

# Educator Voice in Trauma-Informed Professional Development for Alaskan K-12 Educators

APBS Student Grant in Partnership with NWPBIS Network

**Thank you to Dr. Geovanna Rodriguez, Dr. Jessica Swain-Bradway and NWPBIS team, Dr. Rhonda Nese and Krista Rice for their support in this project**



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# Objectives

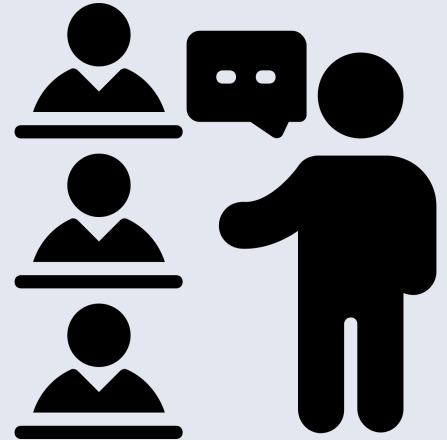
1. Define trauma, trauma-informed, disability and neurodiversity
  2. Understand why disability should be included in trauma-informed efforts to promote equity and intersectionality
  3. Review and reflect on how educator voice is important in understanding barriers and supports to the use of trauma-informed practices
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# Invitation to participate

Please participate in whatever way feels comfortable.  
For example, you might

- Use technology interactions
- Your voice, at any point
- Sit, take notes and listen
- Email to contact me afterwards

In the words of advocate Lydia X Z Brown “ I honor and respect how you come to this space.”





# Introduction

# About me: Alex Newson (she/her)

I am a 3rd year multiply neurodivergent doctoral student at the University of Oregon

I am a certified Special Education teacher who has taught in public and private school settings in the Pacific Northwest

Research Interests:

- Neuroinclusive research methodology
- Trauma-informed, neurodiversity-affirming educator training
- Autistic mental health and well-being







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# Context for the Study

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# Background Information

- NWPBIS Network is a non-profit organization that provides professional development, coaching, and support in “all things PBIS & MTSS”
- Anchorage School District (ASD) contracted NWPBIS to support their efforts to reduce seclusion and restraint as mandated by the Department of Justice
- A 5-year action plan was created to assist ASD to decrease exclusionary practices through PBIS while also focusing on mental health, equity, and trauma-responsive practices





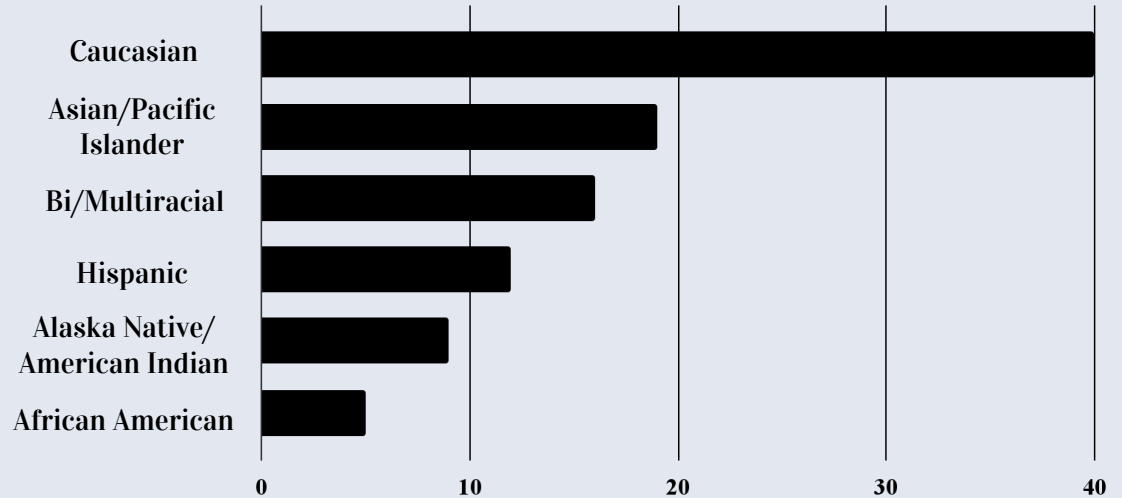
# Demographics

110 Different Languages Spoken

2,000 Square Miles Covered

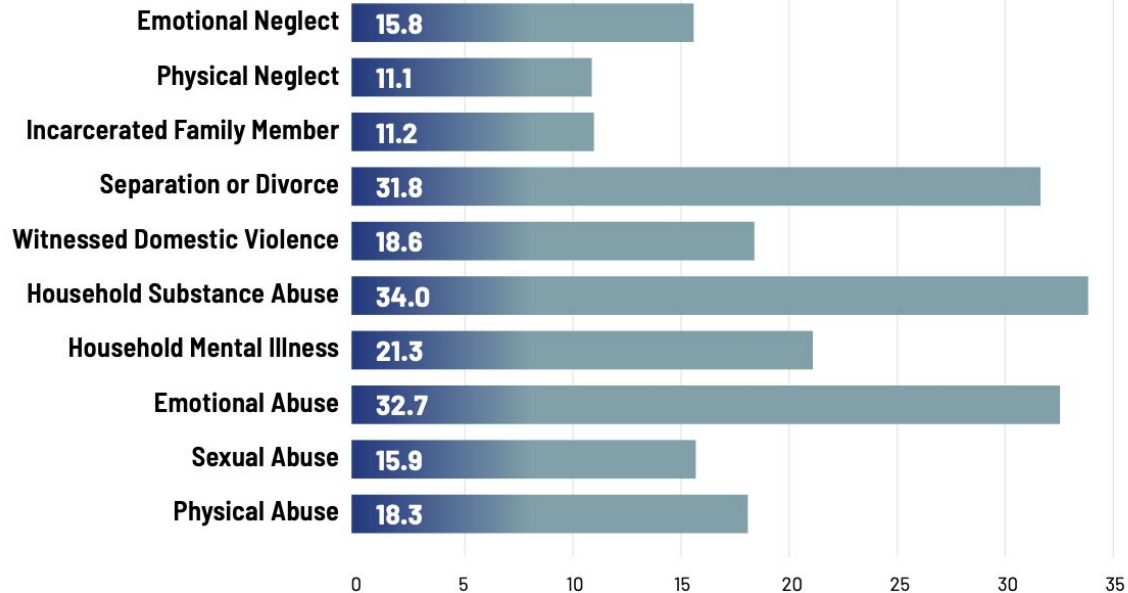
43,500 Total Students

Race/Ethnicity Percentages of Students at ASD



# Alaska Specific Data

## 1. Percentage of Alaskan Adults who Reported Individual ACEs by Type



Source: 2014-2015 [Alaska Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System](#), Section of Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Alaska Division of Public Health, & Centers for Disease Control

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# Questions for you

What do you notice about the context?

What more would you like to know?

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# So What Am I (WE) Doing?

## Fancy Version

The current study seeks to include teacher voice in professional development through an exploratory sequential mixed methods approach that examines teacher perspectives related to trauma-informed practices that are better tailored to their schools, students, and environments. Our goal is to honor and understand teacher perceptions about current barriers and supports in order to create a training that focuses on the utilization of trauma-informed practices and current issues relating to suspected disability, neurodiversity, race, equity issues, power sharing, etc. Once the interviews are analyzed for themes, those insights will be incorporated into the professional development opportunities/series. Through the use of pre and post surveys with participants, we seek to empirically assess and identify if the training had an effect on increasing and improving knowledge of trauma, trauma-informed practices, implementation of trauma-informed PBIS in schools

## Regular Version

- Method: Mixed methods
  - Semi structured interviews with educators
  - PD with Pre/Post Survey
- Process
  - Talk with teachers about trauma-informed practices and what they want to see and already know
  - Use that information to create the professional development
- Side Quest:
  - Educator perspectives on the intersection of trauma-informed practices and disability, neurodiversity and other historically marginalized identities

# Research Questions

## Question 1

What are educator's current perceptions, knowledge, and understanding about trauma and trauma-informed practices?  
What are educators perceptions of barriers and supports to creating trauma-informed environments in schools?

## Question 2

Does the introduction of trauma-informed professional development increase knowledge of trauma-informed practices for educators as measured by pre and post surveys?

## Question 3

Are there differences in educator perception of treatment acceptability of trauma informed PBIS implementation after the introduction of the trauma-informed professional development as measured by pre/post survey and TFI Tier 1 scores?

# Interview Questions

## Trauma/Trauma-Informed

How would you define trauma? What does that look like in schools, for teachers, and for students?

How would you define or describe trauma-informed practices? What is your experience regarding trauma-informed practices in your setting?

What is currently in place in your school or district that supports the implementation of trauma-informed practices? What are the barriers to using trauma-informed practices in your school?

What training have you received regarding trauma-informed practices in schools? How effective/helpful was that training? What was missing or what else did you want to know more about?

## Equity/Intersectionality

How can trauma-informed practices be used to increase equity in schools?

Are trauma-informed practices a universal approach or something that should be used with a particular set of students in need? Why?

How can we include or focus on students with marginalized identities (students with disabilities, BIPOC students, neurodivergent students etc) when talking about trauma informed practices?

How does student culture, identity and language relate to the use of trauma-informed practices in schools? Do we consider neurology, race, ethnicity when thinking about trauma-informed practices?



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# Interview Demographics

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## Interviews

Conducted from  
January-March 2023

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## Educators

Health Specialist, SPED,  
MTSS Behavior Support,  
SBBS Teacher, Gen Ed,  
ELL Teacher

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## Schools

3 Elementary and 4  
Secondary

54%

## Response Rate

Assisted by Krista Rice,  
School Psychologist at  
ASD

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# Review of Terms

From Research and Educators

# Research Defining Trauma:

## Individual

- Occurs to one person
- Can be a one-time, prolonged or recurrent event
- Examples include abuse, neglect, abandonment, witnessing stressful event

(NCTSN, nd; SAMHSA, 2014)

## Collective

- Traumatic event that has impact on communities, groups of people, society, or globally
- Can elicit government policy, change societal norms, and adjust communities and groups
- Examples include experiences after COVID-19, a natural disaster, or political uprising

(Turmaud, 2020; Aydin, 2017)



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# How Educators Define Trauma

“I would define as anything from that has to do with **mental health** that has lifelong effects, whether it's mental or physical effects on individuals. It can be a **small trauma, big trauma**, but I believe every person, no matter how their upbringing, they've had some sort of trauma in their lives”

“Trauma is a significant event that happens in a young person's life that **needs extra supports** to deal with a significant I wanna say, a significant negative event.”

“So I would define trauma as an experience that someone has gone through that has actually **shaped how they react, or the way they interact with their environment or their world**. And I think that a lot of times trauma can be **outward or inward**. I don't think I can define it as a singular thing, but I do think it's an experience that something a person goes through that can impact many parts of their lives.”

“Any adverse past experience that can **inhibit functioning in day to day life** and can be **triggered by any number of factors or elements**”

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# How Educators Define Trauma-Informed

“So I think, being able to understand that each child comes into our classroom with a different experience...But I also think that being aware that every kiddo has a **different background, a different experience**, that they're coming into the classroom with and being mindful of that. Being very aware that some kiddos are going to be there that have a lot more in their lives and a lot more that they're coming into the classroom with.”

“To truly be trauma informed, is to be **baking that [practice] in even into the curriculum**, into everything... An underlying theme, no matter what I'm teaching is, I want to be model of being compassionate and **creating an environment where students are celebrated and honored**”

“It seems like oftentimes it has to be more than just be something you're aware of, though, like there have to be **strategies or things that you can actually do**... reminding yourself that there's more to the story than what you always see and kind of knowing some of the things to look for that indicate that that there might be **trauma at the root of the behavior**.”

“**Knowledge based practices with a blueprint** on what to do when certain things happen”

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## "Trauma informed"

is not a buzzword or a strategy. It's a systemic shift in our mindsets, approaches, and everyday practices

@MSDUANE

<https://www.addisonduane.com/>

## Research Defining Trauma Informed:

Trauma informed practices in education have no one universally accepted definition.

A definition that resonates with me is:

"Trauma informed educational practices **respond** to the impacts of trauma on the entire school community and **prevent** future trauma from occurring. **Equity** and **social justice** are key concerns of trauma informed educators as we make **changes** in our individual practice, classrooms, schools and in district wide and state systems" (pg. 10)

Alex Shevrin Venet (2020) *Equity-Centered Trauma-Informed Education*

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# Questions for you

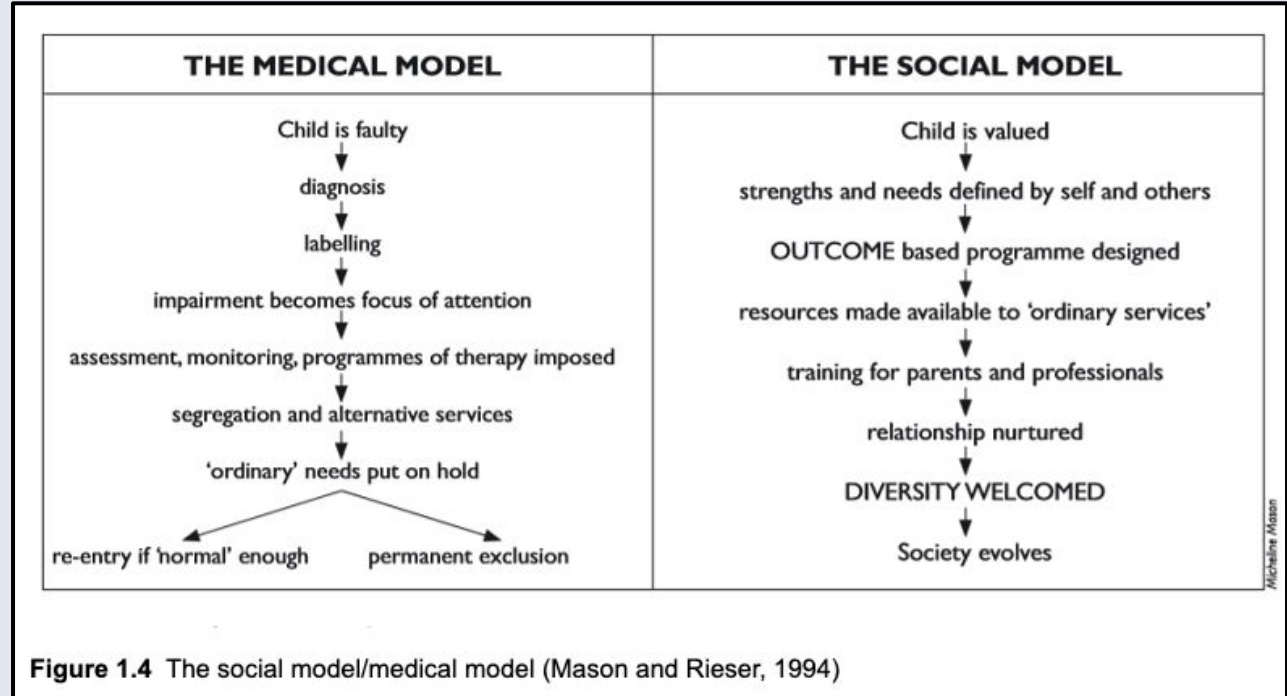
What stuck out to you about these different definitions?

What other definitions have you heard?

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# Gaps in Trauma Informed Framework

Although the attention on cultural responsiveness and equity is an essential step forward, there are limitations around how to include disability or the unique needs of students with disabilities. This may be due to differences in conceptual models of disability.



**Question: How many of you are familiar with these models?**



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# Defining Disability:

The ADA defines it as a “person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activity. This includes people who have a record of such an impairment, even if they do not currently have a disability. It also includes individuals who do not have a disability but are regarded as having a disability.”

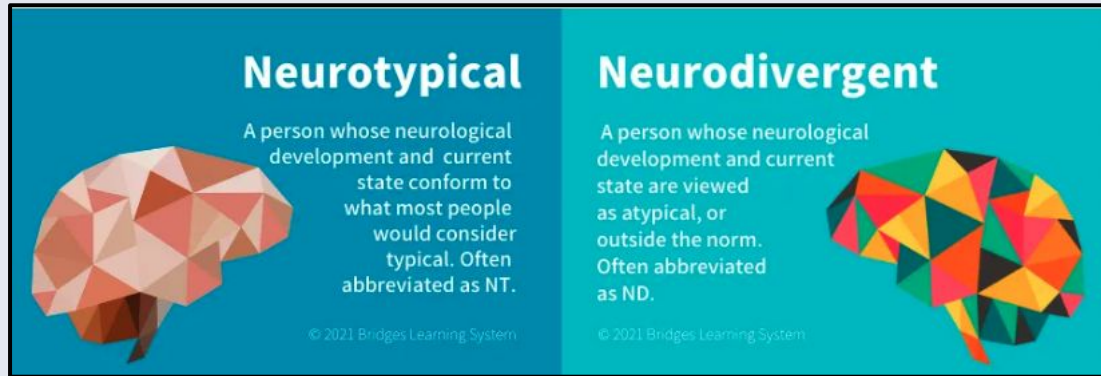
The Inclusive Design Research Centre defines it as “a mismatch between our needs and the design features of a product, built environment, system or service”

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# Defining Neurodiversity



- “Neurodiversity refers to the virtually infinite neuro-cognitive variability within Earth’s human population [...] Neurodiversity is a subset of biodiversity...” (Dr. Judy Singer)
- “Neurodiversity is a natural and valuable form of human diversity.” (Dr. Nick Walker)
- A political movement and identity



Alt Text: Definitions of neurotypical and neurodivergent with two different colored brains

[Celebrate Neurodiversity in Education](#) | [IFundWomen](#)

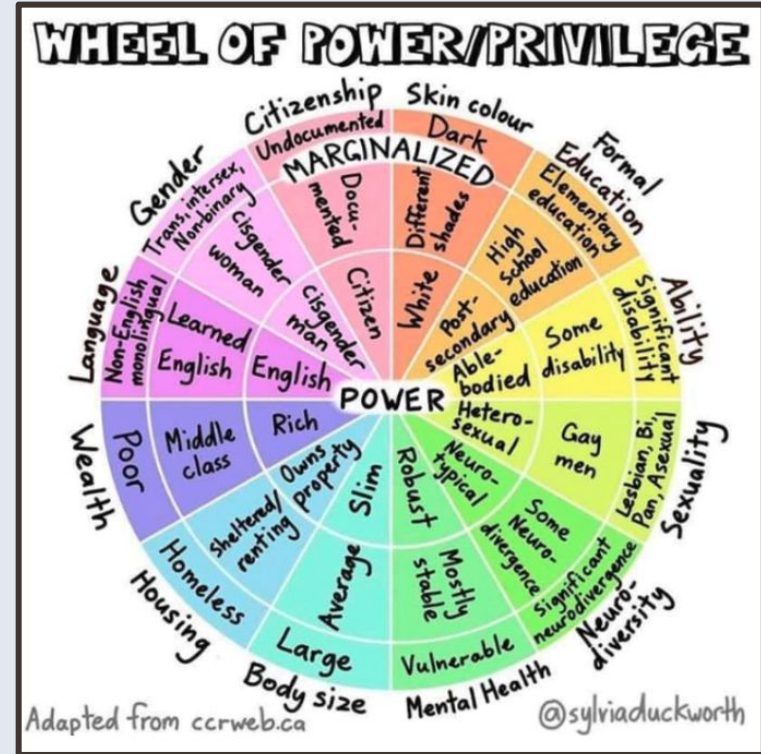
# Why should Disability be Included?

Students with disabilities, or identify as neurodivergent, at higher risks for experiencing trauma, in and outside of school (Blake et al., 2012; Byrne, 2022; Cavanaugh, 2016)

Students with disabilities who identify as Black, Latinx, and Native/Indigenous have larger discrepancies in discipline as compared to their white peers (U.S. Department of Education, 2021)

Majority autistic individuals identify as LGBTQIA+ (Hillier et al., 2020; Koffer Miller et al., 2022; Mallipeddi & VanDaalen, 2022; McAuliffe et al., 2022)

Alt text: Wheel of Power and Privilege. Wheel is sectioned off into 12 color coded identities with three different levels of power.



# Alaska Specific Data

## 2. Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) Incidences Among Alaskan Students and Select Outcomes

Outcomes	0 ACEs	4 or More ACEs	Increase from those with 0 to 4+ ACEs
Learning Disabilities	6.2%	23%	3.6 times greater
Attention Deficit Disorder	4.7%	21%	4.5 times greater
Individual Education Plan	7%	27%	3.8 times greater
Repeated a Grade	2.9%	16%	5.4 times greater

Source: Child and Adolescent Health Management Initiative (2012). 2011-2012 *National Survey of Children's Health*, U.S. Department of Health and Social Services, Analysis by the Alaska Mental Health Board.

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# Questions for you

Do you think disability should be included in  
trauma-informed efforts?

How have you seen it meaningfully included?

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# Why Educator Voice is Important

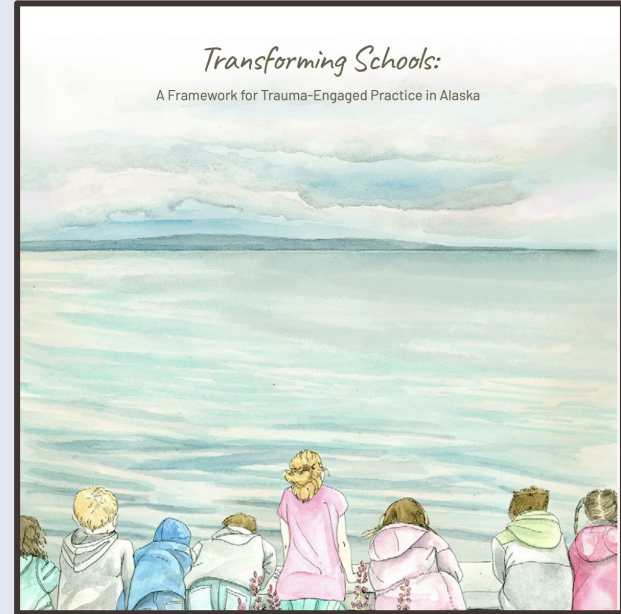
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# Resource to Practice Gap

Transforming Schools: A Framework for Trauma-Engaged Practice in Alaska was created by over 200 community members, with assistance from:

- First Alaskans Institute
- Alaska Department of Education
- Alaskan Community Mental Health Services
- Statewide Suicide Prevention Council
- Association of Alaska School Boards
- Alaska's Council for Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault
- Alaska Afterschool Network
- Advisory Board for Alcoholism and Drug Abuse

However, only **1 out of 7 educators** interviewed knew anything about it.



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# Educators Reported

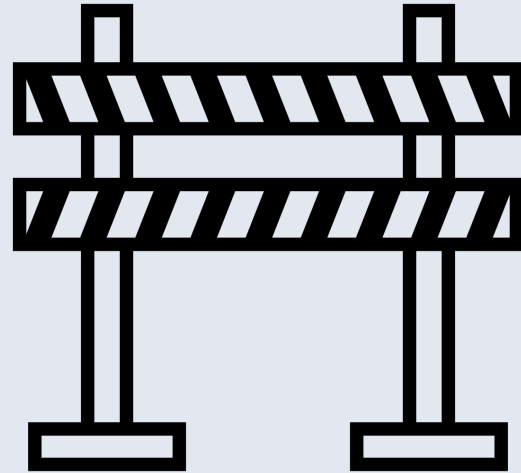
- That they did not receive any training related to trauma or trauma-informed practices while at ASD, but participated in the interviews because they were seeking information
  - Wanted the trainings to be more than a one-off session, but something implemented over time with multiple opportunities for collaboration and practice
  - Want to see trainings that include community members, students, and those with historically marginalized identities
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# Able to Understand Barriers and Facilitators

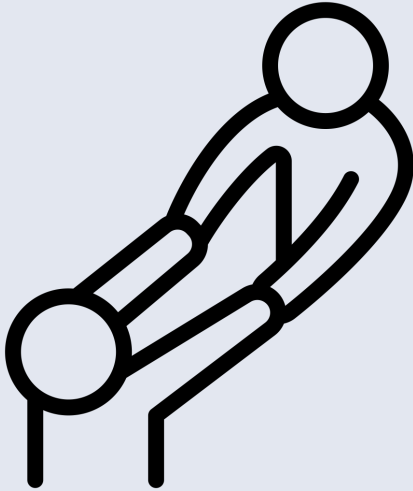
## Barriers

- Lack of clear definitions by district
- Feeling “exhausted and under valued”
- “Pull up by bootstraps” or “good ole boy” attitudes
- Lack of experience
- Lack of staff support
- Traditional use of punitive discipline and outdated policies

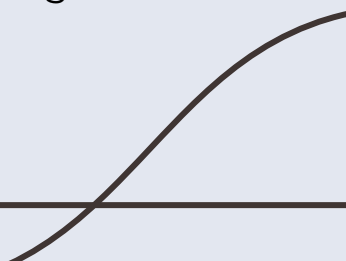


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# Able to Understand Barriers and Facilitators



## Facilitators

- Supportive school team and school psychologist
  - Break space with mental health supports for students
  - Strong focus on SEL and prevention
  - Comprehensive PBIS implementation
  - “Being asked what our opinions are” or “Someone actually listening”
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# Questions for you

How have you elicited educator or participant response? What worked and didn't?

Reflect on barriers and facilitators. What did you think was missing? What did it bring up for you?

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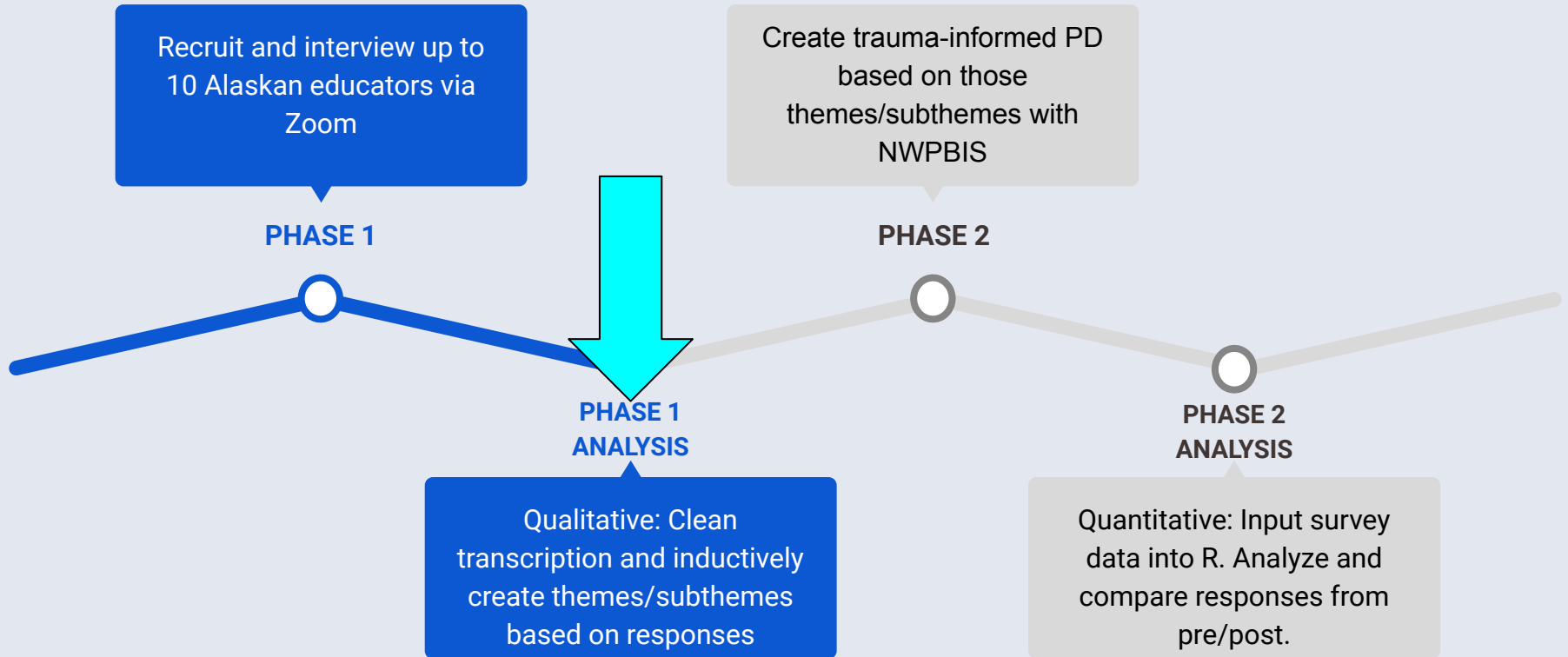


# Next Steps in Study

Looking forward with ASD

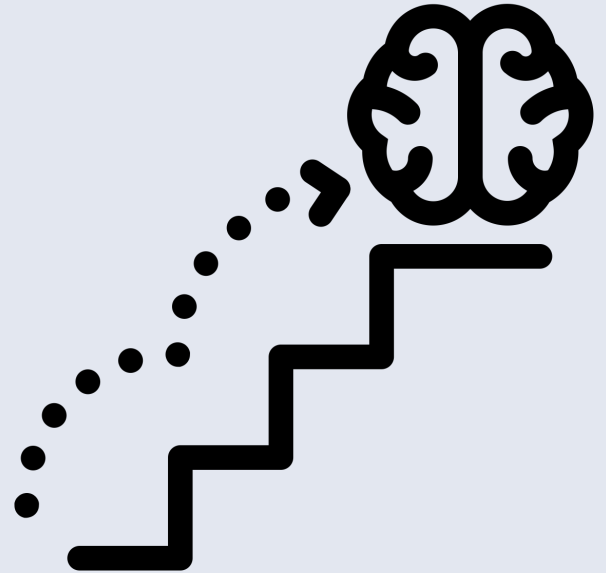


# Roadmap



# What We Hope to Learn

- Understand current levels of knowledge, barriers and supports to TI practices
- Understand educators perspectives of trauma, trauma-informed practices in PBIS. Additional layer of perceptions of intersections of disability, neurodiversity, and other historically marginalized groups.
- How to best include educator voice in the creation of professional development



# Thanks

Do you have any questions?

Email: [anewson@uoregon.edu](mailto:anewson@uoregon.edu)

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