Creating Learning Environments for Individual Success
Welcome!

- Wendy Baron, Chief Officer, Social and Emotional Learning
- Lisa Mount, Senior Director, Product Development
- Jenny Morgan, Vice President, Product Development
- Pamela McVeagh-Lally, Social and Emotional Learning Consultant
CONNECTING

Give-One-Get-One
Optimal Learning Environments

Reflect on a time when you were in a learning environment where you thrived.

*What elements in the environment were present?*
Give-One-Get-One

Instructions

1. Cover each square with a small sticky note.

2. Jot down 3 things that supported your learning.

3. Stand up. Give one of your ideas and receive a new idea from your partner.

4. Continue giving and getting ideas from colleagues until time is called.
## Give-One-Get-One

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Optimal Learning Environment

Effective teaching and learning can only happen when an Optimal Learning Environment is in place. In an Optimal Learning Environment, the social and emotional elements of learning are prioritized and understood to be the foundation of academic success and personal well-being. Optimal Learning Environments begin with a positive, productive school climate and provide intellectually and emotionally safe, stimulating classroom communities that are personalized and co-constructed by adults and students. They are characterized by kind, caring, and respectful adult, adult-student, and peer relationships that cultivate a sense of belonging and foster academic, social, and emotional skills. Optimal Learning Environments reflect a belief that all students can achieve high standards. Within an Optimal Learning Environment, the diverse needs of each learner are addressed with an ever-present attention to equity and continuous academic, social, and emotional growth.

Create Emotionally, Intellectually, and Physically Safe Environments

Provide Equitable, Culturally Responsive, and Rigorous Curriculum and Instruction

Meet the Needs of Diverse Learners
# Sticky Note Sort

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical, Intellectual, and Emotional Safety</th>
<th>Equitable and Culturally Responsive</th>
<th>Meets the Needs of Diverse Learners</th>
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Debrief

What did you notice?
“If children feel safe, they can take risks, ask questions, make mistakes, learn to trust, share their feelings, and grow.”

-Alfie Kohn

_Punished By Rewards_
Road Map for Our Journey

OVERVIEW
Outcomes

By the end of today’s session, you will:

• Understand how an Optimal Learning Environment maximizes the conditions for each student’s access and engagement in rigorous, grade level content

• Explore neuroplasticity, executive functioning, the relationship between the mind, body, and emotions, and the impact of trauma and adversity on learning

• Be equipped with concrete strategies to accelerate learning

• Apply key concepts to your personal context

• Connect with other educators
Agenda

• Welcome and Connecting: Give-One-Get-One
• Overview
• What is an Optimal Learning Environment?
• The Neuroscience of Learning
• Accessibility and Engagement
• How to Keep that Executive Functioning
• Four Corners
• Closing: 3-2-1
Collaborative Norms

- Equity of Voice
- Active Listening
- Respect for All Perspectives
- Safety and Confidentiality
- Respectful Use of Electronics
What is an Optimal Learning Environment?
Effective teaching and learning can only happen when an Optimal Learning Environment is in place. In an Optimal Learning Environment, the social and emotional elements of learning are prioritized and understood to be the foundation of academic success and personal well-being. Optimal Learning Environments begin with a positive, productive school climate and provide intellectually and emotionally safe, stimulating classroom communities that are personalized and co-constructed by adults and students. They are characterized by kind, caring, and respectful adult, adult-student, and peer relationships that cultivate a sense of belonging and foster academic, social, and emotional skills. Optimal Learning Environments reflect a belief that all students can achieve high standards. Within an Optimal Learning Environment, the diverse needs of each learner are addressed with an ever-present attention to equity and continuous academic, social, and emotional growth.
Brooklyn
PS 108
5th Grade Math
Evidence Is…

- Specific
- Objective
- Measurable/Observable
- Non-judgmental
- Indisputable
Watch the video

Record evidence of OLE domain

Include both teacher’s and students’ words and actions
## Video Observation

**OLE DOMAIN:** ______________________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher’s Words and Actions</th>
<th>Students’ Words and Actions</th>
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Video Observation
OLE DOMAIN: ______________________________

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Discuss Evidence

Within Domain-alike groups:

– Review characteristics within assigned Domain

– Connect video evidence to characteristics

– What are you curious about?
Triad Discussion

1. Discuss each domain and specific evidence of characteristics

2. Discuss the following prompts:
   ✧ *Why are all three domains critical to an OLE?*
   ✧ *What might this classroom look like if one of the domains were missing?*
Going Deeper

Thinking about your own context:

1. How does an OLE support ALL students to achieve at high levels?

1. How might you influence improvements of the learning environment at your site?

1. How might the OLE framework help you talk to teachers, coaches, school leaders… about ALL students achieving?
BREAK
The Neuroscience of Learning

JOURNEY #2
Teachers are Brain Changers

Plasticity:

“The lifelong ability of the brain to change its organization as a result of experiences.”

Alliance for Excellent Education
Neuroplasticity Video
Say Something

- Insights
- Personal connections
- Questions
Key Neuroscience Findings

- Neuroplasticity: Experience changes the brain’s structure and chemistry
- Neurogenesis: The brain grows new cells at any age
- Emotions and Learning: Emotions can enhance or shut down learning
- Epigenetics: Gene expression is influenced by lifestyle choices
**Prefrontal Cortex**
- Executive Function
- Self Regulation
- Attention

**Hippocampus**
- Learning
- Memory

**Amygdala:**
- Emotional Regulation
- Reactivity

**Nucleus Acumbens**
- Motivation
- Reward
- Addiction
Learning and Emotion

Emotions & thoughts shape each other, influencing a student’s performance in and outside of the classroom.
For better or for worse!

“Although many of us think of ourselves as thinking creatures that feel, biologically, we are feeling creatures that think.”

- Bolte, Taylor, 2008, p. 19

A Stroke of Insight
Emotions and Hormones

Neurotransmitters:
- Serotonin
- Dopamine

Hormones:
- Ocytocin
- Cortisol

2014, via Pixabay, CC0 Public Domain
Stress

Downshifting is a metaphor often used to describe how negative emotions cause us to process in our emotional center and lose focus on higher order thinking.

*Alliance for Excellent Education*
Not All Stress is Bad

Sheila Walker, Ph.D.
Three Types of Stress

- Tolerable
- Acute
- Toxic
## Adverse Childhood Experiences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abuse</th>
<th>Neglect</th>
<th>Household Dysfunction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>Mental Illness, Incarcerated Relative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional</td>
<td>Emotional</td>
<td>Mother treated violently</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sexual</td>
<td></td>
<td>Substance Abuse</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Divorce</td>
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</table>

Sheila Walker, Ph.D.
Mental and Physical Health Issues
Children who experience four or more ACE’s:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>32x</th>
<th>2-3x</th>
<th>10-12x</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More likely to have LEARNING and BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS</td>
<td>Greater risk of developing HEART DISEASE and CANCER</td>
<td>Greater risk for INTRAVENOUS DRUG USE and ATTEMPTING SUICIDE</td>
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8 out of 10 LEADING CAUSES OF DEATH in the U.S. correlate with exposure to 4 or more ACE’s.
Trauma Sensitive Educators

Instead of asking:
“What’s wrong with you?”

Let’s ask:
“What happened to you?”
Keep the Optimal Learning Environment in Mind

- Create a safe, trusting emotional climate where students feel seen, heard, and are comfortable taking risks
- Cultivate relationships that are compassionate, caring, and respectful
- Encourage student to discover their passions and understand themselves as learners
- Equip students with tools and strategies to be intellectually, socially, and emotionally healthy and successful
## Factors That Cause and Reduce Stress

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors that cause stress and lead to the reactive brain fight, flight, freeze response</th>
<th>Factors that reduce stress and lead to the thinking, reflective brain response</th>
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</thead>
</table>
| • Boredom  
• No personal relevance  
• Frustration of previous failures  
• Fear of being wrong if asked to speak in class  
• Fear of presenting work orally  
• Test-taking anxiety  
• Physical, language, or dress differences  
• Feeling overwhelmed by workload and unable to organize time to respond to these demands | • Choice  
• Novelty  
• Humor, music  
• Being told a story or anecdote  
• Positive interactions with peers  
• Acting kindly  
• Movement  
• Optimism  
• Expressing gratitude  
• Making correct predictions  
• Achieving challenges |
Stand Up When You Know

• Two functions of the prefrontal cortex
• A hormone that gets released under stress
• One Adverse Childhood Experience
• One risk for someone with 4 or more ACEs
• Three types of stress
• Teachers are __________ changers
JOURNEY #3

Accessibility and Engagement
“The hardest part of learning something new is not embracing new ideas, but letting go of old ones.”

— Todd Rose, The End of Average: How We Succeed in a World That Values Sameness
Engagement Strategy Carousel

1. Choose one Engagement Strategy chart
2. With your group, brainstorm and record classroom/school applications
3. At the signal move to the next chart and repeat the process
Making Meaning

• What do you know now that you didn’t know before?

• How might you use these concrete strategies and research in the context of your work?

• What are you curious to learn more about related to accelerating learning?
LUNCH
How to Keep That Executive Functioning
Executive Function Skills and Why they Matter

As we watch the video, *Executive Function: Skills for Life and Learning* and then read the related Research Brief, use the chart in your packet to take notes.
Executive Function Application

Think about your experience of the video and the reading.

1. *Did either of them speak to you in a way that you will remember? Why, or why not?*

2. *What other ways (metaphors/analogies, activities, etc.) have you used, or might you come up with now, to explain the concept of executive function to others?*
Learner Behaviors and Executive Function

1. Draw a card from the pile on your table.

2. Stand up and find a partner.

3. Take turns thinking aloud for 1 minute each about what executive function(s) might be at play in the card example.

4. At the signal, find a new partner and repeat the process.
Application

• What struck you as you considered the scenarios?

• What executive function skills did you need in order to participate in this task?

• How is executive function critical for creating an optimal learning environment?
Executive Function Development

Children are more likely to develop Executive Function if some of the following practices exist in their classrooms:

- **Support** of their efforts
- **Model** the skills
- **Engage** in activities in which they practice the skills
- **Provide** a consistent, reliable presence that children can trust
- **Guide** them from complete dependence on adults to gradual independence
- **Protect** them from chaos, violence, and chronic adversity

Harvard University’s Center for the Developing Child
APPLICATIONS

Four Corners
Spheres of Influence
Four Corners

Select a topic for dialogue:

1. *How do we use our knowledge about neuroscience and executive functioning to address the needs of diverse learners?*

2. *What is the inter-relatedness of mind, body, and emotions? What are implications for teaching and leading?*

3. *How might we ensure teachers understand and support students who have had a variety of adverse childhood experiences? What would this look like school-wide?*

4. *How might you use your influence to improve the learning environment in your context?*

Chart key ideas and be prepared to share.
3-2-1

3 Key Learnings

2 Things to Share with Colleagues Immediately

1 Concrete Next Steps
An effective teacher for every student in every zipcode

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● Session evaluations are located under the *Session and Conference Evaluation* link and sorted by Track and then Session Number.

● Session evaluations can also be found under the *Workshop and Session Information* link.

● Click on the session number you attended and the evaluation link is below the session description.
THANK YOU!

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