# Content Breakout Sessions – Orlando, FL

**Trauma Informed Schools and Classrooms**
*Ann McCarty Perez*
Are you looking to create a safe and caring learning environment for all students?  Understanding the impact of trauma is one of your first steps.  Research shows that traumatic experiences can alter the brain and affect children and adults in all facets of their life. In this session we will explore the various types of trauma, how it affects us both in and out of the classroom, and learn how adverse life experiences can impact the behavior of your students in the classroom. We will explore what we as adults can do to help and learn strategies for creating a safe and informed classroom/school.

**Transforming School Culture**
*Linda Hopping*
Research shows that good schools do not occur without first establishing a positive, collaborative culture that involves all stakeholders. This transformational piece is often time-consuming and difficult. However, with time and systematic approaches this collaborative culture can be achieved, and the result is a shared vision that energizes all stakeholders through teaming and collaboration that propels the school forward to optimum performance in all areas.

**The Master Schedule as an Instructional Tool**
Paul Dunford
Effectively designed master schedules provide the framework for essential middle grades practices and support for innovative instructional strategies. This session will explore the components of the middle grades scheduling process and connections to the evidence-based practices found in *This We Believe*, and provide a set of essential questions for scheduling teams to consider in determining if their master schedule is a contributor or a deterrent to improving student achievement. Participants will leave this session with:
- A process to explore if your master schedule contributes to or hinders increased student achievement
- Questions to frame a review of current practice and guide changes/adjustments to your master schedule
- Considerations to integrate the characteristics of *This We Believe* into your master schedule

**Personalized Professional Development**
*Bryan Boykin*
The constant evolution of teaching and learning makes professional development necessary to meet the needs of teachers and students.  Professional development not only allows teachers to learn new teaching styles and strategies, but also interact with other educators in order to improve their own teaching.  As school leaders, it can be a challenge to create meaningful professional development opportunities for our staff, while also managing competing demands. During this session, participants will examine their current professional development models and how to re-allocate existing time to do so. You will learn how to create a culture of professional learning and how to maximize professional development opportunities.

**Making School, Family, and Community Connections**
Ruthie Stevenson
Too often we forget about the importance of our external stakeholders: families and the community. Few can disagree that all schools are in need of support. When schools have support from families and the community, the schools thrive; thus, it is imperative that school leaders seek ways to get the entire community to support schools. Research has shown that when schools, families, and the community partner, the results are improved learning for all students.  This session will examine ways participants can engage its stakeholders; identify resources in the community; and provide strategies for communicating with families and the community. Participants will be invited to share their strategies for working with the community.

**Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivators**
*Juan Rodriguez*
In today's fast-paced world, engaging students is a major challenge for teachers. Oftentimes, it's all about finding the proper motivation. But which type of motivation are we talking about: intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, or perhaps a combination of both? Is there room for both? A student's poor performance is often attributed to a lack of motivation. We often put complex programs or systems in place to get the students to perform better. In an effort to increase the motivation on student achievement, rewards are given. Does this work? What exactly are the effects of rewards on students? Let's find out.

**Triple D – The Dean's Life.... Dialogue, Decisions, and Demands**
*Christine Toth*
Life as a dean of students can be challenging and highly demanding but also extremely rewarding.  During this session, you will have the opportunity to reflect on your role as dean and share with others who have experienced this journey of dean life.  Through case studies and group discussion you will walk away with strategies to set you up for success.

**Equity and Culturally Responsive Teaching**
*Ann McCarty Perez*
This session offers an introduction to creating a more equitable classroom environment through the use of culturally responsive teaching (CRT) and making student thinking visible. We will explore some aspects of equity frameworks and how CRT fits into the larger spectrum of meeting the needs of students.

**Promoting Growth Mindset for Students and Staff**
Dru Tomlin
Becoming a great school means every student needs to adopt a growth mindset so they can reach their goals. In fact, the same is true for teachers and staff. As it states in *This We Believe*, effective middle grades programs are driven by "ongoing professional development," which means that we need to see ourselves as professionals who are always developing and learning for our students.  In other words, to reach every student, teachers and staff need to get beyond a fixed mindset about themselves, too.  This session will look at ways we can support and encourage a growth mindset throughout our middle schools—for students, teachers, staff, and ourselves.

**Building Teacher Leadership at the School and District Level**
*Paul Dunford and Bryan Boykin*
Thinking that the principal is solely responsible for the leadership of the school is a common mistake made by many school administrators.  Teachers serve as formal/informal leaders, improve teaching practice by serving as models, and instill a commitment to professional learning. The purpose of this session is to exam the role of teacher leadership in school improvement efforts and how to develop it.

**Dealing with Difficult Parents**
*Ruthie Stevenson*
When a parent or family member shows up mad, or a parent is just downright difficult, what can you do to cope? Are there strategies to move difficult situations from confrontation to problem solving? Is it possible that there may be nothing you can do except let the individual vent? Most of us have probably experienced the stress of dealing with parents who are angry, hostile, defensive, and even threatening. The magic bullet does not exist for dealing with these parents. However, there are some strategies that have been effective with dealing with some of these difficult parents. This session will engage participants in conversations about ways to cope or turn bad situations into ways to positively affect students, parents, teachers, and administrators.

**Walking Each Year with Your Kids - Multi-Age Teaming and Looping**
*Linda Hopping*
One of the most important characteristics of successful middle grades schools is the establishment of small learning communities of teachers and students, established to provide close, lasting relationships between adults and young adolescents. Both looping and multiage teaming provide bonds that last throughout the middle level experience for students, parents, and teachers. This presentation explores the advantages of these exciting alternatives and how they can operate within the structure of a middle school.

**Health and Wellness Concerns for Students and Staff**
*Juan Rodriguez*
When we travel we are told to put on our oxygen mask first before helping others, but as educators we do not. We face many challenges to address the health and wellness needs of our students and staff. In our fast paced schools we give everything away often leaving little for ourselves. Teachers and school leaders are overworked and stressed, and self-care is what makes them capable of being the best they can be and able to sustain the energy needed for their demanding job. It's time to stop the madness and get serious about self-care. It's not a luxury. It's not weakness. It's not self-indulgent. Although improving the mental health and wellness for students and staff in our schools are top concerns, we struggle with maintaining a balance and focus between school demands and having the necessary resources to get it done. We all know that healthy eating, sufficient sleep, and being physically active are good practices. But how do we truly break through our habits and start self-care practices that actually stick?

**Team Building: Tips and Tricks to Add to Your Toolbox**
*Christine Toth*
When it comes to developing a group, the best way to start is with team building. Many of us are not comfortable facilitating sessions nor do we even know where to begin. During this session, participants will have the opportunity to participate in hands on teambuilders, share best practices, and walk away with tips and tricks to add to their toolbox.

**Monitoring Student Progress Using Early Warning Indicators**
*Linda Hopping and Gail Heinemeyer*
The research is clear that the school dropout crisis begins in the middle grades. This session will familiarize you with the research and the urgency for interventions in the middle grades years. As early as sixth grade, schools can identify those students who are in danger of not graduating on time or at all. This session will provide a framework for how to set up tracking systems of the ABCs, (attendance, behavior, and course grades) and develop specific interventions.

**Supporting English Language Learners**
*Juan Rodriguez*
Every day, millions of linguistically and culturally diverse students enter our schools. Increasing diversity in schools places increased demands on all middle level educators. Successful middle schools ensure that all students are achieving in all aspects of their middle school experience. This session looks at classroom strategies and school-wide interventions to support the English Language Learner. We will provide the teacher and principal perspective on developing instructional strategies, forging cultural connections, creating a supportive environment, facilitating assessments, and designing professional development.

**Homework - To Assign and Assess or Not**
*Ruthie Stevenson*
The arguments for and against homework are not new. A 2007 article in *Educational Leadership* by Robert J. Marzano and Debra J. Pickering asserted, "Teachers should not abandon homework. Instead, they should improve its instructional quality." Research has shown that there are pros and cons to doing homework. Some questions that will be addressed during this session will be:
What's the purpose of the assignment?
- Is it merely a way to show parents and administration what's going on in the class?
- Is it a means to help keep the grades up?
- Is homework being graded for accuracy or completion? If so, then what if the assignment is wrong?
- Have the necessary skills been taught so the student can master the material on his or her own?
Participants will engage in discussions on the pros and cons of homework; how and why they use homework or why they do not assign homework.

**Making Advisory and House Systems Work for Everyone**

*Dru Tomlin*

In *This We Believe*, advisory is a critical ingredient in the recipe of an effective middle school but cooking it up can be challenging! This session will explore key considerations that every middle grades leader needs to think about when creating, rekindling, and/or growing an advisory program so it can work for every stakeholder. Participants will explore the limitless possibilities (and potential challenges) of a school-wide house system, which can bring even more community building, spirit, and collaboration to the marvelous middle grades! Examine what, when, where, and how to make all of this happen to improve the lives of young adolescents and share questions, experiences, and success stories of advisory programs.

**Girls Empowerment**

*Christine Toth*

As educators, we have the ability to instill confidence in our students and provide them with the tools they will need to thrive in this world. In this session, we will explore how to help girls find their voice, specifically through intentional programming. It is important for educators to provide female students the opportunity for growth in an environment that encourages the formation of new friendships and the strengthening of existing ones with a focus on communication, team building, relationships, kindness and empathy.

**Understanding Specially Designed Instruction**

*Paul Dunford*

As standards based instruction takes a firm hold in the middle grades landscape, a clear understanding of high-quality special education instructional practices and a multi-tiered system of supports are critical to ensure success for every child. This session will look at specially designed instruction as an essential strategy for serving students with disabilities and leadership practices that support specially designed instruction in the middle grades. Participants will leave this session with:

- Actions middle level leaders might take to support high quality specially designed instruction in their schools
- Options for special education services in the middle grades structure
- Understanding how the focus on the "first teach" serves students in universally designed middle grades classrooms
- Tools and schedule structures that support specially designed instruction for your middle school

**1:1 Classrooms - Purposeful Use of Technology to Transform Teaching and Learning**

*Ann McCarty Perez*

This session is designed to help leaders and teachers who have made the move to being 1:1 and are now looking for the next step in moving instruction beyond substitution of technology. We will explore pedagogy that facilitates the purposeful use of technology and how to leverage the power of devices to meet the needs of students at every level.

**Developing a Comprehensive School Counseling Program**

*Bryan Boykin*

The purpose of the school counseling program is to impart specific skills and learning opportunities in a proactive, preventive manner, ensuring all students can achieve success through academic, career, and personal/social development. In this session participants will examine the components of a comprehensive school counseling program and learn how to create one that meets the needs of their students.

**Transitioning To and From the Middle Grades**

*Dru Tomlin*

According to *This We Believe*, young adolescents need educators who value them and who are prepared to teach them. In addition, they (and their families) need and deserve effective and amazing transitional programs to and from the middle level. This interactive session will provide you with the tools, ideas, and examples you need to make this happen for every student in your school. Participants will take away a "blueprint" to create your own transition camp for incoming middle grades students.

**Instructional Leadership: Making the Most of Your PLCs and the School Improvement Process**
*Ann McCarty Perez*
The role of instructional leader is one of the most important in the organization. You are tasked with the learning of adults and students to ensure student outcomes.  In this session you will learn how to facilitate your Professional Learning Communities to build collective capacity and understanding of instructional outcomes to improve performance. Learn how to lead your organization by developing consistent and clear ways to review school data and choose instructional strategies to meet the needs of your students.  This session will help those who are focused on continuous improvement through Professional Learning Communities and improving their multi-tiered systems of support.

**Fundamentals of an Advisory Program**
*Christine Toth*
This session is designed for those who are new to advisory or those that are interested in starting an advisory program.  An effective advisory program should touch every aspect of a student's life: the social, emotional, and academic.  During this session, we will discuss the importance of an effective advisory program, what should be included, and share best practices.

**Student-Led Conferencing: The Best Kept Secret in Middle Grades Schools**
*Linda Hopping*
Student-led conferencing is gaining momentum throughout the country as educators begin to understand how this powerful format brings students to the center of the learning process. Students assume responsibility for their learning when they begin to reflect on what they have and have not accomplished, develop goals based on those reflections, and share that information with their parents.

**How to Have Difficult Conversations**
*Juan Rodriguez*
The ability to manage difficult conversations effectively is a key leadership skill and critically necessary to achieving almost any significant change. What knowledge and skills are needed to engage in difficult conversations and give effective feedback? How do we deal with our own emotions? Asking everyone to give just a little more and "push it" requires strong relationships; a culture of trust, respect, and accountability; and commitment to high expectations. Where do we learn how to handle healthy conflict and debate with tact and a lot of patience with one another? Do people in our schools deal with conflicts directly, routinely, and well? Or does the email and water cooler chat continue to focus on all the ways things are not working.

**Creating a Culture and Structure for Systems Change in Support of Middle Grades Practices**
*Paul Dunford*
We never seem to be short on reports that define what we must do to transform our schools. In this session we will look at how theories and ideas become practices that make a difference to the students in our classrooms. We will share successful strategies for building capacity and sustainable supports around and within districts and schools to transform middle level classrooms. Our conversations and activities will center on this essential question: What does it take to bring everyone ( district, school, classroom) to the point at which what we *talk about*, and what we *plan*, positively impacts the work of middle grades teachers in the classroom? Participants will leave this session with:
- Understanding how change theory when put into practice builds capacity for fully implementing the characteristics of *This We Believe*.
- Ideas for implementing theories of change and how Active Implementation Science ensures success for innovative middle level practices.
- Tools and resources that will support implementing *This We Believe* in your middle grades school.

**Authentic Leadership to Build Relationships and Foster a Positive Climate and Culture**
*Ann McCarty Perez*
Culture trumps strategy every time! How we define ourselves as leaders shapes our schools and affects our every interaction. If we want to provide a safe, inclusive, and positive school culture where teachers and students thrive, we must first be authentic leaders by modeling courage, vulnerability, risk taking, and imperfection. This session is designed for school leaders who want to reflect on their personal selves to increase their ability to connect with teachers and students to improve school culture and climate. Participants will learn strategies to help them lead with authenticity and foster a more inclusive and equitable school environment.

**Onboarding New Teachers**
*Bryan Boykin*
Effective onboarding is vital to the success of school and school division efforts to recruit, develop, and retain highly qualified staff. As a school leader, it is important to understand that new teachers are onboarded through a process and not a single event. During this session, participants will learn the value of an effective onboarding process.

**Digging into Data for School Improvement**
*Dru Tomlin*
Building an effective and amazing middle school is challenging work. Middle level leaders want to not only create great schools, but they want to maintain and sustain them. The essential key to this process is knowing how to gather, analyze, and utilize critical data about best middle school practices and the level at which they are being implemented at one's school. Explore this topic and the AMLE School Improvement Assessment tool at this engaging session.

**Developing Teacher Teams**
*Linda Hopping and Ruthie Stevenson*
Many middle school leaders have instituted teaming as the basic organizational structure of their school, and teachers practice basic teaming principles every day. Come explore ways to move to the next level, where teams look closely at data on a regular basis, coordinate and integrate curriculum, engage in their own ongoing professional development, and even develop innovative teaming structures that extend beyond the norm.

**The Design Thinking Process**
*Christine Toth*
The design thinking process is a great way to challenge traditional ways of thinking and find creative solutions to everyday issues and problems that are not always predictable. During this session, you will learn how to use this process and have the opportunity to participate in a solution-based feedback session using a growth mindset approach.

**Establishing Core Beliefs for Implementing This We Believe**
*Paul Dunford*
Creating a culture of shared beliefs is essential to the characteristics of *This We Believe*, a framework of proven practices that define high-performing middle schools. Schools that embrace this research and implement aligned practices provide academic excellence developed and maintained in an environment that is appropriate for young adolescents.
Participants will leave this session with:
- Strategies and tools to use with your team to build a culture of shared beliefs
- Connections to middle grades research and classroom practices
- Understanding of the essential attributes of middle level education in the context of your work in the middle grades.

**100 Day Entry Plan for New Leaders**

*Bryan Boykin*

The first days of school are just as important for school leaders as they are for teachers with their new students. This is why it is important for new leaders to have a detailed plan to guide their work and increase their chances of success. Entry plans are designed to help individuals systemically collect information about their new school or department and manage the transition of leadership. During this session participants will examine the components of an effective entry plan and learn how to develop one by creating an entry plan to meet their individual needs.

**Closing Access and Opportunity Gaps in Middle Schools**

*Dru Tomlin*

Keeping students connected to school in the middle grades is essential to their academic, behavioral, and social growth. We want them to stay for clubs after school, but transportation is an issue. We want them to be celebrated more, but we only have Honor Roll at certain times of the year. We want them to achieve academically, but access to technology is lacking. So how do we help ensure that students have unfettered access to activities, recognition, technology, and more? Let's discuss the answers, examples, and the challenges to this critical question in this engaging session.

**School Safety: How to Ensure that Everyone Feels Safe**

*Juan Rodriguez*

We are all shocked by the recent violent events in our schools that affect how we feel about safety and security. Although improving the security measures in our school campuses and buildings are two of our top concerns, school administrators struggle with maintaining a balance between having a user-friendly, welcoming school climate and a facility that is secure from unwanted intruders. While even the best school access control efforts will not guarantee preventing a determined outsider from gaining access to the school, we must take reasonable steps to reduce the risks of unauthorized access. Campus security does not happen overnight, but we can begin the journey today.

**Courageous Conversations About Adolescent Suicide and Bullying**

*Ruthie Stevenson*

Unfortunately, teenage suicide is increasing, and rapidly. It had been decreasing in the 1980s and 1990s, but now is becoming much more prevalent. In 15- to 24-year-olds, it is the second leading cause of death in the United States. Many external forces pressure young people to consider suicide, such as bullying, and with the relatively recent advent of advanced communication technology, such as the Internet, this pressure is even greater. Clearly, much work needs to be done, but many barriers have existed to turn the tide of this ongoing tragedy. In too many instances, the suicide crisis among adolescents is not addressed until it happens. Fortunately, that is not always the case. Some school districts have openly addressed the problem. This session will actively engage institute attendees in "courageous" conversations and activities to examine what may be described as an epidemic among adolescents.