



Human Trafficking in **AMERICA'S SCHOOLS**



- Human Trafficking Webinar Series – Reducing Student Vulnerability in the Face of Community Risk Factors

*Thursday, April 21, 2022 | 3:00 – 4:15 PM ET
Transcript*

Cindy Wilson:

Once again, good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to today's webinar: Reducing Student Vulnerability in the Face of Community Risk Factors. This is the sixth in the series of webinars sponsored by the US Department of Education since January 2020 to focus on the critical role that American schools can play in addressing human trafficking. We're glad to have you with us today. My name is Cindy Carraway-Wilson, and I'm a Training Specialist for the National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments, or NCSSE. NCSSE is funded by the Office of Safe and Supportive Schools in the office of Elementary and Secondary Education at the US Department of Education.

Our aim is to build the capacity of state education agencies, districts, and schools to make school climate improvements, foster school safety, and maintain supportive, engaging, and healthy learning environments to support academic enrichment and success for all students. To learn more about NCSSE and to access a range of resources that address school climate conditions for learning, we encourage you to visit our website. To give you a sense of what the website looks like and what it includes, here we share some of our most popular products on the left and an image of our homepage on the right.

Please note the materials you see today, including the slides, referenced resources, and an archived version of the recording, will be available at the event webpage within this website. In fact, some of those items, including the slides and bios, have already been posted. Please also note you can access previous webinars in the Human Trafficking series by visiting the webinar webpage, which is listed here and is also now posted in the chat.

When you've registered, we ask you to describe which of the descriptions best describes your role. You can see from this chart that the majority of you, 30% selected other. This category includes community outreach and awareness practitioners, caseworkers and social workers, law enforcement officers, advocates, CASA volunteers, juvenile justice workers, forensics, nurses, and scientists, health advocates, and others from the educational field. 24% of you identified as specialized instructional support personnel. 10% said you were with state and local education agencies. And the rest of you identified as school administrators, community stakeholders, federal grantees, classroom teachers, parents, and students. And we welcome all of you.

We also asked you which of the following best describes your primary reason for participating in this webinar? 33% of you said that you had personal interest in addressing human trafficking. 24% of you were here for other reasons, such as the desire to keep young people safe, increasing your personal awareness of the issues, being a concerned parent or community member, and working with particularly vulnerable populations. 16% said you were part of a team that addresses human trafficking with local education agencies. 12% of you have leadership responsibilities with local educational agencies. And 8% of you are with state educational agencies. While six of you have leadership responsibility within those state agencies to address human trafficking.

Next, I'd like to take a few minutes so that we can hear about the work that the Department of Education is doing to address human trafficking. Joining us today from the department is Ruth Ryder. Ruth serves as the Deputy Assistant Secretary and the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education at the Department of Education. She has provided significant leadership in the department's efforts to address human trafficking over the past several years. A more detailed bio for Ruth can be found at the NCSSE website. Ruth.

Ruth Ryder:

Thank you so much, Cindy, and welcome to all of you who are joining us today for this important discussion. On behalf of the US Department of Education, I extend our appreciation to all of you. Your commitment to the field and passion for ensuring a positive school climate for all students is a hallmark of American education. I hope you find today's content helpful in your continued efforts to build that safe, supportive learning environment for every student.

This webinar reflects the department's commitment to addressing human trafficking and the role educators can play as members of the community who can have direct impact on both ongoing and intermittent factors that affect student vulnerability for trafficking. The work the department is now undertaking to address child trafficking is an extension of our ongoing focus on nurturing, safe, and supportive school learning environments. Places in which all students feel safe and connected to meaningful adult and peer relationships.

As part of the department's role in the Interagency Task Force to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, we are committed to helping educators support students affected by trafficking. Since early 2020, the department has led a series of projects to strengthen that support. First, we produced, with the support of the National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments, these

series of webinars addressing human trafficking. Today's webinar is the sixth in that series.

Earlier events in the series have discussed the latest research in child trafficking, including risk factors for and indicators of child trafficking. The critical nature of online safety as students find themselves increasingly engaged in virtual environments, the reintegration of students into school settings after extraction from trafficking, and the effective engagement of individuals with lived experience in trafficking. We hope you'll check out the archive versions of the past webinars in this series at the address now appearing in the chatbox and join us for future webinars on the topic of human trafficking.

Our second major activity has been the production of two critical reference documents related to child trafficking. The first document is a revision of the popular resource *Human Trafficking in America's Schools*. The update was released in January of 2021 with a goal of bringing the document up to date with recent developments in the field. This downloadable resource supports school personnel in their role as caring, principled adults who can monitor for warning signs of trafficking and involvement of students and engage in appropriate interventions as warranted. You can access this guide at the link now appearing in the chat.

The second document we've prepared is *Addressing the Growing Problem of Domestic Sex Trafficking of Minors Through PBIS*. This practice brief addresses how domestic minor sex trafficking can be approached using existing school strategies, such as positive behavioral interventions and supports. The link to this brief now appears in the chat for your reference.

Other major activity related to child trafficking is a series of resources as part of our human trafficking in America's school staff development series. Three brief online videos with subject matter experts, including those with lived experience, along with posters and social media website graphics to support them, comprise this staff development series. Titles of the three sessions are visible on-screen now. We encourage you to check out the series by using the link now being posted into the chat.

All of this information can be found on our dedicated Human Trafficking webpage at the Department of Education's website. This webpage is committed to providing key resources and reference documents to educators who are supporting students impacted by trafficking on a daily basis in American schools.

You will note that the webinars and resources I described earlier are available for your access on this webpage. And coming soon will be a supplement to the human trafficking in America's schools guide that will highlight strategies for engagement of individuals with lived experience in trafficking prevention efforts of schools. Watch for the details of the release of this supplement in coming weeks. All of these resources are rooted in the latest research and best practice information available while drawing from the wisdom of individuals with lived experience and also trafficking advocates.

Our work on these resources has been an important part of the department's commitment to supporting your efforts to address the trauma of trafficking. We look forward to bringing additional resources to you in the months to come. Thank you again for joining us today. I, along with the entire Department of Education, recognize the important work you are all undertaking to create safe, supportive environments for all students. Thank you for all that you do. I'll turn it back to Cindy now.

Cindy Wilson:

Thank you, Ruth, for your comments. We appreciate your efforts to keep human trafficking in the forefront of our minds and our practice. Now I'd like to take this opportunity to introduce one of our speakers, Mrs. Brittany Darrow. Brittany is a Survivor Expert with YouthWorks in North Dakota. And we'll provide a brief introduction to our webinar today. Brittany.

Brittany Darrow:

Thank you, Cindy. As Cindy stated, my name's Brittany Darrow. I'm a Survivor Expert working for a youth-serving organization in North Dakota. Today we'll be having a panel discussion about the chronic and acute risk factors that contribute to students' vulnerability as it relates to trafficking. As a person with lived experience, I've personally faced many of the vulnerabilities that we'll be talking about today. Along with that some of those risk factors, I've also experienced that school being the most significant protective factor I had growing up. For me, school was a safe place. I was the first student there and the last to leave.

The environment was predictable, and they were caring adults there that welcomed me in and met me where I was at. And that was everything that I needed. I believe so deeply that schools have the opportunity to leave a long-lasting impact on the lives of youth that experienced these risk factors that we'll be talking about today. And I believe this because that's who I was, and I was that same child. I'm so grateful to have an opportunity to be here. And it's an honor to welcome you guys to today's webinar. Thank you.

Cindy Wilson:

Thank you so much for that introduction, Brittany. We appreciate you being here as well. Now we'd like to do a very brief overview of the panelists and in the agenda, and we'll move on to our context setting. So our panelists are joining us today, and we're quite honored to have them coming in with us. They have a tremendous amount of experience to share with us on how to effectively reduce student vulnerability, despite community of risk factors that may exist. And our experts range from individuals with lived experience to practitioners on the ground working with young people to researchers, law enforcement officers, public health consultants, and advocates. And we're pleased to welcome you all today.

Just as by way of reminder, full bios for all of our speakers are available on the website for this event. To briefly overview the agenda, you'll notice from this slide we've already come through the first three segments of the agenda. Our next segment will take us into the introductory context and the research, followed by a panel discussion and then a wrap-up and the closing.

Now I'm pleased to welcome Dr. Dominique Roe-Sepowitz. Who's an Associate Professor and Director of the Office of Sex Trafficking from Arizona State University. And Dr. Roe-Sepowitz will take us through some context-setting around the risk factors that we're going to be discussing in our panel. Dominique.

Dominique R-S:

Thank you for having me. I'm very excited to talk to you today about sex trafficking in our community, along with being the director of the Office of Sex Trafficking Intervention Research here at ASU in Phoenix, Arizona, the clinical director of a housing program for sex-trafficked women and their children called Phoenix Starfish Place. And we've been developing prevention programs, training programs for everything from schools to jails, to detention centers, screening instruments, and so on. So I'm really pleased to be here today to talk to you a little bit about what we know about chronic child sex trafficking risk factors. And then I'm going to talk a little bit about the youth experiences survey, which is a study that we do here in Arizona every year for the last eight years, looking at homeless young adults who are 18 to 24 and really reflecting back on the chronic and acute factors that we see.

So some of the chronic issues that we see affecting sex-trafficked children in our community are things that just happen to be here. So the availability of cheap motels and hotels allows for trafficking to be facilitated. There are events here with men and money. We have super bowls and golf tournaments and car auctions and things that bring people to our community that facilitate the activity of sex trafficking of children that there is some engagement with the community where we are working with the education system and law enforcement developing prevention and awareness. But they are not a priority all the time. And we really struggle to bring those topics into our community.

Some of the social factors that we see in communities include poverty. We oftentimes hear from traffickers through investigations, through our partners in the Phoenix Police Department, in the Las Vegas Police Department, that a child just needed something. They needed a place to stay. They needed a phone to contact their family. They needed to be able to go to school. They needed food. And so there are things that a child wants, something like a fancy purse or fancy thing, or to get their nails and hair done, for example, but there are also things that kids need. And those are the things that we worry the most about.

We know that some other social factors which are chronic in our communities are the high rates of youth who are in out-of-home care, who are in foster or group home care. Those kids are difficult to supervise for many reasons. They're transitioning from foster home to foster home, group homes have transitioned in caregivers. And it's difficult to monitor who they're hanging out with, what they're doing, what's happening on social media, and who's had contact with them. So a really high-risk factor that we see in our communities for sex trafficking of children.

We also recognize that youth are very accessible in most of our communities. There are places that traffickers can find them that are difficult to monitor. So games online, chat rooms, places, and spaces where kids hang out online, even

though a friend-making website. Excuse me. We also know that children in our communities are being solicited by traffickers in front of schools and coffee shops, and malls. Places and spaces where traffickers can have appropriate contact with them, including a bus stop where interacting with another person isn't so unusual.

I'd like to tell you a little bit about the Youth Experience, the survey that we've done here for the past eight years. The link will be posted for you to have access to this study. We started this study in 2014, trying to understand what the youth in our community were experiencing. We were interested in. They were staying in school after they turned 18. We were interested in if they were unsheltered, what was their experience? So specifically, this study is for unsheltered youth or youth at really high risk for being unsheltered. And we survey them in four different agencies throughout Arizona. We've also done this study in Kentucky, Anna, with Jennifer Middleton out of University of Louisville. And we're doing this in Hawaii at a number of agencies.

So to tell you a little bit about the study, we surveyed 89 youth, 18 to 24. And again, this is a context about acute stress that our youth are under that push them into situations that make them at risk for sex trafficking. So we surveyed these youth at housing programs, people who were out on the street, that was 22, and drop-in centers, which was 18. And these are from agencies all over Arizona, primarily in Tucson and Phoenix. The average age of the youth that we surveyed was 21. And we had 56% were female. 33% were male, and then we had 4.5% transgender, and then other genders were identified.

Background we had a wide diversity of ethnicity of the youth that we surveyed. Importantly, if you look over at sexual orientation, LGBTQIA+ was a dominant representation of sexual orientation. It is something we're seeing an increasing amount of LGBTQIA+ youth being homeless or unsheltered for some important reasons. But as we approach working with youth in schools, as we approach addressing their chronic community problems and their acute community problems, how are we going to address that, making sure that we're paying attention to people who are identifying as sexual orientation other than heterosexual having pretty serious needs for shelter and support and prevention for sex trafficking risk.

So what we found was that the youth were first. The average age of first homelessness was 17. So that means that they were juniors and seniors in high school. They may have been doubling up or couch surfing and may not be contained in the HMIS system. But the majority of them were under the age of 18 on average, and that's important for us to consider how do we work with school, social workers, and principals and make sure that we're asking and understanding what homelessness or unshelteredness looks like for children in schools who are at really high risk for trafficking.

46% reported that they were homeless before they turned to age 18. We found that the youth 14 of them were living on the street, 12 were couch surfing, 26 were in transitional housing, 23 were in shelters, and then others were in their own place in a hotel or some sort of couch surfing situation.

So we found that about 23% of our survey reported that they had been sex trafficked. Now, remember under the age of 18, you do not need to have a sex trafficker to be identified as a sex trafficking victim. So 38% reported they were first trafficked under the age of 18. The average age of sex trafficking in this population that we surveyed who were 18 to 25, the average age was 16.9.

Our population was 66% female. I think that really speaks to some of the risks towards trafficking as we talk about who were hoping to prevent from being exploited, what are the types of risks homeless youth face when they are female and unsheltered that we have quite a diversity of gender, but two-thirds were female in this sample.

We had 38% Caucasian and then quite a diversity of representation of ethnicity of the sex trafficking victims. So these are the 21 youth that identified as being traffic victims. So two-thirds were female, one-third was sort of the other genders. But we see sexual orientation, of course, being overly represented for LGBTQIA in our sex trafficking sample.

So the concern is that we're seeing this huge number out of the half of the kids that were homeless, that was identified 66.7% of the sex-trafficked youth reported that they were LGBTQIA+. So big concern, big flag for us, and thinking of ways that schools can support their transitions, their needs, their issues related to home and religion and family.

So what we learned from our study is that sex-trafficked youth are experiencing quite a lot of need. In this study, we found that 57% of the youth needed a place to stay. And that's why they exchanged sex or were exploited. 52% talked about money exchanged. 33% was for drugs. 28.6% was regarding food. 24% was related to protection, and 19% was related to clothing.

So, in summary, we know that these youth were high risk while they were in school, that there were flags that we need to teach our community to make sure that they are able to identify those flags. There are a large number of issues related to wants, and much more specifically, towards needs, but also towards the youth that are LGBTQIA+. We are asking youth about their educational backgrounds their educational attainment. More than 50% of these youth had dropped out of school, and they were some really great reasons that they described that they had left school. So thank you very much. That is the end of my part of the presentation. Thank you for listening.

Cindy Wilson:

Thank you so much, Dr. Roe-Sepowitz, this really gives us some great context for our panel discussion, and I'd love to invite the panelists now to go ahead and bring your cameras up. And we're going to go launching right into our question to explore this concept of community risk factors. So they're both chronic and acute. I'd like to begin with our first question. Given that all communities have some chronic risk factors and often experience acute risk factors, which increase the vulnerability to human trafficking. Briefly tell us what you've done thus far to build protective factors for young people. Nathan, I'd like to have you begin speaking?

Nathan Earl: Sure. Thank you so much for having me. So as a Fellow of the Human Trafficking Leadership Academy, I and my cohort really researched ways to prevent child trafficking, utilizing a two-generation approach. The findings from that research-informed strategic recommendation to deploy two-gen family resource centers in elementary schools, which means that the youth were screened for ACEs and youth with high ACE scores and their entire family unit were wrapped around with social support, substance dependency, mental health treatment, job training, and placement parenting trafficking education.

I also advocate for equitable resources and action to address the trafficking of male-identified youth. I think one of the strongest community risk factors we see is the unconscious or willful neglect of male youth and research prevention, education outreach, and school and community-based services. I think we need to be really careful on communicating data that says that one gender is more exploited than the other when we know this is such a clandestine crime. And finally, I'm heavily involved with educating schools, healthcare, criminal justice, and child welfare systems on how adverse child experiences and community risk factors such as community violence, substance dependency, and others can lead to the exploitation of marginalized groups.

Cindy Wilson: Thank you, Nathan, for those comments. We appreciate that. Brittany, would you like to speak to your experiences?

Brittany Derrow: Yeah, so a lot of what we've done is going off of best practice and recognizing that the response to trafficking is really critical and really utilizing and building a strong multidisciplinary team within the communities of the state where specialists are able to partner with law enforcement and where everyone's able to really have a specialized set of skills to have really positive, meaningful engagements with these young people. Along with that is having appropriate service delivery. And then that continued education and training piece that Nathan had really talked about too on opening our eyes to our community partners of who is, what are the indicators, what are the risk factors and how can we help intercept those? And that's across all those disciplines within the community. So school staff, criminal justice, juvenile justice, as well as child protection, and law enforcement.

Cindy Wilson: Excellent. Thank you. And speaking of those community partnerships, we have Sergeant Mike Bolme, who is one of your partners there in North Dakota. Mike, would you like to speak to this question?

Mike Bolme: What I think the best thing from our team or that our team has done from a law enforcement perspective is to go at the problem from an engagement lens rather than just an enforcement lens. And we actually go out and establish relationships with these at-risk youths, to the point where we actually have examples of them calling their favorite detectives or officers when they get into trouble. And our first meetings with these youths are usually just rapport building, asking them what they need, buying them a meal, generally, just trying to get past their perceptions that law enforcement are the bad guys because these are kids who, let's face it by the time they're 12, they've had multiple bad experiences of law enforcement intervening in their homes.

So we have some barriers to work through there, but once those barriers are breached, we're having tremendous success in getting these kids to open up to us about what's happening to them out on the streets because they're often victims of multiple crimes. And through our engagement and victim-centered approach, we are getting successful prosecutions of their perpetrators.

The other essential part of what we're doing is working with our service provider partners like Brittany and including the schools to ensure those at-risk kids are also getting the help they need before, during, and after those prosecutions. And this becomes especially important when the parents are the perpetrators. You're usually looking at a big ball of generational trauma, poverty, and drug usage, and law enforcement isn't equipped or even designed to deal with those issues. So our team approach is really essential.

Cindy Wilson:

Thank you so much for those comments, and Keri, would you like to round us out?

Keri Cerio:

Yeah, so New York City has the largest community schools program in the nation, and community schools are a strategy that we use, and they're uniquely equipped to support students that are vulnerable to human trafficking. So by implementing three key community school strategies, school supportive vision for student engagement that protects students who are vulnerable to human trafficking. So the first is they shift the focus of attendance improvement work to identifying chronic absenteeism and students being disconnected from school to create a culture of engagement by implementing every student's everyday strategy.

Schools focus on chronic absenteeism, which is missing 10% or 18 days or more of school each year. Research over the last decade shows that chronic absenteeism in kindergarten predicts lower academic achievement in third grade, and chronic absenteeism in middle and high school correlates to an increase in dropout rates and weekends college and career readiness. So if schools don't continuously monitor student absences and follow up on interventions assigned to students with troubling attendance trends, students can slip through the cracks.

So to engage every student in school every day, my office within the Department of Education coaches schools on how to use data to identify and break down barriers to attendance, to partner and collaborate with communities and organizations to provide resources to students and families, and assign interventions to students using a differentiated tiered approach for school-wide, small group, and individual services.

We also make sure that our programs are coordinating and collaborating. So they have leadership teams consisting of administrators, community-based partners, parents, and students that collaborate regularly to coordinate services for students. And this has been proven to be one of our most effective strategies.

And finally, we use a tiered intervention protocol to personalize student interventions, where schools look at data to understand student needs, to discuss options, and assign interventions specific to the barrier that students are facing. And this allows for schools to identify whole-school strategies that can center prevention and community building and can be adapted as a strategy to prevent and intervene in human trafficking.

Cindy Wilson: That sounds like quite a menu of interventions there in New York City. Thank you so much. And I'd like to move us into the next question, which is to talk a bit more about the acute factors that you've seen most impacting human trafficking rates among young people. And Keri, I'd like to begin with you, and maybe you can build on some of the things you just shared with us.

Keri Cerio: Sure. So chronic absenteeism, which I discussed a bit a minute ago, has increased significantly during the pandemic, and our students and families have been more disconnected from schools than ever before. Pre-pandemic, one in five public schools students were chronically absent. But today, one in three students are chronically absent. So we know that when children are disconnected from school and have experienced significant trauma or don't have consistent healthy adult relationships in their lives, they're more likely to be at risk for unhealthy relationships in their adulthood or their youth and exploitation.

Excessive absences or significant changes in patterns of attendance is an indicator that something's happening in a child's life, and in combination with other factors, some that you see on the screen, these children are at greater risk of exploitation. So by identifying these patterns early, schools can intervene in the best-case scenario, prevent exploitation.

In addition to absences, inequities that existed in our system long before the pandemic have been amplified in the communities that we serve. So in New York City and other larger cities nationwide, the impacts of the pandemic have gravely impacted Black, Hispanic, Latino, Asian, Southeast Asian, and indigenous communities. Children are experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity more than ever before. Children that are multilingual, involved in child welfare and legal systems are at greater risk for becoming disconnected from school because of the systemic racism and inequities that their communities have faced that have been exacerbated by the pandemic.

So those are just very broad examples of community risk factors, and as educators and policymakers, we have to reflect on those inequities and change how we interact with and support communities that have been impacted by those systems that make students and families vulnerable to exploitation.

Cindy Wilson: Thank you, Keri. All right. Over to you, Brittany, would you like to add to what was said?

Brittany Derrow: I think a lot of just going off of, kind of what Keri had said, just how the pandemic and the way that, that changed how we all functioned is really just

exacerbated even some of the chronic factors that were discussed earlier. So domestic violence, poverty, the lack of services, such as mental health, substance abuse, have all just gotten the issues related to that have been exacerbated because of the pandemic because we've all been more disconnected. And I think also that bottleneck of everyone's kind of able to get out and maybe attempting to get services. So there's more demand but less supply to be able to provide that.

I think another part is the electronic component of us understanding how young people engage online but also school switching to a model that are so related going all over on computers and things like that and how technology inherently puts perpetrators or potential perpetrators in contact with our young people too.

Cindy Wilson: Great. Thank you for those comments, Brittany. Mike, would you like to speak up?

Mike Bolme: Well, I would just like to add that drug use is just definitely a factor in trafficking abuse, and the nationwide opiate crisis has intensified that risk. Briefly, an opiate addict has to get their daily fix at a minimum every 12 to 24 hours, or they're going to get violently ill. Pimps know that, and they use that as a control factor with that vulnerable population. So if you think about it, how is a young person with no job skills and no employment background, how are they affording multiple between \$20 and \$80 pills, multiple pills per day? Their options are very limited, and a lot of times, it comes down to either selling drugs or selling their bodies or both.

Cindy Wilson: Thank you for that sobering information. Definitely, and I'm seeing lots of nods from your fellow panelists. Dominique, would you like to go next?

Dominique R-S: Sure. I'd like to sort of add-in that in our community. We're seeing a huge amount of unshelteredness, which I talked a little bit about in that study that an acute need is a place to stay tonight. The food I need to have in my mouth today. We have sort of the philosophy that a homeless or unsheltered youth starts the day with absolutely nothing, a balance of zero. If they're disconnected from their families for many, many reasons. They're kicked out for whatever reason, or they're unable to live in that home, that they start with a balance of zero. And so traffickers are excellent at finding ways to find what those needs are and exploiting them, whether they're substances or emotional needs or actually a place to sleep. And the consequences of that are pretty dire.

In our community, we have lost almost 100% of our homeless shelters for 18 to 24-year-olds. So even if a youth turns 18 and thinks that now they can enter into some of the homeless support networks, there is nothing special for those 18 to 24-year-olds. They're going into the lineup with all the other people of all other ages. And we're terribly concerned about that. So we want to work, and we continue to work with teachers and social workers and principals to be looking for unsheltered youth in their schools, asking better questions about unshelteredness, which is not just do you not have an address, but really doing a little bit more and making sure that if a person's basic need is not met, that

trafficker's going to exploit that. They're going to figure that out very, very quickly.

Cindy Wilson: Great. Thank you. And Nathan, would you like to jump into the conversation?

Nathan Earl: Sure. So what we've seen here in South Florida is that as a result of COVID-related school closings, students were spending a lot more time online with virtual classes just because they have nothing else to do. So that increase in online activity, increased exposure to pornography, and also online sexual exploitation and trafficking, which was supported by the National Human Trafficking Hotline, actually did some research as well as Love146.

I think what made that worse is that a lot of the programs and services were also closed down. So for those that were victimized or were exploited, it was challenging to access those services. And I think all of that if that wasn't bad enough, was even further exacerbated by the economic challenges as a result of COVID, which pushed many individuals, youth and families into engaging in survival sex or labor exploitation, which, unfortunately, many times led to actual sex and labor trafficking.

Cindy Wilson: Thank you. Thank you, Nathan, for sure. All of these elements, the pandemic maybe being the ignition, but including all of those economic crises that happened, the bottleneck that Brittany mentioned, the increased disconnection from school, and the drugs that are readily available, all of these things can play into the chronic factors that were already existing in communities and thereby enhancing the vulnerability that students have.

So on that note, I'd like to explore two more questions with you on the roles that schools can play. And I'd like to look at the two different levels here, first supporting students. And secondly, how might schools impact the community realities? So let's begin with that student-level first. What else can school personnel do to support students who are exposed to both chronic and acute community risk factors? And I'd like to start with Keri on this question as well.

Keri Cerio: Yeah. Thank you. So there are three things that I've identified that schools or districts can do right now to support young people. The first is to invest in resources. So these are ideally survivor-led or designed to educate school staff on what trafficking looks like in your community and shift away from that dominant image of what people typically think trafficking is. So in New York City, trafficking rarely looks like what educators may see on TV or in the media, and it's nuanced to each community or neighborhood.

The second is coordination and collaboration. I mentioned earlier that coordination, collaboration, and shared leadership between school members, community, and other partners is key to the community school strategy. But I want to stress that and share some strategies to improve coordination and collaboration.

School should identify partner and collaborate with community partners that provide services and support to students and families. These partnerships are going to help schools build structures to not only intervene but eventually prevent students from experiencing the negative impacts of these risk factors, including human trafficking.

There are a few simple ways to start this. So you could assign a point person to lead the work. They organize the group to engage in an asset and needs assessment to build a Rolodex of community partners that drive the work forward and lean on the expertise of team members to create the vision, identify needs and create interdisciplinary systems to support students and families.

And finally, a tiered intervention strategy. Schools are best positioned to engage in trafficking prevention and identification. Intervention and support services are where partnerships and community organizations can come in. So once students are identified as being exploited, partnerships with these organizations are critical to supporting students and families. Tiering interventions in this way can help schools to select criteria for specific interventions and organize their student support structures based on that criteria. And lastly, within these tiered interventions, mentoring programs can be assigned to students using the strategy and should be considered for students that are high risk of or experiencing human trafficking.

Cindy Wilson:

Great. So there are a variety of levels at which the schools can intervene with students broadly and are more narrow-focused for those who are the highest risk. Thank you for those suggestions. Next, I'd like to move to Brittany.

Brittany Derrow:

Yeah. Thank you. When I think about my lived experience, and like I had said earlier, school was a protective factor. So I think I can come up with some really specific things that felt really good for me when I was a young person going through what a lot of these young people are experiencing. And that was my school was open earlier. The doors were open, and I could come early, and I was welcome to be inside. And there would be staff members whose doors were open, and I could go and sit, and I could be there. And I could color, and I could doodle, and I could draw. And just be a young person in the school and it wasn't structured. It was just a safe place for me to be, and same with afterschool.

The doors continued to be open for a period of time and having those afterschool programs. I remember I participated in every afterschool program we could do, any summer school program that was connected with the school, I wanted to be there, and I wanted to be a part of that. So I think really fostering those types of programs that the schools can support. It builds a really strong relationship with the young person and just increasing positive connections and interactions with adults because when I think about the struggles our young people face, it's a lot of negative interactions with grownups, and anything that schools can do to increase those positive interactions with adults and showing them that there are safe adults in the world is extremely critical.

I also think about the school that I attended had a school-based mental health program, and it was so unique in the way that it was scheduled into our class period, like a high school schedule. We received a credit to attend. We received one-on-one and group-based interventions with a therapist and a mental health tech. And we were also able to utilize that resource during other parts of the day of maybe we were really struggling. And part of what I think was so unique about that is it set the forefront for me to know that therapy was safe for me to engage in when I was ready to do the really big therapeutic work that I needed to do. Because a lot of what we're doing now is we're planting seeds for the tomorrow's and these young people later in life, not necessarily to yield what we are looking for right now.

It was so helpful that the school was able to foster that and bridge that gap for my family to get me to a separate location, a separate place, especially in an area where mental health services were really lacking because we were so rurally located.

Cindy Wilson: Again, those are great suggestions. I can hear the energy that you bring forth when you remember those connections that you have, which is very powerful and things that schools can do right now to help young people. Thank you. All right. I'd like to move over to Mike. If you have anything you would like to add to this.

Mike Bolme: I do, especially for you educators that are the boots on the ground people. My advice to you is just really simple. And it's just to listen. That at-risk kids get a reputation of just being these little impossible juvenile delinquents. And there's definitely some truth in that. Dealing with these kids can be really, really difficult. But no matter the kid, there has to be someone in your school, and it can be anyone. It can be the school nurse, secretary, teacher, the principal, a janitor who can relate to that kid. Our team has had many discussions of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, and you can see it up behind me here. And it was on some of the slides earlier. They're about their needs.

Most of the youths that we deal with in this situation they're not running towards food, shelter, safety, et cetera. They're actually running away from surety in those needs to get to love and belonging with some group. And that's kind of what Brittany talked about. That was her safe space. So find that kid or kids in your school who you personally connect with and who you can intervene with and help give them at least a little love and belonging that they're not getting anywhere else.

Cindy Wilson: Again, another powerful response. Thank you. And Nathan, would you like to jump into the conversation?

Nathan Earl: Sure, absolutely. Can I just say, as an advocate, I am so encouraged by the great work and all the good stuff that this panel is sharing about. I'm almost stoked here. So I've identified six ways, pretty easy to implement, six ways that school personnel can support these youths. First is to really acknowledge that students are actually being trafficked and exploited in your schools. I don't believe there's a school in the nation where exploitation isn't occurring and become trauma

aware. And when I say trauma-aware is a term I picked up from the Academic Pediatric Association, meaning having an understanding of how adverse childhood experience is. So how abuse, neglect, maltreatment, household dysfunction may show up in the classroom. Having an understanding, I think, will help us develop a level of empathy and kind of direct resources and how we can go upstream, as some of the other panelists have said.

The second is to undergo public health-oriented human trafficking and debiasing training. A lot of the training that is out there is really as a criminal justice framework and looking at this as a public health crisis than this is a social determinant of health, I think can help people have an understanding or a greater understanding of risk factors and how they play and are interconnected with, with later exploitation.

We need to create safe spaces by normalizing conversations about sexual abuse, sex trafficking, and other forms of co-occurring violence. So create safe spaces by normalizing that conversation. But in particular, I think for male-identifying, so boys and male youth. It's a taboo subject, and I think that taboo keeps and the shame and stigma keep so many boys and males from disclosing.

Work to empower students rather than rescue them. That's I think been a mistake in the past is there are a lot of opportunities to really empower teach young people how to protect themselves. Ensure male youth, as well as transgender and non-binary youth are equitably supported and finally empower all youth with prevention education that's really gender-inclusive, LGBTQ inclusive, a public health model that's survivor informed and that's evidence-based.

Cindy Wilson:

Wonderful. Thank you so much for those suggestions. I'm sure everybody was taking notes on those. And we'll round up this question with any comments you might have, Dominique.

Dominique R-S:

Sure. I'd like to think about it, and there are sort of two perspectives. One is if we have children who are in our schools who are identified as victims, so people who have been identified as sex trafficked, we're asking them to go back to school. We're asking their foster home, their group home, their bio family to send them back to school. And the school now has a pretty highly traumatized person going to school. And so thinking about what are some of the supports that we can provide that are unique. I love the trauma-informed, trauma-sensitive perspective, but making sure that the families have the support they need those foster families, those group homes, those bio families. Right now, we don't have a lot of structure for supporting them how to live with a person who's traumatized, how to recognize the difference between trauma and a kid who's just having a tough time, but making sure that schools know what to do. Do they talk about it? Do they not? Do they go to therapy? Do they not? How do they facilitate the healing of those youths? What should the nurse know? Is there anything special that that nurse could be aware of?

There are lots of different factors that should be considered of a child who's been identified as a trafficking victim who were asking to go to school, and the

school is like, "What is happening?" Is there a right of a school to know? Are there ways that we can educate schools to be more responsive and receptive to youth who have been victims of trafficking?

So now to the other side about that risk factors, things to look for ways that we can prevent. So I'm a big advocate of the peer-led model that making sure that all students know how to protect each other. We know that from sexual assault responses that if you tell someone, they're going to be sexually assaulted, they're like, "I don't believe you. And I'm not going to listen to anything else you've said," but if you say, "Listen, your roommate might come home your freshman year during those first three weeks of the year and something may have happened. And here are the steps that you should take. You should tell your RA, you should go take them to the hospital, whatever it is," and giving the tools to students in the school to know how to respond. That's how they're going to look at things in other specific communities that we see within a school is really important for us. My internet says it's unstable. Are we okay? Can you hear me, okay?

Cindy Wilson: Yes, please. We have you now. Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Dominique R-S: Okay. So because when we think about going into schools and doing prevention, it's overwhelming. Some of the schools I have in my community have 3000 youths it's how would we ever even get through one school in one year with what kind of staff? And so what we've done in our research is trying to find what communities within that school are at highest risk. So, of course, I've talked a little bit about LGBTQIA+ youth, but also youth in special education programs are also disproportionate risk from my research and from John Reed out of South Florida. And so if we know that 22% of sex trafficking survivors in some very broad research, we've done thousands of cases that we've studied. If 22% of them have been a member of the special education community at some point, that is a great place to get a person on their team who knows about trafficking to be on the lookout with all of those IEPs, those 501 plans, all of the things that we can get youth to.

So our perspective is, and I think along with the rest of this panel, is if there's one person on every meeting about a child that knows to look for trafficking, we've won. Get one person who cares about this issue. One person who knows what to look for. One person who knows what resources to channel that child into, if they seem to be at risk or if they're a known victim. So we're kind of building that army, building that community that surrounds youth both at-risk and those who have been victims of trafficking.

Cindy Wilson: Thank you so much. And again, these are some high-level interventions that we can do and also some things that we can do now today. And so, we greatly appreciate your thoughts here. Now what might be a trickier side for schools, perhaps. I don't know. Now I'd like to ask the question of what can schools do to address the risk factors in the community itself? And to begin with this one, I'd like to jump back to you, Dominique, because you were just kind of hinting to that.

Dominique R-S:

So as we think of those risk factors that schools can see, so we've had cases here. Actually, I worked with a victim a couple of weeks ago who recently turned 18 and is still going to high school, but she moved in with her boyfriend, who's prostituting her, who's trafficking her. The school is unaware. She's disconnected. How do we support that child? How do we support the needs that she has? They're very different from our child-serving system. Once she moves into the adult system, how do we become more responsive at the school level? What could people look for? And so we work very closely with school social workers. That's sort of our key. I'm a professor in a school social work. So I make sure that all the students in my classes are well aware.

We offer special training for school to social workers because we think that they're the ones whose eyes and ears are not on curriculum, are not on discipline, maybe not on health, but that overall holistic perspective of a child's life and is available for them. We work with some really strong school social workers who have open office hours who have material around their offices. We have some brochures that we've developed for parents and kids in different and in English and in Spanish. So she just leaves some of our training brochures on the table and has had more than a dozen kids pick up the brochure and say, "Oh, this, this is happening to me right now. Or I think this is happening to my best friend."

So giving kids ways and spaces and places to talk about trafficking when they're not being interrogated or asked very specific questions by a DCS investigator or law enforcement. Trying to find other ways to make sure, but also making sure our schools know exactly how to respond. Who do they tell? Some of our school systems, we have mandated law enforcement responders so that the school social worker has to tell the law enforcement school resource officer, and that school resource officer can overrule the decision of that school social worker and say, "I don't agree with you. I don't think that's trafficking."

And so trying to make sure that the systems are really laid out very cleanly and very clearly for school staff is probably the first step I would do before you do any education, any prevention, anything else if you're a new school and you've got some new ideas, make sure you've made that plan, and that policy is developed. So you know exactly what to do if a child is identified.

Cindy Wilson:

Wonderful, thank you so much for all of those ideas. I'd like to shift over to Keri.

Keri Cerio:

So I've identified a few things. So as a principal or a school leader, you can work with a point person that you have assigned for this to regularly monitor and identify data with your school teams to focus on supporting families and community members. You can include those community members, relevant, local or state agencies, students, and families on your school teams. That's sort of our bread and butter at the community schools is that we make sure that everyone is collaborating and the communities are in the fabric of the schools.

So you can identify partner with listen to amplify the voices of students and families and grassroots organizations and community groups to learn what's happening in the community and how you can work together to prevent and

identify resources to help students and families. And outside of school leadership, team members can build relationships within the community. Building relationships should not be exclusive to students and families.

So in New York City, school leaders have had success when they've went out in the community and built relationships with local businesses, connected with them regularly to learn from their perspective and engage them in prevention activities. So, for example, if you're thinking about attendance, if the corner store or the bodega in New York City, the people that work there know that a child that they see every day should be in school, and they see them regularly. If they're collaborating with the school and they know this, they can ask them why they aren't in school, encourage them to go. They've created deals and specials that students can only access if they show proof that they were in school or participated in something, just making sure that we are holistically looking at the community as we look at students as well.

Cindy Wilson:

Wonderful. I love the idea of having those deals that young people can take advantage of when they demonstrate attendance. That's wonderful. And Nathan, we'd like to hear from you.

Nathan Earl:

Sure. I think, and what I've seen successful is the adoption of some type of a collective impact model and approach, I think, is what's been abdicated by the panelists here. We've had some success, I know, here in South Florida, and when I say collective impact, there's the traditional coalition model. And we know many think the collective impact model is an iteration of that, but it's really enhancing the capacity of the entire ecosystem. And I love the fact that Keri mentioned the involvement of community members, that data-driven approach.

So I think the adoption of this model, the community resilience-building model is one, and there are many, but I think creating a shared understanding of the relationship between toxic stress, adverse child experiences, the risk factors, creating a shared understanding of the intersectionality between all of that and exploitation whole system, whole school system-wide, I think would really enhance the efforts at the classroom level or the division level department level.

I also think we really need to listen. So I think Mike mentioned this early listen to community members that are most impacted. In my opinion, every school district school system should have a multicultural compensated advisory board that is comprised of those with lived experience and those that are living in the community. So trusted community messengers. They should be involved in every level of planning, policy development, policy influencing.

And finally, there's such a strong nexus between substance dependency and exploitation across the gender spectrum. Prevention education that targets a two-generation approach. So that targets both the young people but also the caregivers or the family units. And perhaps providing support groups on campus or during the school day, after school, being creative about providing accessible substance treatment for the entire family that's culturally in gender-responsive, I think would be really helpful.

Cindy Wilson: Excellent. I love that including the family, and we are hearing that message from a wide variety of the panelists. Thank you. Then Brittany, would you like to add?

Brittany Derrow: Yeah. So similar to kind of what Nathan was saying just about that two-generation approach when I really think about when a family is coming in, and they know that it's not a secret, families know that they have adversities, they know that they have dysfunction, they know that there's substance abuse and they're showing up with all of the feelings, like guilt that comes with that. And I think schools could do, and in my own personal experience, one of the most helpful things was when the school just showed up, and they were like, "What can we do? What can we do for you? And how can we connect you with something that'll be helpful?"

I recall from my experience where there was one really big event, and the school was really present in it. And that was when I was connected with the school-based mental health program when I was making these other connections with these other staff members, and the school really drove, how can we support the success that's coming out of this really big event. And I think that early intervention approach that comes with that and that two-generation approach is extremely critical.

Cindy Wilson: Wonderful. Thank you so very much. And I'm pleased that you brought up that mental health service again that you experienced in your school. And Mike.

Mike Bolme: I just love that. We're all saying the same thing because what have down here is you have to have somebody from the schools on your local multidisciplinary team because no one agency can cover all aspects of human trafficking. And then you can see from Brittany's input today, it is so important to have that survivor's input on your teams. Because they're the only ones, you actually know what that's like and what those experiences are like.

Cindy Wilson: Excellent. Thank you so much. And we have one more question, which in some ways, I think is one of the most important questions to ask today, and that is what does it look like when schools and community are effectively supporting students to protect against human trafficking? That is what does it look like when we're successful? And Mike, I'd like to start with you this time.

Mike Bolme: So engagement. Success, we've talked about it here today. Success looks like engagement because if you went by numbers or percentages of success stories, those are going to be real low, really depressing, and it's going to feel like your whole team is failing. But frankly, that engagement is why most of you do what you do anyway. You didn't get into the education system with the thought of, "I don't want to engage with kids." The kids we are talking about right now just happen to be some of the most challenging. And by the way, they're the ones you need you the most.

Cindy Wilson: Excellent. Thank you so much. And Keri.

Keri Cerio:

Measuring success in this work is difficult. I know that's really frustrating in a field that's metric-driven. But this work is usually not quantifiable. So for me, successful schools are community hubs. They work in concert with all organizations and systems that interact with the children they serve, and their school staff are fierce advocates for not only their education but their wellbeing.

So this looks like sharing power and decision making, creating solutions to barriers that are identified together, hiring community organizations as partners that are deeply rooted in the community that you serve, hiring family members and community leaders when you can to serve as mentors, and advocates for children. So in order for us to have a holistic approach to this, sorry, it starts with looking at who's in the room when we have these conversations. And so I'll name something that's sitting with me, and it might feel uncomfortable for some, but when we're looking at cities, this panel is not as racially diverse in the communities that are victims of trafficking in cities around the country.

And so, when we work with youth in cities specifically, this is something we need to think about and we have to address. As educators, we have to continuously interrogate who we're engaging with, how we're engaging, and what our assumptions are about why specific communities have a higher risk than others and how we're sharing power with those communities. That's true for schools as it is for policymakers and people in positions of power to make change.

So ultimately is, what we've all been saying is you need to center the voices of communities of survivors and your prevention and intervention strategies because, more times than not know what is preventing them from getting what they need, and they're able to identify that if we work with them and we partner with them. This work is changing systems in schools, and schools can't do that alone. It takes cross-agency, cross-sector, community, and student-centered partnerships and engagements to begin to make those changes.

Cindy Wilson:

Excellent. Thank you. And Dominique, you're up.

Dominique R-S:

So I think the way that I see schools being successful starts before kind of traditional schools starts. It starts at places like Head Start, where we know that many of my adult clients have their children. And so making sure that those Head Start staff who are some of the most incredible educators are really aware of what's happening with the moms of the children and making sure that we're starting really, really early when children are coming into the system, and we have this amazing opportunity to connect to those families that starts at that point.

We hope in our community to stop trafficking from happening. I mean, we have this sort of dream that if we can stop one person from being trafficked by teaching that child or the children around them or the teachers around them that we can stop it because what we end up seeing, most of the time is we just don't have all the resources for this child that they need. We don't have enough residential programs or housing programs or therapists or responses, and our court system can't handle it.

So as we train and as we talk about it, we really show that a child who's successful after they've been trafficked has a really high set of needs that they deserve, that they have the right to, and that includes survivor mentors and courts that pay attention and are educated and teachers and schools that are responsive and families, whoever they're living with knows how to house them safely and lovingly. And we generally, as social providers in our communities, don't have all of those tools.

So instead of trying to build a better response system, we really need to really focus on that awareness and that prevention. And so we're constantly struggling that here in Arizona, we have lots of different types of kids and lots of different types of communities, but if we can stop it and that's not that idealistic like I'm going to stop trafficking 100% because I'm very realistic.

But I think if we can, instead of being so response-driven as a system, that we're much, much better about seeing the risk factors and the things that are leading kids into those situations, we can do it a much better job, and I've seen schools do it, what those schools look like are connected schools. Kids who feel like they're part of something they're connected to their teachers. Their teachers know their names, their teachers care about what happens to them. If they miss school, they ask about it. They're connected and communicating with caregivers.

So we know what that looks like. And we know that that's overwhelming, especially in COVID times. We know that's way too much to ask in many systems, but we know that that is what works. We know that we need to get back to that, and we need to focus on that and put resources towards that connectedness, which will prevent trafficking from happening in my perspective.

Cindy Wilson: Excellent. Thank you so much for those comments and Brittany.

Brittany Derrow: So when I think about what success looks like, I go back to what Mike had said. Success is not found in the outcome. It's in the intervention. And I had a really great mentor tell me that, and it was really resonating with me because the successes we see, and even in my own life, I can see the successes that I had. It wasn't measured on a test score. It wasn't measured by some metric type of scale. The success was that I found that therapy can be safe. And that when I was ready to go back, I got to. The success was that I continued to keep going to school. And the success can be that our young people are calling on individuals who can help them, and it's not the traditional type of success that we would look for.

Cindy Wilson: Excellent. Thank you so much. And Nathan, I know you have something to add to this conversation. Let's hear from you.

Nathan Earl: All right, guys, I got seven for you. I'll go through them quick. I'll stay within time limit. I promise. And this was based on more, this prevention upstream intervention strategy. So the first is a formal commitment by your school board

and your county leadership to an invest time, resources into a transformational long-term sustainable strategy that really tackles and addresses the root cause. So what does that look like? This could be a proclamation. It could be a formal statement. You need buy-in from the senior leadership.

Number two, I think that senior school board and system officials should be co-leading these collective impact initiatives or these community resilience initiatives, not just sitting in a coalition meeting. Senior school board officials and principals need to be co-leading those initiatives. That's a measure of success for me.

Shared measurement system between collective impact partners. So I know many of the panelists have talked about data. What does that look like? So do you have a shared measurement system between partners and schools that allows us to track some of the more quantifiable elements or indicators of success?

I think there needs to be a measurable increase, or an indicator would be a measurable increase in substance dependency screenings across schools, knowing that that's a leading risk factor as well for the individual and family. The same with ACEs screening. So, how many screenings for ACEs are you doing within your school? An indicator of success would be a certain percentage year over year of what you're doing. And of course, there's a lot more to that, but one indicator is the number.

The adoption of a whole system, a gender-inclusive prevention education. So again, not just empowering the kids but also caregivers and the entire school system staff. And then finally, whatever we're doing, policies, protocols, they are co-created by the students, by the caregivers, by those people in the community that this is affecting. So they're sitting at the table at every level of planning.

Cindy Wilson:

All right, can I just say, wow, you all have, are an amazing resource of ideas and energy and passion for this topic? And we so greatly appreciate you participating on our panel today. We are drawing close to our close of time. And again, just thank you so much for all of the ideas that you shared. And we have a lot of questions that are still rolling in through the Q&A, so people are definitely taking it in and interested to go deep. I also want to thank all of you who are in attendance today for being here, and we deeply appreciate your commitment to keep American students healthy and connected in schools and the meaningful things that you're doing to safeguard our young people's health, safety, and wellbeing.

We are also wanting to make sure that everyone's aware that we have a big slate of events planned for this year. We're planning a number of additional high-interest webinars on human traffic throughout 2022. And as a participant in today's event, you'll be receiving notices from us as they're finalized. You may also want to visit the websites that you see on the slide here for the human trafficking webpages for NCSSE and also the Department of Education Human Trafficking webpages. We hope to see you at the future webinars.

And then finally, your feedback is valuable to us, and it helps us to guide topics and focus areas for future webinars. And we would love to hear from you today. If you can take a moment to click the link, it should also be in the chat with the chat box as well. And give us your feedback and your thoughts about how you thought the webinar went today and any other comments or questions you might have that are outstanding for you. Thank you so much for joining us today. And we look forward to seeing you next time at the next webinar, and we hope you all have the wonderful reminder of the day.