

The Regulated Classroom™

Professional Learning Opportunities for Early Child Care Educators

Performance period 10/2024–12/2025

The Maine Department of Education (DOE) has supported training for educators in The Regulated Classroom™ (TRC), a framework that helps children feel safe, regulated, and ready to learn and educators be more connected, flexible, and grounded. Prioritizing regulation reduces stress and improves focus, memory, engagement, and problem solving. The training is based on strategies within 4 Core Practices (Connectors, Activators, Settlers, and Affirmations) which fit into daily routines and set the stage for optimal learning conditions. TRC is based on Polyvagal theory, which incorporates an understanding of neuroanatomy and neurophysiology. Strategies based on the theory both neutralize defensive strategies and communicate cues of safety. TRC tools and resources enable educators to recognize and bring regulation to the classroom¹.

The Maine Department of Education initiated a statewide train-the-trainer model with TRC in 2023; participants received multiple copies of the TRC text to share with others in their schools and districts. Maine has also set up Lead Co-Regulators from each of Maine's nine Superintendent Regions who facilitate follow-up events in their regions to support the implementation and sustainability efforts of educators trained in the TRC framework.

This report presents **findings from outcome-focused assessment activities** conducted in fall 2025 as part of Maine's Preschool Development Grant–Renewal (PDG-R) program. Drawing on diverse data, the report examines the Regulated Classroom initiative with respect to the following PDG-R outcome areas:

- **Impact**, including results from surveys and interviews with teachers about applications and changes in children's behaviors.
- **Communication and coordination**, including collaboration of state partners
- **System building**, including the contribution of teacher confidence and successful classroom management to the efficacy of other types of professional learning
- **Supports and access**, including multiple opportunities for in-person training as well as virtual options and additional materials for sharing with colleagues.

Data sources for this report include interview transcripts from conversations with Rene Reilly and Sue Gallant (representing First 10); a small focus group with training participants; a short survey of participants (N=22).

Aware of the popularity of training with Maine educators (approximately 1800 have been trained, typically in groups of 40-50) and seeking support for educators to help address challenging behaviors, the Preschool Development Steering Committee offered several Regulated Classroom professional

¹Daniels, Emily Read (2020, Revised 2026). The Regulated Classroom: "Bottom Up" Trauma-informed Teaching. Peterborough, NH: Here This Now, LLC.

learning opportunities intended specifically for early learning educators (pre-K to grade 3) at no cost to participants.

There were some challenges in focusing on the TRC opportunity for early educators: the developers advertised sessions widely and sessions were flooded with applicants from all grade levels; and the materials were not specifically customized for early care and education for the initial sessions.

The Maine Department of Education Preschool Development Grant Manager and state lead, quickly stepped in to manage registrations to ensure the target population of early educators was prioritized. More recently, developers have adjusted the activities to adapt to young learners. Participants were very enthusiastic about the strategies they learned but did not feel prepared to train others.

The state lead described the statewide reaction to the training: **We haven't seen a tool that has had this much positive reaction.** She further explained that, through behavior regulation, educators can support and leverage all the other initiatives that PDG has introduced, e.g., emergent literacy training. She emphasized the value of TRC's self-care techniques for reducing teacher burn-out which has a positive effect on teacher retention.

Educators have appreciated the focus on both their own regulation and self-awareness as adults, as well as on classroom dynamics and children's behavior. The table below illustrates the competencies that TRC works on developing through modeling and practice.

REGULATED CLASSROOM™ FEATURES

Highly popular professional development opportunity

Focus on trauma-informed teaching to cultivate conditions for "felt safety" in the classroom

- Connectors which build relationships
- Activators which help synchronize with others
- Settlers which calm the body
- Affirmations which reinforce associations with positive experiences

More recently adapted for early educators

Approx. 300 early educators participated in training

Supported by texts and materials; participants receive multiple copies to share with colleagues

Regional opportunities for maintaining connections

ESSENTIAL EDUCATOR COMPETENCIES

- ▶ Increasing self-awareness in order to more fluidly shift physiological state. Check yourself first.
- ▶ Recruiting the realm of social engagement. Consider relational cues (e.g., voice prosody, social proximity) and environmental cues (e.g., lighting, visuals)

What was the impact of the Regulated Classroom professional development?

Information from participants and observers is consistent in supporting the value of TRC techniques for the **intended outcome of equipping educators with tools to manage challenging behaviors**. In the years following the pandemic, educators have sought help in addressing children's behaviors and social-emotional dysregulation that they perceive as disruptive and beyond their skills. This has remained a high priority for professional development despite a variety of efforts to address it.

Educators are applying the TRC techniques in the Classroom

In both interviews and surveys, respondents gave high marks to the utility of TRC techniques.

77% of survey respondents indicate they regularly use TRC strategies; the remainder use them at least occasionally.

Survey respondents offered many examples of how they apply their learning, including for themselves (i.e., their own regulation) and children's behavior, in 1-to-1 situations, and for whole-class activities. Unusually, each survey respondent added one or more examples in an open-ended response.

Examples of responses from **teachers**:

"I use activators daily; rhythm sticks and movement activities. I use settlers when energy is high, passing the rainstorm, snowflake tapping, and grounding."

"I am using connectors almost daily and helping students learn to regulate their feelings and understand how important it is to listen to what their bodies are telling them."

"One of the biggest changes I've made is that I've given myself permission to stop, or reroute, a lesson. I will pause and do a short regulation activity (whether energizing, connecting, or taking deep breaths)."

"I do activators and settlers throughout the day. My kids love it and so do I! Game changer!"

School **support personnel** have also found the techniques helpful:

"As a school social worker, I started teaching my students settler skills. They all love the massage ball that came in my kit, which opened up even more conversation about our brains and how different techniques can be helpful."

"I work as a school nurse and help children regulate themselves every day. I learned the importance of regulating myself in order to help students regulate."

"At staff meetings and all school morning meetings, my team and I have taught staff and students connectors, activators, and settlers. For example, last month we taught snowflake tapping during our gratitude presentation."

The educators interviewed were able to offer similar examples. They noted that the techniques fit into learning activities throughout the day. One described how the training helped shift their school culture and provided practical strategies for managing challenging situations, such as having a calming corner/shelf with aids such as fidgets and weighted scarves. A CTE early childhood instructor shared the information with her high school students, who were familiar with some of the techniques but had not known the reason behind the activities.

“When a student might seem to be dysregulated, it is easy to think about a strategy and use it immediately to counteract things outside of our control.”

“We shifted our thinking about how to do safety drills, and now they look more like conversations.”

“We could see kids prompting each other—noticing each other’s behavior and being more accepting (“you need to use a strategy”).”

The state First10 Community School Specialist encouraged the First 10 school districts to participate in TRC training. She noted that First 10 interest stems from educators reaching out for help to address challenging behaviors. They have been trying to shift the understanding that those behaviors are a form of communication that can stem from poverty and cultural discontinuity. In an interview, she described a classroom where TRC activities were fully integrated into classroom activities—during morning meetings, built into a center, kids doing activities in groups—to keep them regulated. The teacher provided training to help children be aware of their bodies and the space they are in. She noted that the training is a good complement to PBIS programs.

How Children’s Behavior is Affected

Respondents to the survey provided specific examples of how both individual children and groups of children reacted to TRC techniques.

94% of survey respondents reported seeing positive changes in children’s behavior as a result of using the strategies.

“I have a student who struggles with anxiety. She has been able to transition to school without having a meltdown.”

“Students make connections to one another, and I have seen new relationships with students who did not tend to gravitate toward one another before that. I also recognize more thoughtful interactions with my students.”

“My kids know when we start a settler activity, it’s time to calm down, take a breath, or do some tapping. Sometimes they settle before we even get started because they know it’s coming.”

“The activities can change the mood and dynamic so quickly.”

“I have noticed far fewer visits to the nurse’s office for somatic² complaints since many of the teachers in our school have attended the regulated classroom.”

One teacher noted that effective use depends on a deep understanding of students; her nonverbal students require lots of repetition and consistency. Another noted that while the training was effective for moderate behavioral issues, it was less helpful for children with more severe issues, including those with significant difficulty working independently.

What communication and cross-sector coordination was involved?

Different agencies have cooperated to support TRC training. Agencies that assisted with advertising and recruiting include the Office of Child and Family Services, Office of Early Learning, Head Start, First 10, the PreK Partnership and CTE early childhood instructors. The Department of Education has identified regional co-regulators to assist in the continued application of TRC training by providing opportunities for educators to meet and exchange experiences.

Feedback used to adjust professional development?

The developer of Regulated Classroom, Emily Read Daniels, worked with an expert in early childhood to redevelop the current guidebook that accompanies the program, and she has revised the training to focus more on early childhood examples. This change responds to the requests of both the training sponsors and the participants.

The state lead indicated another change to make it easier for rural providers and family child care staff to access the training was to provide virtual training offered over a four-day period. To improve access, subsequent in-person trainings have been moved to locations around the state different from the original locales.

How does TRC training contribute to a robust early learning and education system?

State lead Renee Reilly noted that when educators feel equipped with practical tools and techniques, their confidence is boosted, and they feel they can do something positive to change situations. Further, the sense of confidence and control complements other professional development initiatives. She emphasized that TRC training supports various educational goals, such as increasing literacy and family engagement, by creating emotionally regulated environments that extend beyond the classroom. She commented:

“This is money well spent. No matter what classroom you are in, students need to be ready to learn.”

Participants gave high marks to TRC’s in-person training for its engagement, clarity, and enjoyment. They noted that in-person training was more impactful than virtual sessions because of the hands-on,

²Related to how internal sensations are experienced in the body.

practical nature of the work, which allowed participants to rehearse and practice the techniques. They also commented on the value of understanding the “why” behind the techniques—a great **combination of tangible activities and theoretical insights**.

However, there were repeated comments that the train-the-trainer format was not effective—it was very challenging to try to bring the training to other staff **in a comprehensive way**. Some said they would have appreciated more help with crafting a training program and an occasional refresher.

How will the impact of TRC be sustained?

The Department of Education plans to continue offering training sessions, so there will be continued opportunities to learn and update techniques. As indicated above, there were a number of complaints about the lack of explicit train-the-trainer methods, but some aspects of the implementation design have facilitated dissemination. For example, each person who attends training receives 15 guidebooks to share with others. From surveys, interviews, and observations, it appears that some level of sharing is occurring.

Nearly all survey respondents reported sharing techniques informally with colleagues, but only one reported conducting a full training session.

Typically, the sharing has occurred in small increments, woven into staff meetings or professional development sessions. Some staff have also taught the techniques to families at play-and-learn events. One of the First 10 coordinators who was trained developed a packet of TRC strategies targeted directly to families, that is, activities that work best with 1-2 children. She posted the packet of activities on a Facebook page, gave them out through the public library, and took a wagon with packets to share during playground activities.

Summary

The Regulated Classroom represents a highly effective professional development program that has helped address educators’ needs for managing children’s behavior they perceive as challenging. The program’s popularity has spread among Maine educators through word of mouth. Educators and school support personnel report they have integrated the techniques, tools, and materials into their classroom activities. They appreciate the theory behind the activities, which they use with both individual children and groups, and also share with parents. At this point, many educators have been through the training that facilitates peer support in implementing specific techniques. While the program did not fulfill the goal of serving as a train-the-trainer model, participants have been sharing the ideas informally and regularly with their colleagues.