Content Breakout Sessions

Getting Started with Project-Based Learning: Fueling Engagement and Purpose
Penny Bishop and Katy Farber
Are you new to project-based learning (PBL)? Join us to explore the foundations of this approach, including a quick review of how PBL can increase student engagement, heighten achievement, and foster personal, social, and emotional growth. We will learn the differences between projects and project-based learning, or as PBLWorks describes it, "dessert vs. the main course" learning. You'll be introduced to multiple examples of PBL from nearby middle schools and have the opportunity to brainstorm and receive feedback on your own PBL planning, walking away with a user-friendly planning template!

Deepening Project-Based Learning: Service-Learning, Global Connections, and Beyond
Penny Bishop and Katy Farber
Join us to take your project-based learning (PBL) to the next level. In this workshop we will explore ways to deepen and extend your existing PBL practice by integrating service and critical service learning into students' opportunities. We'll learn how to respond to the social-emotional needs of students by engaging them in asset mapping as a powerful way to integrate more authentic audiences, community partners, and global connections. Consider how the U.N. Global Goals can serve as inspiration and a framework for this work. Come away with a planning template that helps you integrate service and social-emotional learning into PBL.

Playgrounds with Purpose: A Collaborative Design Thinking Project
Christianne Loupelle and Adriana Ruffini
Design thinking lends itself to interdisciplinary, project-based learning that can be adapted for all grade levels. We share the steps taken with our students to identify, design, and build prototypes for shared recreational spaces benefitting specific populations. Arising from conversations about opportunities for collaboration between math and science, this project gained STEAM when language arts and ethics jumped on board. Using different facets of design thinking, our Grade 7 students developed transferable skills, which are an integral part of girls' education. Students showcased these skills during final pitches of their proposals to a panel of experts from a variety of fields.

Incorporating Meaningful Tasks in the Classroom through Project-Based Learning
Adriana Ruffini
A question often asked by students in several different subject areas is "What is the point of this?" My objective was to answer this question as often and as meaningfully as possible by creating a cross-curricular, year-long project that aligned with everything required in the years' mathematics curriculum. This project began in October 2018 and is continually being iterated, improved upon, and adapted for learners in Grade 8 math. In this session, I explain and explore how I let students imagine their future lifestyles by choosing a career, exploring their educational options, considering apartment-living options, and discussing finances and budgeting, all the while creating choice and meaning. I'll show how you can do this too!

Student-directed STEAM Inquiry Leads to Deeper Learning and Engagement in Girls
Christianne Loupelle
Research indicates inquiry-based approaches to science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics (STEAM) have many benefits for students, including better conceptual knowledge. Yet many teachers struggle to take this approach. In this session, we present results from two year-long collaborative projects in which we engaged deeply with student-directed STEAM inquiry. Outcomes of two year-long projects (including student and teacher experiences/learning) and challenges faced throughout the project will be shared. The presentation will conclude with suggestions for the kinds of supports and training teachers may require to successfully take these approaches in their classrooms.

Defining the Whole Child
Brett Reis
When education is mentioned in public, usually the conversation involves standardized test scores, curriculum, or funding. What is often forgotten in these conversations is the human element of the students we teach. This session seeks to find a common understanding of the statement "teaching to the whole child." We will examine how educators can nurture learning by being responsive to the social, emotional, and physical well-being of students and how this holistic view can be supported in a safe, challenging, and supportive classroom environment.

The Whole Child for School Leaders
Brett Reis
Successfully teaching to the whole child takes more than a belief system of a classroom teacher; it requires strong school leadership to create the structure that allows staff and students to grow and thrive. In this session, we will use the experience of one school to show how school leaders can build a structure within their buildings to empower staff to teach to the whole child. We will examine how one school used holistic assessments to report on student learning and development, leveraged family and community engagement, and built staff efficacy.

Keeping it Real: Authentic Learning That Inspires Thinking
Kristie McCullough, Chris McCullough, and Tom Stones
In this session you will learn from three different teachers as they take you into the authentic learning environment of their schools. In their experiences, students "learn by doing" as their teachers journey alongside their class to help students dive into real-world problems by using inquiry and thinking skills within a community of learners, while directing their own learning path. This session will challenge you to think outside the box and get you excited about planning authentic learning experiences for your students in the fall.

Making it Meaningful for Me... Authentic Learning in the Classroom
Kristie McCullough, Chris McCullough, and Tom Stones
Deeper Dive from Session 1. Planning tools and time will be given to attendees to work on an authentic learning idea for the upcoming school year. The presenters will guide the attendees through the planning process so teachers leave with a tangible plan.

Create + Debate + Navigate = Innovate: The Process of Making a Project-Based Learning Environment a Reality
Jeff Rodman and Matt Coleman
The goal of the Project-Based classroom is to take students, as well as teachers, beyond compliance and engagement, to a place where students are empowered to be innovative learners. PBL allows students and their teachers to get out of their routines, take some risks and look to exceed expectations. In this session, learn, explore, and share how students, teachers, and administrators work together to avoid the pitfalls and to get over the hurdles in an effort to provide the supports and opportunities necessary in creating a successful Project-Based Learning environment.

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Measuring Effectiveness within a Project-Based Learning Classroom: A School Leaders' Roundtable
Jeff Rodman
Project-based learning creates a unique paradigm for learning, but does it improve student achievement? Does it increase teacher effectiveness? These will be the questions we will explore and hope to answer. This will be an interactive sharing session providing those in leadership roles the opportunity to share their knowledge and beliefs about project-based learning. During this session we will discuss what a project-based learning classroom looks-like, how to measure the effectiveness of project-based learning, how to ensure standards are being met, as well as how to supervise and evaluate teachers who are facilitating a PBL classroom.

Game On! Building Student Engagement and Empowerment through Classroom Gamification
Matt Coleman
Global Studies teacher Matt Coleman wanted to create a boardgame that would allow his students to experiment with and experience the concepts and themes from his class in a meaningful way. So, he did. See how he did it, see what happened, and get some ideas on how to take project-based learning to the next level of empowerment. Oh, dang. Game puns.

Project "Be the Change"
Anna Kovaliv and Anna Mildrum
How does project-based service-learning inspire middle school students to engage in affecting positive change? This session explores how students at Camels Hump Middle School in Richmond, Vermont, explored their identities, communities, values, and passions to design projects that would affect a positive change. We will discuss both the challenges student-led curriculum often poses (such as pacing, scheduling, and logistics) as well as the benefits it provides (such as increased engagement, creativity, and agency). After presenting our "Be the Change" model, attendees will have an opportunity to participate in an interactive activity, discuss their own projects, and engage with resources. **this session will be repeated*

Cultivating Pathways to Sustainability Through Partnership
Lindsey Halman
Educators and students play a key role in learning and advancing community knowledge and competencies in justice-centered practices, climate education, and place-based innovations. While schools are a place for learning about the past to understand our present day issues, they are also important places for future thinking and building the skills and mindsets necessary to create more just and healthy communities. Using project-based learning (PBL) as the framework, students create year-long projects to address the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), while integrating required curriculum. Projects have focused on building a socially, economically, and ecologically just community at a variety of levels - school, town, region or globally. Projects have ranged across the state to include efforts to address mental health and gender equity through restorative justice/practices, to a student run business focused on sustainable products. Students have engaged a wide variety of community partners and school-based leaders to implement projects including local conservation groups for the development of a solar installation in one community. Engagement shifts to empowerment, when young people and educators work in partnership to positively impact their communities. In this session, participants will have hands-on experience engaging in the full cycle of project-based learning using the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

UP for Learning: Youth-Adult Partnership for School and Community Change
Lindsey Halman
When schools decide to embrace student voice as a priority, they often initiate a pendulum swing from an entirely adult-driven model to an entirely youth-driven model. Neither end of this swing mobilizes the full potential of either adults or youth. The most powerful configuration is partnership: shared responsibility for learning and decision-making. We will explore the reasons why amplifying youth voice is the essential next step in making our schools more engaging and communities places where young people thrive. In the process, we will identify the partnership sweet spot: where all individuals feel known and valued, have a sense of purpose, and pursue that purpose with heartfelt intention. Authentic youth-adult partnership—a culture that supports all of us to be our best selves—develops along a continuum. We'll provide benchmarks for this journey and time for reflection, aiming for deeper understanding and commitment to this partnership paradigm shift. We expect to inform and inspire you to set at least one goal to amplify student voice and partnership to build on and initiate upon your return home.

Empowering Students as Community Leaders Using the U.N. Global Goals
Kyle Chadburn and Andrea Gratton
The first step in empowering students to be positive changemakers in their community is to help them recognize the issues that exist around them. Our fifth and sixth grade students recognized that their community's greatest challenges were connected to poverty and hunger, and they set out to do their part in helping those who are experiencing need. Although our original intention was only to support our local community, the project had another unexpected accomplishment: it created a sense of pride and empowerment in our students that is improving the culture of our classroom and school. Join us to find out more about how projects like this one can improve students' confidence and the culture of your school.

Exploring Identity to Build Empathy and Understanding
Kyle Chadburn and Andrea Gratton
For students to build strong, meaningful relationships with each other, they must first develop a deep understanding of who they are as individuals. In this session participants will engage in some of the activities that we used in our Exploring Identity unit to help students understand identity markers including race, gender identity, sexual orientation, belief systems, and more. We will also model the processes that helped us create the kind of safe and respectful classroom environment needed for this work to be successful, including "calling in/calling out," acknowledging and responding to bias, and recognizing privilege. Finally, we will share examples of a culminating project that allowed students to use this knowledge to express and celebrate who they were in the past, who they are now, and who they hope to be in the future.