

Washington State University

College of Education

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Will defend the dissertation

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Faculty, students and the general public are encouraged to attend

**CHILDHOOD TRAUMA: A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY OF ELEMENTARY
EDUCATORS' ATTITUDES AND PERCEPTIONS**

Chair: Kristin Huggins

Developments in neuroscience over the last 30 years show evidence that the physical, psychological, and emotional burden of enduring trauma during childhood is a driver for unequal achievement in school and in life. The prevalence and associated risks of childhood trauma have prompted many youth-serving organizations to adopt a trauma-informed approach to responding to and supporting the needs of students impacted by trauma. The purpose of this case study was to explore the attitudes and perceptions of school-based trauma-informed care among elementary educators at a highly-impacted school located in Washington state. In this qualitative case study, survey data was collected from a total of 51 educators, 27 teachers, 19 para-educators, and five additional school staff, representing an 82 percent response rate. Survey results were analyzed using descriptive reporting. Additional qualitative data were collected through nine individual, semi-structured interviews and artifact review both of which were analyzed using conventional content analysis and descriptive reporting. Findings in this study indicated that study participants held favorable attitudes toward working with students impacted by trauma and had positive perceptions regarding the application of trauma-informed principles in a school setting. Staff noted, however, that their attitudes and perceptions have evolved over time through

participating in formal professional development, but, most meaningfully, from collaboratively processing and reflecting on their individual experiences working with students impacted by trauma. Study participants identified the issue of childhood trauma as a widespread community issue and indicated their collective commitment to supporting students impacted by trauma achieve both academic and social-emotional growth. Recommendations include fostering a trauma-informed and responsive school culture by embedding social-emotional learning through multi-tiered system of support, providing professional development and collaboration opportunities, and ensuring appropriate funding for ongoing professional learning, hiring and retaining qualified staff, and purchasing curricula, supplies and materials to support and reinforce TIC practices.

Keywords: trauma-informed care, school-based trauma-informed care, childhood trauma, adverse childhood experiences, toxic stress, trauma-informed approach, trauma-informed schools, educational practices.