



Content Breakout Sessions

Culture IS Behavior: Positively Impacting Student AND Staff Behavior

Houston Kraft

Culture is the sum of the behaviors in your school or district—the behaviors of both students AND staff. CharacterStrong is working with more than 2,000 schools globally to put a practical focus on effective behavior change through the thoughtful teaching of social and emotional learning (SEL), character development, and relationship-building. How do we integrate and teach these skills in an engaging and relevant way? In this interactive and resource-packed session, you will learn a framework for powerful culture change and walk away with low-burden, high-impact strategies and tools to make an impact RIGHT NOW. In addition, every participant will walk away with access to an extensive library of resources to put the content into immediate and consistent action. **this session will be repeated*

Let's TALK: Take Care of Yourself

Christopher Seeley

Staff members in every middle school play a crucial role for students who are experiencing distress. This role does not start when the student walks through the front doors of the school, but when staff members walk into the school. Each staff member brings with them unique life experiences and perspectives that impact their daily activities. During this session we will talk about how your own emotions and life experiences may impact your ability to best help the students in your school. We will review self-screening questions and a cycle of supporting each other that you can implement in your staff community. We will discuss the foundation of a good conversation with someone and how your language may impact students' or other staff members' ability to talk to you about mental health. Lastly, we will go over your role in engaging in support services and how you can model this to your students. This session will be engaging with interactive sections and small group discussions. **this session will be repeated*

Streamline SEL Utilizing Restorative Practices

Nathan Maynard and Brad Weinstein

Let's take some work off your shoulders and come up with some best practices for proactive relationships by implementing SEL in and out of the classroom using restorative practices. We will examine how Circles can be a quick forum for SEL and how to overcome seen or unforeseen pushback. **this session will be repeated*

How our Brains are Impacted by Adversity, Trauma and How Neuroplasticity Builds Resilience

Lori Desautels

In this presentation Dr. Desautels will address the significant correlation between early childhood and adolescent brain development, adversity, and resiliency! She will explore how trauma and adverse childhood experiences can intimately affect learning, behavior, and relationships along with implications for our physiological health. We will discuss the brain-aligned practices and strategies that are so beneficial for all youth, adults, and children!

Let's Dig Deeper into Brain and Body Resiliency

Lori Desautels

In this breakout session Dr. Desautels will share the four pillars of applied educational neuroscience and how the specific strategies address touchpoints, co-regulation, our neuro-anatomy, and our own brain and body states. We will also explore how addictions are intimately tied to trauma and adversity and the emotional pain that lies underneath these behavioral signals.

Put on Your Own Oxygen Mask: Teacher Mental Health Issues

Jennifer Leban

Teacher burnout is real and ignoring it won't make it better. Let's talk about strategies we can use to help us navigate the daily grind that teaching can sometimes be and how to cope with things we cannot control. I'll share my own personal story of burnout and some strategies and skills that have helped me. I'll address topics such as dealing with toxic coworkers, feeling trapped at your job, seeking professional help (and reducing the stigma that surrounds it), and some neat tech tools you can use to help you along the way in your own mental health journey.

Classroom Design and Environment Workshop

Jennifer Leban

Imagine you're a student walking into your classroom for the first time. What would you think? Would you feel welcome, safe, comfortable, and able to focus? Let's discuss ways to improve your classroom culture through the way your classroom is designed. You will leave this session with a plan for this upcoming school year on how you will make changes to improve your classroom environment. Topics will include DIY and cheap/free options for utilizing your existing furniture and resources, classroom layout brainstorming, flexible seating, options for types of spaces within a classroom, classroom management strategies for flexible seating, the sensory experience of your classroom, and ways to ease incoming student anxiety in the fall.

Culturally Responsive Connections

Laura Ross

Being a culturally responsive educator means recognizing the importance of engaging students by including students' cultural references and ways of learning in the classroom community and learning experience. Supporting staff in cultural responsiveness can lead to stronger teacher-student connections and disruption of racial disparities in discipline referrals. Discuss a variety of ways to lead faculty and staff through culturally responsive staff development and small group discussions that address being aware of implicit bias, challenge a single story, and encourage culturally unique contributions from students in the classroom environment. Resources shared will include staff development ideas, book lists, and activities to explore bias and to increase culturally responsive connections.

Middle School Emotional Management and Coping Strategies

Laura Ross

Middle school is a challenging time filled with big emotions. Middle school students are also enduring large amounts of stress and anxious feelings linked to school, family challenges, post-secondary planning pressures, and social standings. Let's discuss ways to support middle school students in a multi-tiered approach through teaching coping strategies and emotional and stress management in whole school, small group, and individual settings. Resources shared will include school-wide announcements, lesson add-ons, small group lessons, how to create calming areas, and coping strategies including useful apps and websites.

Realigning the STARS: Our Journey Towards Responsive Social-Emotional Learning in Advisory

Kim Urban, Eric Bartkowski, Casey Lehmann, and Kristen Gillespie from Olmsted Falls Middle School

Over time and for different reasons, advisory periods can shift from a student-centered oasis of connecting and building relationships to a work-centered wasteland of social isolation. When this began to occur for our teaching team, we made monumental changes to our existing advisory plans with the goal of reclaiming a student-centered advisory model. We hope you join us as we share our story--along with resources, tips, and suggestions--to help you make time in your day for SEL!
**this session will be repeated*

Making SEL Work for You: Understanding SEL to Build a Better Classroom

Natalie May and Holly Jacobs

Staff are at the heart of implementing strong SEL programs to create a supportive environment at school, but it can be hard to keep up with all the latest research and best SEL practices. In this session, educators will learn about the current landscape of social and emotional learning, gain an understanding of SEL development for themselves and their students, and discuss ways to implement real SEL practices at school. Join other educators in a professional development training and brainstorming session to learn about how to support your own social and emotional skills and find ways to infuse SEL within your school or program. Attendees will take away concrete, flexible strategies to use in and outside of the classroom, and a deeper understanding of how SEL can support their own teaching.

SEL in Inclusive Schools: Positive Youth Development for All Students

Natalie May and Holly Jacobs

Want to know what it's like to learn social and emotional skills in middle school? Come hear directly from youth in Illinois middle schools as they talk about their experiences and personal growth in Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools® (UCS). UCS promotes students' positive development and social-emotional skills through Unified Sports, Inclusive Youth Leadership, and Whole School Engagement activities that bring students with and without intellectual disability together. The youth perspective will help you view social and emotional learning for middle grades students through the lens of social inclusion and will enhance our understanding of how inclusive schools can support the development of the whole child, for all children. Discussion with participants and school staff in UCS schools will provide insights and resources for how you can promote SEL through inclusion in your own school.

Homework, What's the Point?

Eugene Pitchford

Homework can be a source of frustration for middle school educators and students? How can we support middle school students to complete homework assignments and produce high quality work? In this engaging and collaborative session, participants will explore their role in the homework process. We will review district policies, student engagement, the purpose of homework, why students don't complete homework, motivational strategies, cultural relevance, the frequency in which homework is given, and the appropriate feedback given to student's homework when completed. Participants will learn the Homework Buddies process used to motivate middle school students to complete homework assignments. Participants will reflect on their classroom homework policies, and develop an answer the question: Homework, What's The Point?

Superhero Social Emotional Learning!

Eugene Pitchford

The best educators use their superpowers to ensure social, emotional, and learning needs of middle school students are met. That is most effective way to ensure out of this world learning takes place. In this interactive session participants will take a deep dive in the following areas: barriers to social emotional learning, becoming intentional when learning the needs of students we serve, and how to combine social emotional learning and growth mindsets. The dynamic session concludes with a reflection process that will clarify our superhero strengths, as well as, specific areas for improvement to help meet the needs of our middle school students.

Beyond Binary: Gender Inclusive Schools

Hadeis Safi

This session provides attendees with the opportunity to understand how to support trans and gender expansive students in school. Attendees will review key terms, recognize the positive impact that their support can have, and receive an overview of best practices.

SEL in Motion: Integrating Practices within a PBIS, Restorative, and Culturally Responsive Lens

Martin Da Costa, Vicky Karahalios, Gretchen Matkovic, Laura Swanlund, and Gabby McArtor

As social-emotional learning's scope and reach is expanding, middle level educators are faced with the ongoing challenge of implementing these practices alongside an increasing amount of parallel efforts to promote comprehensive school-based services. This case presentation will highlight how social-emotional learning was adopted at a junior high school with a strong, existing foundation of Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (PBIS) as well as a growing restorative and culturally responsive lens. Processes and implications for integrating these systems will be provided, as well as data supporting the contextual effects of this framework.

The Power of Everyday Interactions: Classroom Practices that Encourage SEL

Hannah Graham

This session will focus on the integration of SEL into classroom interactions and curricula. Drawing on research in classroom discussion and epistemologies (ways of knowing), the presenter will outline four concrete practices teachers can incorporate toward facilitating cooperative classrooms that re-examine students' relationship to content and one another. The session will include interactive portions with participant sharing and problem-solving.

Advisory 2.0: A Flexible Learning Model to Make Each Moment Count

Travis Lobbins

Experience a middle school that uses a flexible learning model during advisory to meet the talents and needs of individual students. With a re-envisioned 44-minute flexible and responsive advisory period, time is allotted in the school day so students can choose extension, intervention, enrichment, or studying. See the research in action as educators and administrators share first-hand accounts on how the flexible learning model impacts the social and academic learning of middle school students.

Teacher Wellness Check: Find Your Joy, Seek to Inspire, and Combat Work-Life Stressors

Leslie Mitchell, Matt Clark, and Michelle Leibfried

The purpose of this session is to serve as a "breath of fresh air." We recognize that the job of an educator is often accompanied by many stressors. We are seeking to help teachers find their joy in spite of those stressors inside and outside of the classroom and inspire others to do the same. We will reflect and provide strategies for teachers to facilitate a healthy work-life balance using the 5 CASEL Social Emotional Competencies. Audience members will leave this session empowered to identify what they need to do to be happier in their personal lives in order to foster a more joyous climate and culture within their school community.

Strategies to Counteract Trauma in the Classroom

Christine Dykstra and Sarah Lloyd

Students of all ages are facing trauma (divorce, abuse, poverty, death of family members, etc.) in their lives. These experiences can impact students as they enter our school or classroom. It is important that teachers and staff can recognize how trauma manifests in the classroom. Once teachers/staff can recognize that trauma can be at the cause of these behaviors, teachers can begin to help students feel safe in the classroom with simple everyday strategies. These strategies can be implemented on a daily basis to show school is a safe learning environment for their students. We will also share strategies to help students in the moment that trauma may be taking over their response to classroom environments.

Social-Emotional Learning in School-Wide Programming: Looking beyond Advisory

Steve Diveley, Amanda Connell, and Chris Abbott

Currently, Hadley Junior High has once per week advisory and supplements SEL through programming during the day, in the classroom, and after school. Expanding our SEL time through an advisory period is not possible at this point, but opportunities are created through building programming. This session highlights how schools can be creative in their school events and curriculum to address the SEL component, cognizant that social skills and addressing anxiety are not confined to a single point of day.

Developing a Student Leadership Team

Julia Colombo and Jessica Closson

Empowering students is at the heart of successful middle schools as described in AMLEs seminal position paper, *This We Believe: Keys to Educating Young Adolescents* (2010). Our school has been working toward that goal by developing a student leadership team from the ground up. Working within the framework of Stephen Covey's *7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, this student group is gradually gaining members and taking on a shared role in the leadership, culture, and academic workings of our school. In this session, we will describe our journey toward developing this student leadership team, including our rationale, organizational strategies, and helpful tips for implementing a group like this in your own school.

SMS All School Advisory: Making Relationships a Priority

James Parker, Michael Cox, Tracey Fuentes, and Jon Palicki

This past school year, we have made building relationships with our students a priority by creating an "All School Advisory." We combined students in grades 6-8 into 50 different advisory classes. Each class has an interest base as well as an SEL purpose. Students were allowed to choose their interest-based topic. Come listen to our journey on how an idea from a team leader meeting grew into an all-school advisory.

SEL for ELs: Unique Needs of our Linguistically Diverse Students

Carly Spina

This session will talk about the ways in which our linguistic and cultural identities shape who we are in the middle school classroom and ways that educators can support and honor our students' diversities. "SEL for ELs" will dive into practical strategies that all educators can use as well as explore ways that teams and schools can collectively elevate the status of other languages. This session will also discuss SLIFE (Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education) and how this can impact a student's ability to connect with a teacher, peers, or their school.

Developing SEL in STEM

Jennifer Smith

This session will explore classroom tested ways to incorporate SEL competencies into the STEM classroom through project-based learning. This is a hands-on session where participants will work on two brief STEM projects to explore SEL. SEL resources and classroom project ideas will be shared with participants as well.

The Power of YOU: Developing Yourself and Students

Christopher McGraw

Through actual student data and testimonials comprised of 830+ current middle school students, this presentation focuses on practical, effective, and impactful means of building significant connections with students. Learn directly from middle school students about their self-identified "cornerstones" they value in regards to staff members meeting their social-emotional needs. Develop both yourself as a leader and your students as partners through the "power of YOU – Year-long Opportunities for Understanding" in this real-world, thought provoking, humorous, self-reflective, and challenging presentation!