotional learning. TS is Transforming Schools. TTA is training and technical assistance.

As illustrated by the logic model, Project Transform is designed to support schools and educators to use a trauma-engaged school (TES) approach. The project aims to 1) build schools' capacity to implement a TES approach; 2) improve educators' understanding of trauma and their role in supporting a TES; 3) support educators to use trauma-engaged practices; 4) improve and reduce disparities in student academic, behavioral, and SEL outcomes; and 5) further develop, refine, and evaluate the implementation and effectiveness of the model.

To accomplish these goals, Project Transform will leverage a robust set of inputs and strategies that are unique to this project. Each component builds off existing evidence to maximize successful implementation of a trauma-engaged approach. Project Transform will work with **five rural local education agencies** (school districts). After a pilot, two cohorts of 20 schools will randomly receive the intervention. In year 5, the program model will be expanded to the additional 34 schools from the control group (total: **55 schools**). The project will reach **800 educators** (teachers and administrators), impacting over **10,000 students** (see Table 4).

Other inputs include the TS framework, a research-based flexible framework that integrates stories and cultural and community perspectives (see Appendix J1); the accompanying *milestone guides* that help educators integrate trauma-informed understanding into their routines, relationships, and instructional practices (see Appendix J2); other **tools, protocols, and materials** to support professional learning; and dedicated and experienced **staff members, coaches, and consultants**. Materials and other supports are tailored to the needs of adult learners, offer opportunities to layer learning, and connect staff members to support from **Association of Alaska School Boards (AASB) staff members**, the **Department of Education and Early Development (DEED)**, cultural experts and educators, and site-based coaches (school counselors, social workers, or designated staff members).

To build school-level capacity (**goal 1**), sites will work with coaches to complete **readiness activities**, including training for administrators, completing an assessment of current practices and policies, and identifying a **school-based TS team**. Each TS team will meet monthly and lead the implementation process at its school, including reviewing the assessment data, determining schoolwide priorities, and developing a plan for implementation of the school- and systems-level components of the TS framework (**outcomes 1.1–1.3**). TS teams will also develop a coordinated site-specific **PD structure** and monitor staff participation.

To help educators understand trauma and their role in supporting a TES (**goal 2**), all staff members at intervention schools will receive a universal **TS foundations training** at the beginning of the school year. The staff will learn about trauma and brain science, deconstructing trauma, and the components of the TS framework. Content will also address the ongoing impact of Alaska's history of colonization and harm in the education system and work to support healing from intergenerational trauma. Educators will build the foundational knowledge and confidence they need to support students who have experienced trauma (**outcomes 2.1–2.2**). In addition, each educator will complete a self-assessment of their practices using the milestone guides (see Appendix J2). Educators will use their assessment results to develop **individualized learning plans** with their coaches that will guide the rest of their professional learning activities.

Over the next two years, educators will be supported to use trauma-engaged practices (**goal 3**) via collaborative, sustained opportunities to learn, practice, reflect, and improve. These ongoing professional learning opportunities are designed to support educators' individualized learning plans and educator-level components of the TS framework. Content aligns with the TS components and includes: exploring effective strategies for trauma-engaged practice; identifying, practicing, and reflecting on their own classroom practices; exploring relevant data and using it

to make decisions; learning about and practicing self-care; and connecting and problem-solving

with peers (see Appendix J3). Teachers at participating schools will be asked to dedicate two

hours each week to rotating PD activities (Table 2) and will receive points for participating.

These points allow them to access incentives and continuing education credits (see Appendix J4).

Table 2: Monthly Schedule for Participating Educators

Professional Learning Structure	Description	Lead Staff Members	Duration	Delivery Method
Weekly self-paced learning content (4)	Videos, podcasts, and readings are provided based on learning goals	Recommendations from coach; self-paced	15-minute videos and 15-minute reflection	Virtual
Bi-monthly individual coaching sessions (2)	Advance individual goals and practices from milestone guide assessment	DEED coordinator, AASB coordinator, site-based coordinator	45-minute session and 15-minute reflection/ documentation	Virtual
Peer observation (2; once in each role)	Observee chooses the practice that they would like feedback on	Peers	45-minute observation and 15-minute reflection	In classroom
Monthly reflective practice (1)	Each participant reflects on learning and integration into classroom routines and student interactions	AASB and DEED staff members host	1 hour	Virtual
Monthly learning cohort (1)	Learn TS framework components and research practices	DEED, AASB coordinator	1 hour	Virtual

Self-paced learning content using videos, podcasts, reading, and reflection activities

will continue to build knowledge and skills. Content will include example practices or relevant

information from Alaskan cultural experts, teachers, and principals. **Individual coaching**

sessions and **peer observation** will advance personalized learning goals, using the milestone

guides to gradually introduce new practices (**outcome 3.1**). Coaches will have access to a

resource bank with examples of how to adapt practices to align with cultural and community

contexts (for example, culturally and regionally specific SEL standards, Yupík mental health

assessments, guidance for embedding cultural protocols into classroom routines). Each site will

work with their TS team and coaches to adapt their own resources to be culturally specific and responsive. The TS team and site-based coaches will also offer monthly **professional learning cohort sessions** to create a space for educators to learn together. Monthly **reflective practice groups** will convene educators to reflect on their experiences and progress and practice self-care.

Together, these strategies intervene to improve school and educator outcomes (**outcomes 3.2–3.3)** and create TES environments—including positive school climate, SEL, and support for students who have experienced trauma—linked to student academic, behavioral, and social and emotional outcomes **(goal 4; outcomes 4.1–4.3**).

Project staff members will engage in an iterative process of learning, improving, and refining the model and its materials (**goal 5**) through **implementation** and **impact evaluations** in partnership with Education Northwest (EdNW; see Section E). At monthly **continuous quality improvement meetings** partners will convene to understand progress toward project goals as well as implementation strengths and weaknesses. Updates to the TS framework and toolkit, PD content, and implementation structures will be made as needs are identified.

Clear and Measurable Goals, Objectives, and Outcomes

Table 3: Project Goals, Objectives, and Measures (Also See Appendix J5)

Objectives	Measures *(Tool)*	Baseline and Target Values
Goal 1: Build capacity of schools to implement a trauma-engaged school (TES) approach Outcome 1.1 There is a schoolwide approach for TES and agreed-upon practices for building school climate Outcome 1.2 School-level components of the TS framework are being implemented Outcome 1.3 Greater school support for students who have experienced trauma		
Objective 1: Provide technical assistance, training, and coaching to school administrators and school-based teams in adopting and implementing a TES approach (readiness activities)	# of school administrators that participate in PD structures *(tracking logs)*	Baseline: N/A Target: 55
	% of staff that respond favorably, "at their school there are systems to respond to students with trauma" *(SCCS)[1]*	Baseline: 65% Target: 80%
Objective 2: Establish school-based teams that work on schoolwide practices, policies, and routines and coordinated instruction (including restorative and coordinated SEL approaches)	% of schools that have school-based TES teams that meet regularly during the school year *(tracking logs)*	Baseline: 0% Target: 90%
	% of districts that adopt recommended TES policies *(tracking logs)*	Baseline: 40% Target: 100%

	% of districts that implement universal SEL curriculum *(administrative data)*	Baseline: 60% Target:100%
Objective 3: Establish coordinated, sequential, and effective professional learning structures for school staff	% of staff that respond favorably that they "feel supported to respond to trauma experienced by students" *(SCCS)*	Baseline: 60% Target: 75%
	# of schools that have a coordinated, sequential, and incentivized PD structure established for the full school year *(tracking logs)*	Baseline: 0 Target: 55

<table>
<tr><td colspan="3">Goal 2: Improve educators' understanding of trauma and their role in supporting a TES
Outcome 2.1 Increase in teacher knowledge of trauma-engaged and SEL practices
Outcome 2.2 Increase in teacher confidence in trauma-engaged practice skills</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3">Objective 4: Provide training to teachers in deconstructing trauma, brain science, trauma responses, and trauma-engaged practices (foundations training)</td><td>% of staff who complete the foundations training *(tracking logs)*</td><td>Baseline: N/A Target: 95%</td></tr>
<tr><td>% of staff that strongly agree that they "understand how experiences of trauma can affect a person's coping skills and behaviors" *(SCCS)*</td><td>Baseline: 41% Target: 80%</td></tr>
<tr><td>% of staff that strongly agree that they "know specific skills and strategies they can use to help students who have experienced trauma to do well in school" *(SCCS)*</td><td>Baseline: 16% Target: 65%</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3">Objective 5: Establish a differentiated and personalized learning plan for each teacher and administrator that identifies TES learning goals and strategies for achieving them</td><td>% of teachers and administrators who have completed the initial self-assessment using the milestone guides *(tracking logs)*</td><td>Baseline: N/A Target: 95%</td></tr>
<tr><td>% of teachers and administrators with personalized TES learning plan *(tracking logs)*</td><td>Baseline: 0% Target: 95%</td></tr>
<tr><td>% of staff who respond favorably that they "know their role in supporting students experiencing trauma" *(SCCS)*</td><td>Baseline: 64% Target: 75%</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Goal 3: Create supportive learning environments through supporting educators to use trauma-engaged practices
Outcome 3.1 Teachers are using trauma-engaged practices
Outcome 3.2 Increase in positive school climate, including measures of positive relationships (peers, staff, families), school safety, and cultural responsiveness
Outcome 3.3 Increase in teacher well-being</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="5">Objective 6: Increase educators' use of trauma-engaged skills and practices via ongoing education, coaching, and peer learning</td><td>% of teachers and administrators who report increased use of trauma-engaged practices *(milestone guide follow-up assessment)*</td><td>Baseline: N/A Target: 65%</td></tr>
<tr><td>% of teachers who have completed self-paced learning content *(tracking logs)*</td><td>Baseline: N/A Target: 65%</td></tr>
<tr><td>% of students who respond favorably to SCCS caring adults scale *(SCCS)*</td><td>Baseline: 54% Target: 65%</td></tr>
<tr><td>% of families that respond favorably to SCCS family partnership scale *(SCCS)*</td><td>Baseline: 64% Target: 75%</td></tr>
<tr><td>% of staff who respond favorably to measures of satisfaction with PD provided *(participant surveys)*</td><td>Baseline: N/A Target: 80%</td></tr>
<tr><td>Objective 7: Create structures for ongoing reflective practices that allow educators to</td><td>% of teachers and administrators who participate in reflective practice groups *(tracking logs)*</td><td>Baseline: N/A Target: 65%</td></tr>
</table>

engage in iterative processes of learning and doing	% of staff who respond favorably to measures of satisfaction with reflective practice groups *(participant surveys)*	Baseline: N/A Target: 80%
Objective 8: Build structures that support the mental health and well-being of educators and respond to the ongoing needs exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic	% of staff that strongly disagree that they "feel worn out in their work in ways that interfere with their life" *(SCCS)*	Baseline: 6% Target: 25%
	% of teachers and administrators that participate in professional learning cohorts (PLCs; *tracking logs)*	Baseline: N/A Target: 65%
	% of staff who respond favorably to measures of satisfaction with PLCs *(participant surveys)*	Baseline: N/A Target: 80%
Objective 9: Improve student, staff, and family perceptions of school climate	% of students who respond favorably to SCCS school safety scale *(SCCS)*	Baseline: 67% Target: 78%
	% of students who respond favorably to SCCS cultural connectedness scale *(SCCS)*	Baseline: 49% Target: 60%
	% of students who respond favorably to SCCS peer climate scale *(SCCS)*	Baseline: 29% Target: 35%

Goal 4: Improve and reduce disparities in student academic, behavioral, and SEL outcomes

Outcome 4.1 Students are more engaged in school
Outcome 4.2 Students have improved social and emotional skills
Outcome 4.3 Students have improved academic achievement

Objective 10: School environments support students to be more engaged in school	Average daily attendance rate *(administrative data)*	Baseline: 95.8% Target: 98%
	Chronic absenteeism (truancy) rate *(administrative data)*	Baseline: 15% Target: 10%
	% of students who respond favorably that they "try hard to do well in school" *(SCCS)*	Baseline: 75.2% Target: 83%
Objective 11: Students are practicing and building emotional competencies including self-management, emotional regulation, self-efficacy, perseverance	% favorable on Social Emotional Learning Scale *(SCCS)*	Baseline: 66.8% Target: 78%
Objective 12: Students are supported by schools to use SEL skills and co-regulation strategies to improve academic outcomes	% of students (all; BIPOC; Low-Income) proficient in math *(AK STAR)*	Baseline: TBD[2] Target: TBD
	% of students (all; BIPOC; Low-Income) proficient in ELA *(AK STAR)*	Baseline: TBD[2] Target: TBD

Goal 5: Further develop, refine, and evaluate the implementation and effectiveness of Project Transform

Objective 13: Engage in iterative processes of continuous quality improvement to ensure that lessons learned are reflected in future implementation cycles	# of continuous quality improvement meetings held with key stakeholders *(tracking logs)*	Baseline: N/A Target: 60
Objective 14: Understand implementation successes and challenges, including site-level fidelity to the Project Transform model	Completion of implementation evaluation *(qualitative Y/N)*	Baseline: No Target: Yes
Objective 15: Understand how implementation of Project Transform works to improve academic, SEL, and behavioral outcomes for underserved students in Alaska	Completion of impact evaluation meeting What Works Clearinghouse standards without reservation *(qualitative Y/N)*	Baseline: No Target: Yes

Objective 16: Disseminate evaluation findings, lessons learned, and best practices statewide and with relevant national audiences	# of products created for dissemination *(tracking logs)*	Baseline: N/A Target: 6

1. For more information on the School Climate & Connectedness Survey, see Appendix J6.
2. AK transitioned from PEAKS to AK STAR assessment during SY2021-22 (results available in November 2022).

How the Project Design Will Address the Needs of the Target Population

An estimated <u>two in three children in Alaska are exposed to traumatic experiences in childhood, and more than 40 percent have experienced four or more ACEs</u> (BRFSS, 2015). Alaska Native children are more likely to experience ACEs; according to the 2011–2012 National Survey of Children's Health, 44.5 percent of white children experienced one or more ACEs compared to 66.9 percent of Alaska Native children (DHSS, 2012). In addition, during the COVID-19 pandemic, Alaska school districts saw an increase in student mental health needs (Stellar Group, 2021). <u>Rural students, students of color, and students from low-income backgrounds were more likely to experience increased trauma during the pandemic</u> (Absher et al., 2021; U.S. DOE, 2021). Rural Alaska communities and school districts are further impacted by limited services and resources (Stellar Group, 2021).

Childhood trauma is linked to poor academic achievement. In Alaska, <u>fewer than 14.6 percent of individuals with four or more ACEs have graduated high school</u> (BRFSS, 2015). Alaska's history of abuse in the education system and systematically underserving Alaska Native students perpetuates cycles of trauma that disproportionately impact this population. <u>Alaska Native students are more likely to experience trauma and have lower rates of academic proficiency and school-ready SEL skills compared to white students</u> (BRFSS, 2015).

Schools and educators can mitigate the impact of trauma on learning by incorporating evidence-based trauma-informed practices (see "Significance" section). However, <u>only 66 percent of Alaska educators say they know specific skills and strategies to help students who</u>

have experienced trauma to do well in their school and only 18 percent strongly agreed that there are support systems at their school to respond to trauma (AASB, 2022).

Project Transform responds to the needs of Alaska educators, schools, and students through tangible, comprehensive supports for building TES environments. Program components build educator knowledge, confidence, and understanding of best practices through a comprehensive, coordinated approach to PD. Resources link educators to statewide and regional partners to navigate individual or community needs. Materials, coaches, and trainers were chosen to deepen educators' understanding of the cultural and community context. Personalized learning allows professional coaches to respond to the needs of educators in different contexts. Tools, content, and structures were co-created with Alaska educators, families, and communities.

Project Transform will serve high-need, rural students. All participating schools are considered rural (NCES codes 33 and 43) and have a high proportion of students who are Alaska Native, students of color, and from low-income backgrounds. In addition, participating districts see low levels of proficiency in key academic areas (Tables 4 and 5).

Table 4: School District Demographics (2021–22 School Year)
Source: Alaska Department of Education and Early Development.

District	# of Schools	NCES School Locale Code	K–12 Enrollment	Teacher Count	% of Schools Eligible for Title I
Chatham	3	43	129	18	66.7
Copper River	4	43	293	26	100.0
Juneau	13	33	3,996	294	50.0
Ketchikan	8	33	2,029	161	75.0
Lower Kuskokwim	27	43	3,817	268	100.0
Total	55	—	10,264	767	83.6

Table 5: Student Demographics (2021–22) and Proficiency (2020–21[1])
Source: Alaska Department of Education and Early Development.
ELA = English language arts. FRPL = free or reduced-price lunch. BIPOC = Black, Indigenous, people of color (includes students who identify as Alaska Native, American Indian, Black, Hispanic/Latinx, Pacific Islander, and two or more races).

District	% Students Alaska Native	% Students BIPOC	% Students FRPL Eligible	% Students Proficient ELA[1]	% Students Proficient Math[1]
Chatham	52.3	59.1	100	32.4	25.8
Copper River	38.5	49.2	59.7	44.7	40.1
Juneau	13.3	55.3	19.7	44.2	32.6
Ketchikan	29.1	49.8	31.9	43.7	38.9
Lower Kuskokwim	96.6	97.5	90.7	6.6	5.5
Total:	47.80	69.20	49.70	21.33	17.11

1. Most recent academic proficiency data available is from the 2020–2021 PEAKS assessment.

C. Project Personnel

Employment of Members of Underrepresented Groups

AASB seeks to hire staff members who have qualifications and experience within schools. AASB also places a high value on lived experiences and experiences within Alaska Native or other underserved communities. Several AASB staff members who are Alaska Native (████, ████, and ████) will directly support this project, including ████ (Family Partnership), ████ (Grant Manager), ████ (Policy), ████ (Community Dialogues), and ████ (Community Dialogues and Youth). In addition, ████, ████, ████, and ████ have extensive experience living and working in rural Alaska. All personnel across partners bring expertise in their specific roles and often across job functions (see Appendix B). Site-based coaches will be chosen for their coaching abilities and their connection to rural and Alaska Native communities. In addition, many educators who have been contracted to develop materials, videos, and resources are Alaska Native and have served rural Alaska. Many of our staff members and coaches have experienced ACEs and adverse community experiences and bring this experience to supporting students and families (see more on EdNW's commitment to equity in Section E).

Relevant Training and Experience of Key Project Personnel

The Project Transform team has extensive experience in SEL, TES, PD, evaluation, curriculum development, and managing complex grants. Table 6 provides an overview of staff experience and roles (see Appendix B for resumes).

Table 6: Training, Experience, and Responsibilities of Key Personnel

Title/ Position Name Training/Qualifications (% full-time equivalent [FTE])	Experience and Responsibilities for Project Transform
Director, Conditions for Learning (Project Director) ▮▮▮▮▮▮ **Master's, Development Studies; Bachelor's, Social Work** AASB (.25 FTE)	**Experience:** Twenty-five years managing federal grants, including an i3 grant. Supervises nine-person team focused on TES and conditions for learning. **Responsibilities:** Supervise team leads for this project; serve as the liaison with federal project officers, serve as contact for leadership of state education agency and local education agencies; trainer for TS planning and policy. Works closely with ▮▮▮▮▮ Conditions for Learning Manager to oversee team. Together they dedicate 55% to this project.
Coordinator, TES/SEL (Project Coordinator) ▮▮▮▮▮▮ **Master's, Social Work LCSW** AASB (.70 FTE)	**Experience:** Ten years in mental health, education, and youth work. Licensed clinical social worker with experience working in school districts as a TES coordinator and supporting teachers in the classroom. Trainer of restorative practices and racial equity hosting. Certified to support mental health consultation. Experience working on MTSS, SEL standards, curriculum development, and cultural modifications. **Responsibilities:** Oversee TS professional learning, reflection structures, and peer coaching protocols; direct support on SEL and restorative classroom practices. Supervise DEED, AASB, and contractors for coaching and mental health consultation.
Trauma-Engaged/SEL Coach ▮▮▮▮▮▮, **Master's, Education** AASB (.70 FTE)	**Experience:** Experience working on SEL and SEL capacity building. Has worked on standards, culturally responsive curriculum and coaching with educators. She is an expert on SEL, TES, and learning structures. **Responsibilities:** Curriculum development, coaching, peer observation structure support, training.
Partnership Coordinator ▮▮▮▮▮▮ **Bachelor's, Business** AASB (.15 FTE)	**Experience:** Experience in intergenerational trauma, family partnership, reading, and equity within school districts, nonprofits, the legislature, and on school boards. **Responsibilities:** Lead trainer on family partnership, intergenerational trauma, and cultural integration.
Data and Evaluation Coordinator ▮▮▮▮▮▮ **Master's, Public Health** AASB (.30 FTE)	**Experience:** Experience with program management, operations, data collection, and evaluation with educators. **Responsibilities:** Oversee evaluation contract, provide data snapshots for school staff to refine implementation practices, coaching using data to assess TS milestone progress.
Grant Manager ▮▮▮▮▮▮	**Experience:** Experience in Tribal organizations and nonprofits monitoring grants and compliance. Has worked closely on school district and Tribal Head

Bachelor's, Accounting AASB (.25 FTE)	Start grant programs overseeing federal and state grants. **Responsibilities:** Create systems for strong documentation and subrecipient monitoring, coordinate team to prepare federal reports, work with evaluation team to ensure templates and surveys are completed, work with finance office to ensure authorized and timely spending.
Education Specialist II ██████████ **Master's, Social Work** **Licensed Social Worker** AK DEED (.15 FTE)	**Experience:** Over 20 years with DEED overseeing school counselor support programs across the state. A lead contributor to the TS framework and toolkit. **Responsibilities:** Oversees mental health specialist/school-based coach, serves as a member of the TES advisory team, reviews materials, serves as a liaison for the state to TES activities, organizes statewide trainings for educators and counselors.
Mental Health Specialist/ **School-Based Coach** AK DEED (1 FTE)	**Experience:** Position will be hired upon award. **Responsibilities:** One of the lead coaches under the coordination of AASB's trauma-engaged coordinator. Focus will be on deconstructing trauma, mental health consultation (tier 2), and referrals to additional support services. The DEED coach will serve on the workgroup and participate in continuous quality improvement.
Senior Researcher ██████████ **Ph.D., Higher Education** EdNW (1,008 Hours)	**Experience:** Trained in quantitative methods for program evaluation and a What Works Clearinghouse-certified review for group designs. Expertise in designing and implementing evaluations of school- and teacher-level interventions on student outcomes. **Responsibilities:** Lead all aspects of impact evaluation, including data collection with AASB, DEED, and participating districts, ensure impact evaluation is designed to meet What Works Clearinghouse standards, serve as liaison between EdNW and AASB teams.
Researcher ██████████ **Ph.D., Culturally Responsive** **Evaluation** EdNW (1,063 Hours)	**Experience:** Designing and implementing mixed-methods evaluations. Facilitates meaningful stakeholder involvement and incorporates a culturally responsive and equity lens. **Responsibilities:** Lead all aspects of culturally responsive implementation evaluation, including developing and implementing data collection (surveys, focus groups, interviews) and analysis.
Practice Expert ██████████ **Ph.D., Youth Organization** **and Human Development** EdNW (138 Hours)	**Experience:** Evaluation, training, and technical support for initiatives focused on equity in youth development, school-community partnership, and systems change. Has conducted applied research and formative evaluation on social, emotional, and civic development in both school and community contexts. **Responsibilities:** Support implementation evaluation (qualitative analysis), provide SEL expertise to support implementation and impact evaluations.
Additional AASB team members: ██████████ (Co-project Director- Conditions for Learning, Manager, .25 FTE), ██████████ (Finance Officer/Finance Tech, .10 FTE), ██████████ (Community Dialogues and Cultural integration, .15 FTE), ██████████ (Grant Administrator, .15 FTE), ██████████ (Policy Director, .02 FTE), ██████████ (School Climate Coordinator, .05 FTE), ██████████ (Communications Coordinator, .05 FTE), ██████████ (Executive Director, Authorized representative, .05 FTE) Additional Education Northwest Team: ██████████ (Manager); Communications, Finance and IRB.	

D. Management Plan

Achieving Objectives On Time and Within Budget

Project Transform uses a variety of strategies to efficiently accomplish objectives within

the available budget (see details in the budget narrative). ████████████████

████████████████████ will work to make sure that staff members from AASB and

DEED, evaluators, and local education agencies have clear timelines and deliverables. There will

be an easy-to-read one-page timeline shared with all stakeholders and a document with annual

milestones for each partner. These will be monitored by the grant management team and external

partners monthly. This will include monitoring match spending, AASB spending, staff

allocation, and reimbursement requests to ensure that all partners are on track with spending and

project deliverables. The AASB Trauma Engaged Schools Coordinator and AK DEED

Behavioral Specialist will convene bi-monthly meetings of the Project Transform Workgroup.

This workgroup will oversee inputs, implementation, and quality improvements. Both AASB and

EdNW have successfully implemented and evaluated an i3 grant and will monitor progress.

Clearly Defined Responsibilities

AASB, DEED, EdNW, and local education agencies have developed an efficient

management plan with clear responsibilities for each staff member. The Statewide Trauma-

Informed Schools Workgroup, co-led by AASB and DEED, will oversee this project. AASB and

DEED work regularly with Alaska school districts to address school climate, conditions for

learning, curriculum development, and mental health supports. Each organization has extensive

experience working together and with our partners in rural and Indigenous communities.

EdNW will serve as the external evaluator and meet monthly with AASB's Data and

Evaluation Coordinator to ensure alignment and progress. A leader in education evaluation,

EdNW has worked on numerous Alaska-based projects over the past 50 years and has

successfully served as principal investigator for EIR/i3 grants.

Individual staff responsibilities build on the expertise of each staff member in grant

management, educational coaching, evaluation, or TES and meet the needs that have been

identified by participating local education agencies (see Table 6). Upon award, all team members

will meet to clarify their roles and to adjust the support needed for any of the deliverables. Each

organization will update their job descriptions to ensure that the responsibilities for this project

are embedded into each position. A Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) continuous quality improvement

cycle will support making iterative improvements as needed (see Section E).

Timelines and Milestones

Figure 3 highlights the broad five-year timeline. An initial planning period and pilot

study at one school will occur in the first eight months (Table 7). Implementation with the first

cohort will begin in August 2023. The second cohort will be added in the 2024–25 school year.

Figure 3: Project Transform Overview

Table 7: Project Transform Planning and Pilot Milestones: January–August 2023

Grant Manager, Director: Receive award, engage in grant onboarding, and post positions.	January
Director and LEA Superintendent: Finalize educator stipend incentive system.	February
Grant Manager: Update memorandum of understanding with budgets and timeline with each local education agency partner and state education agency.	February
Director: Finalize onboarding new hire.	February
Director: Follow procurement policies to finalize contracts.	February
TES Coordinator: Establish DEED, AASB, and key partner advisory team meeting schedule.	February
Team: Attend EIR trainings for orientation.	TBD

Grant Manager, TES Coordinator, PIO: Develop communication materials.	February
Advisory Team/Management Team: Workgroup/Pilot CQI meetings.	Bi-monthly
Grant Manager: Finalize reporting fiscal and program reporting templates.	March
Advisory Team/ Evaluation Team: Finalize evaluation plans and data collection protocols.	March
Management and Coordinators: Host orientation for onboarding of school leadership. Finalize staff recruitment for pilot cohort.	March
Director/Grant Manager/Finance Officer: Submit performance report.	March
Coordinators, Specialists, and Director: On-site or virtual visits for pilot.	March
TES Coordinator and Manager: Finalize dates for TS foundations trainings. Share with district office and principals.	March
Transforming Schools Coaches/Coordinators: Launch pilot school activities.	March/April
Evaluation Team: Collect data and gather feedback from pilot school.	March–May
SEL/TES Coordinator and Manager: Set dates for in-service and site-based planning for Cohort 1 (fall).	April
Evaluation Team: Confirm group (intervention versus control) assignments for Cohorts 1 and 2.	April
SEL/TES Coordinator and DEED Specialists: Create coaching and site-based support schedules with each school.	April–May
Evaluation Team: Analyze and present key findings from pilot implementation project	May–July
DEED/AASB Coordinators: Refine asynchronous materials, milestone guides, professional learning, coaching tools, and communication materials based off pilot project.	May–July
TES Coordinator: Place finalized materials in shared resource folders and platforms.	July
SEL/TES Coordinator and Manager: Launch first cohort of intervention sites.	August

See detailed timeline for all five years (Appendix J7).

E. Project Evaluation

EdNW will serve as independent evaluator for the five-year project. For over 55 years, EdNW has committed to a vision of excellent and equitable education for all. We acknowledge that educational inequities result from systemic racism and economic injustice and commit to addressing these inequities in our work. The EdNW team, led by ███████████ has deep expertise in evaluation methods, including designing and conducting evaluations that

meet What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) standards, as well as in trauma-engaged practices and

SEL (see Table 6). EdNW also brings experience evaluating an i3 validation grant in Alaska and

two current early-phase EIR grants awarded to Louisiana State University and Portland Public

Schools. The evaluation will be guided by research questions (RQs) outlined in Table 8.

Table 8: Research Questions and Data Sources

Research Questions	Data Sources
Impact Evaluation	
1. What is the impact of attending a Project Transform school on student **achievement in math and reading** for students in grades 3–9, compared to attending a non-Project Transform school? (*WWC domain = general academic achievement*; outcome 4.3) 2. What is the impact of attending a Project Transform school on **student engagement** (attendance, truancy) for students in grades K–12, compared to attending a non-Project Transform school? (*WWC domain = student engagement in school*; outcome 4.1)	• Alaska DEED administrative data (student demographics, school characteristics, AK STAR scores)
3. What is the impact of attending a Project Transform school on school-level average **social and emotional learning (SEL) competencies (self-management, emotional regulation, self-efficacy)** for students in grades 3–12, compared to attending a non-Project Transform school? (*WWC domain = student emotional status*; outcome 4.2) 4. What is the impact of being a Project Transform school on **school-wide measures of climate (safety, positive relationships [peer, adult], cultural responsiveness)**, compared to being a non-Project Transform school? (*WWC domain = School Climate*; outcome 3.2)	• AASB School Climate & Connectedness Survey (administered by Panorama)
5. How does the impact of attending a Project Transform school on **student outcomes** vary by student demographics (e.g., eligibility for free or reduced-price lunch, gender, grade, race)?	• Alaska DEED administrative data, AASB School Climate & Connectedness Survey
Implementation Evaluation	
6. What are the key components of the Project Transform program? 7. What are the thresholds for low, adequate, and ideal fidelity of implementation for Project Transform?	• Document review (logic model, project plans, training materials, fidelity rubric)
8. To what extent is Project Transform implemented with fidelity, and how does fidelity vary across schools? How does Project Transform build the capacity of schools to support students who have experienced trauma? (outcomes 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 3.1. 3.3) 9. To what extent are Project Transform activities associated with increasing teacher knowledge and confidence in trauma-engaged practices? (outcomes 2.1, 2.2)	• Surveys (staff) • Focus groups (staff) • Semi-structured interviews (school leadership) • AASB School Climate & Connectedness Survey,

10. What are the barriers and facilitators of Project Transform development and implementation? In what ways can the Project Transform program model be refined to support implementation?	Alaska DEED, district (student)

Impact evaluation. EdNW will design and implement a school-level randomized controlled trial (RCT) to test the impact of the intervention on student achievement, engagement, SEL competencies, and school climate. Using the WWC review protocol for Supportive Learning Environment Interventions (version 4.0), the study design for student achievement in math and reading (RQ1) and engagement (RQ2) is intended to meet WWC group design standards without reservations. The study design for our analysis of student SEL competencies (RQ3) and school climate (RQ4) is intended to meet WWC group design standards with reservations for cluster-level effects, as the data source for this outcome is at the school level.

Sample and design. Five rural school districts in Alaska with a total of 55 schools and approximately 10,000 students and 800 staff have been recruited to participate. Twenty schools (the maximum feasible for concurrent implementation) will be randomly assigned to the treatment condition across two cohorts. We will account for different probabilities of assignment to treatment in our analysis. Individuals at control schools will not receive Project Transform components (i.e., the control schools will only have access to "business-as-usual" opportunities for training and support). A single school (selected from a participating district and excluded from the analytic sample) will pilot elements of Project Transform between January and July 2023. The pilot study will be used to refine the logic model, project training, and implementation materials for the study cohorts. The first cohort of schools will be randomized for the start of school year (SY) 2023–24 and the second cohort for the start of SY 2024–25. EdNW will collect data and conduct analysis from Sys 2023–24 to 2025–26, with intermediate outcomes estimated after one year of treatment and main outcomes after two years. Final analyses estimated and

reported during SY 2026–27 will include both cohorts. All 34 schools initially assigned to the control condition will receive the program in SY 2026–27.

Data. EdNW will use valid and reliable outcome measures to assess the impact of the intervention on student and school outcomes. School-level SEL competencies and climate outcomes will be collected from the **AASB School Climate & Connectedness Survey**. This survey is administered annually by Panorama across all participating districts and has demonstrated strong internal consistency with Cronbach's $\alpha \geq 0.69$ across all individual scales (AIR, 2016). These data are available as school-level averages. Student achievement in math and reading, attendance, truancy, demographics (grade, gender, race/ethnicity, eligibility for free or reduced-price lunch, English learner status, and special education status), and school characteristics will be collected from **DEED administrative data**. Math and reading achievement will be measured using **AK STAR Proficiency Rates**, which use the **NWEA MAP Growth assessment**, a computer adaptive assessment administered to students in grades 3–9 in participating districts to monitor literacy and numeracy growth. EdNW will enter into data-sharing agreements with AASB and DEED.

Attrition. To mitigate the likelihood that the impact evaluation identifies an effect due to changes in the composition of schools or students—and not the intervention itself—we will monitor attrition rates for clusters (schools) and individuals (students). Students who enroll more than six weeks after randomization (late joiners) will be excluded from the analytic sample. We anticipate individual-level attrition (or nonresponse) will be low and that cluster-level attrition will be very low, as a school would need to close to be removed from its cluster. If either cluster- or individual-level attrition rates exceed the WWC thresholds, we will establish baseline equivalencies between schools and students assigned to treatment and control conditions, and our

analytic models will include baseline measures as prescribed by the WWC.

Analytic approach. To address RQs 1–4, we will use multilevel regression models to estimate the intent-to-treat (ITT) impact of the intervention, where students and schools will be analyzed in the group to which they were randomly assigned. A binary indicator for school-level assignment (i.e., treatment or control condition) will be the predictor of interest. We will include a cohort indicator to account for any variation between implementation cohorts and school-level random effects to address non-independence of students clustered within schools (Theobald, 2018). Student demographic covariates and baseline measures (when available) will be included to improve the precision of our estimates (Bloom, 2006; Bloom et al., 2007). In addition to our confirmatory analyses, we will conduct exploratory analyses to examine variation in estimated effects by student demographics (RQ5) to understand if and how the intervention can best support underserved students. We will use a WWC-established imputation method for all missing data in the analysis, including both outcome and baseline measures, and individuals with imputed outcome data will be counted as attriting when assessing individual-level attrition.

Statistical power. Our power analysis (Dong & Maynard, 2013) indicates that our study will be powered for a minimum detectable effect size (MDES) of 0.20 (two-tailed test, $\alpha = 0.05$, power = 0.80), with 20 treatment schools, 34 control schools, and an average of 175 students attending each school. The intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC) between schools is assumed to be 0.11, student-level $R^2 = 0.42$, and school-level $R^2 = 0.52$, based on studies of SEL and academic achievement (Dong et al., 2006; Hedges & Heldberg, 2007).

Performance feedback and assessment of progress

Throughout the evaluation, EdNW will provide formative feedback to support the development and improvement of project activities. Formative evaluation activities will include

participant perceptions of program activities, implementation, and short-term results. Data from the formative evaluation will come from data sources described above to explore the extent to which *Project Transform* increases teachers' knowledge and confidence in trauma-engaged practices and support for students who experience trauma (RQ9), and implementation barriers and facilitators (RQ10).

The PDSA cycle is a structure for continuous quality improvement that embeds the use of data and evidence in the evaluation process. We will implement the PDSA cycle through monthly meetings with AASB staff members. First, we will identify goals and staff and student outcome indicators (Plan). Then, each quarter EdNW will collect data (described in Table 8) to assess the quality of program components and monitor progress on anticipated staff and student outcomes (Do). In later meetings, we will review these data and discuss implementation fidelity and progress (Study). EdNW will then investigate sites with low implementation fidelity to assess implementation barriers and strategies for resolving them. AASB and DEED can use these results to determine if changes are needed and revise their strategies (Act).

The implementation fidelity study during SY 2023–24 will provide information to guide continuous improvement efforts in SY 2024–25. Program outcome monitoring and improvement will continue during Sys 2024–25 and 2025–26. EdNW will collaborate with the project staff to update the evaluation plan based on lessons learned and will provide annual reports summarizing information on all RQs, including impact analyses during Sys 2024–25 to 2026–27.

Implementation measures of key project components, mediators, outcomes, and threshold for implementation fidelity

███████████ will lead the implementation evaluation and provide feedback to project staff at regular intervals to support the iterative refinement of the program model. During SY 2023–24, the implementation study team will refine the logic model and documents related

to project training and implementation to determine key components of the program (RQ6).

Next, with the workgroup we will co-develop an implementation fidelity rubric consisting of

components that align with the model and key thresholds for low, adequate, and ideal

implementation (RQ7). Fidelity scores will be computed for each treatment school annually

during Sys 2024–25 to 2025–26 to determine implementation fidelity and variation (RQ8). Table

9 provides an example of how the matrix for the training component of the intervention might

look.

Table 9: Example of Measuring Implementation Fidelity for Foundations Training

Indicator	Low	Adequate	Ideal
Training attendance	Fewer than 75 percent of eligible participants attend foundations training	75–95 percent of eligible participants attend foundations training	Over 95 percent of eligible participants attend foundations training

EdNW will use extant data and project records, primarily related to participation in

program components in Table 3 (self-assessment, reflective practice groups, professional

learning communities, milestone guides) and schoolwide adoption of TES policies (SEL

curriculum, teacher self-care practices, and PD structures) to assess implementation fidelity. We

will also collect agendas, notes, and artifacts from training and meetings in 2023–24 to 2024–25.

During Sys 2023–24 (cohort 1) and 2024–25 (cohort 2), EdNW will conduct focus

groups with a random selection of treatment school staff members and interview site

administrators to assess implementation successes and barriers related to key aspects of the logic

model and short-term outcomes, including increases in teacher knowledge and confidence in

trauma-engaged practices. In Sys 2024–25 and 2025–26, EdNW will administer an educator

survey in treatment schools to determine implementation successes and challenges and

satisfaction with PD, reflective practice groups, and professional learning communities.