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## Agency, Schools Study Mental Trauma Needs

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Page: A1

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WORCESTER -- By some measures -- long waits for appointments and dwindling resources in a difficult economic time -- Worcester area mental health providers already have too much on their plate, according to Jewish Family Service Director Stephen Slaten.

Given that status, Mr. Slaten recently pondered two questions while working with a task force formulating ways to help teen-agers with mental health needs: What is our capacity to respond to school violence? Do Worcester area mental health practitioners have the resources to provide help to students, families and the community over the long haul? "We have a lot of therapists. But are they really going to be available if they are called in?" Mr. Slaten asked rhetorically. "We can't make any assumptions. Dealing with trauma is different than dealing with someone coming into your office for counseling."

Jewish Family Service will team up with the Worcester public schools' Safe Schools Program and take a first step to determine Worcester's school violence response capacity, Mr. Slaten said. The agencies will sponsor a satellite connection to a nationally broadcast trauma training session, from noon to 4 p.m. next Tuesday at the WPI Campus Center.

The broadcast will be interactive and include in-studio discussions with national experts drawing from their experiences with events such as the Columbine High School shootings, the Oklahoma City federal building bombing, and riots. Examples of existing school-based trauma response programs will be highlighted, and there will be an opportunity for participants to help formulate a local trauma response plan.

Public, private and parochial school officials from Worcester and eight contiguous school districts -- Shrewsbury, Auburn, Millbury, Wachusett, Boylston, West Boylston, Leicester and Grafton -- have been invited. Also included are mental health professionals from across Central Massachusetts. The session is being offered without charge, but registration on or before Thursday is required because of the 45-person capacity of the WPI studio.