

The Boston Globe

MONDAY, OCTOBER 24, 2005

RAW. HIDE!

TODAY: Cloudy, cool, showers in P.M.,
rain at night, high 50-55

TOMORROW: Heavy, wind-driven
rain, chance of flooding, high 48-53

HIGH TIDE: 5:02 a.m. 5:09 p.m.

SUNRISE: 7:08 SUNSET: 5:48

FULL REPORT: PAGE B10

The Boston Globe

Founded 1872

RICHARD H. GILMAN *Publisher*

MARTIN BARON *Editor* RENÉE LOTH *Editor, Editorial Page*

HELEN W. DONOVAN *Executive Editor*

RICHARD J. DANIELS *President & General Manager*

TROUBLED IN SCHOOL

FOR SOME children, the biggest sources of trauma are at home. Having violent parents or relatives, being abandoned by a parent, or suffering a major loss can create an environment with devastating consequences.

Ongoing trauma can impair emotional and brain development, keeping children in a constant state of fight-or-flight anxiety. And traumatized children can fail at schoolwork or behave poorly and be suspended or expelled when teachers have no idea what the children are facing.

Early intervention and a supportive community can help. This gives schools a huge responsibility.

"Schools are children's communities," notes a new report by Massachusetts Advocates for Children. But one can almost hear the school buildings themselves sighing under the weight of having to provide so many academic and nonacademic services to children.

"It is extra work," concedes Laura Goldman, a teacher who uses strategies to address trauma at Framingham's Barbieri Elementary School. But Goldman says that if teachers understood the full context of trauma — including its impact on brain development — responding would be easier. In June, Goldman took a two-day professional development course on trauma that made her look back at troubled students she has taught and

wonder: What if I had tried this?

The report's goal is to help schools — not just individual teachers — become more sensitive to students' difficult experiences. A key recommendation is to train teachers to see past "bad" behavior such as anger, rudeness, or withdrawal. Then they can respond to underlying traumas, bond with students, and steer them toward success. Teachers should also be trained to talk with parents who have themselves been victims of violence. Once teachers have these skills, they need the chance to practice them and compare notes with colleagues.

Susan Cole, one of the report's authors, says the therapeutic approach is typically used in individual counseling sessions. The report translates that approach to the larger school setting.

Teachers can't go it alone. As the report says, they need the support of mental health professionals who can help devise school-wide trauma plans and consult with teachers about individual children.

State Representative Alice Wolf, a Cambridge Democrat, worked to create a state-funded grant program to help schools do this work. This year the program has \$1.25 million, enough for 20 schools. In the future, legislators should invest more. In time, all Massachusetts educators should be able to say to traumatized students: We can help you cope and succeed.