A Bronx Tale:
A Social-Emotional Health Model for Working with Urban Middle School Students

Dr. Meghan Oppenheimer
Dr. Elizabeth Weiner

Mott Hall Charter School – Bronx, NY
Introduction to Mott Hall
Middle School: Development & Challenges
Our 4-tier approach:
- Trauma and attachment focus
- Enhanced counseling services
- School-wide character development
- Parent engagement
Objectives

O PWBAT explain how the promotion of a trauma and attachment sensitive approach in the school setting is beneficial to all students.

O PWBAT list four initiatives that can be utilized to develop a safe and supportive school environment.

O PWBAT describe three positive outcomes associated with the successful engagement of students and families in the development of social-emotional skills.
Mott Hall Charter School

- Middle School in Bronx, NY
- 300 students in 6th to 8th grade
- SEH Goal: Create a safe and supportive environment to ensure that every student has the opportunity to succeed in school
Middle School

- Adolescent development:
  - Period of rapid developmental changes
    - Physical, cognitive, moral, psychological, and social-emotional
  - Move towards independence & developing identity

- Challenges specific to students in urban settings:
  - Poverty and homelessness, exposure to community violence, and unfavorable statistics for students
High School Graduation Rates in New York

- Asians
- Whites
- Latino
- Blacks
- NY State
- NYC
- East Harlem
- NYC Latino Boys
- NYC Black Boys

High School Graduation Rates
Our 4-Tier Approach to Advancing Social-Emotional Health at MHCS

- Trauma and attachment focus
- Enhanced counseling services
- School-wide character development
- Parent engagement
1 – Trauma & Attachment

- Traumatization occurs when both internal and external resources are inadequate to cope with external threat (Van der Kolk, 1989)

- Types of trauma experienced by our students:
  - Poverty and homelessness, community violence, maltreatment and abuse, loss and other attachment failures, and illness
1 – Trauma & Attachment

- Effects of trauma in the school setting:
  - Diminished concentration and memory
  - Organizational difficulties
  - Decreased language skills
  - Learning difficulties
  - Inappropriate behaviors (aggression, impulsivity, defiance, withdrawal, perfectionism)
  - Difficulty regulating emotions
  - Difficulty forming healthy relationships
  - Difficulty understanding cause and effect
1 – Trauma & Attachment

- Tips of working with trauma in the school setting:
  - Provide a consistent, predictable pattern for the day
  - Set clear expectations
  - Use of affirming language
  - Use of positive or neutral tone
  - Give the scholar choices and some sense of control
  - Model & teach appropriate social behaviors
  - Strive to remain calm (as much as possible!) in the face of challenges, utilize self-calming techniques
2 – Enhanced Counseling Services

- 30% of our student body participate in weekly, scheduled counseling
  - Only 5% receive mandated counseling

- Method of obtaining counseling:
  - Self-referral, parent request, staff recommendation
2 – Enhanced Counseling Services

Outcomes:

- Qualitative
  - Improved emotional regulation, learning to express oneself
  - Increased focus, improved organization, better grades
- Quantitative:
  - Positive ratings on counseling survey
  - Increased growth on NYS standardized tests
3 – Character Education

“All throughout history, and in cultures all over the world, education rightly conceived has two great goals: to help students become smart and to help them become good.”

Program goal:

- To develop positive character and integrate school’s core values among scholars, in order to provide them with the tools to navigate the complexities of adolescence and actively shape the future.
3 – Character Education

Program design:
- Every scholar participates in 1 class per week for the duration of the school year
- Smaller class size (12-14 students per class)
- Facilitated by teachers
- Integrated with routines and practices

Additional Details:
- Evidenced-based practices based on character strengths
- One character strength per week
3 – Character Education

**Character Strengths**

- Hope
- Kindness
- Humor
- Open-Mindedness
- Forgiveness
- Bravery
- Gratitude
- Fairness
- Honesty
- Perspective
- Self-regulation
- Leadership
- Teamwork

- Social Intelligence
- Modesty
- Love
- Perseverance
- Zest
- Curiosity
- Love of learning
- Prudence
- Creativity
- Spirituality
- Appreciation of beauty and excellence
4- Parent Engagement

- Importance of an integrative approach

Venn Diagram showing overlap between Schools, Families, and Communities.
4 – Parent Engagement

- “Parent-to-Parent Dinner Series”
  - Once a month
  - Different social and emotional health topics each month:
    - Peer pressure
    - Bullying
    - Relationships
  - Goal: Professional and peer support
4- Parent Engagement

- Advisory program
  - Each scholar is assigned a staff member they remain with for their entire time at MHCS
- Benefit to Scholars
  - Promotes school connectedness
- Benefit to parents
  - Contact person
Q & A

Contact information:

- Meghan Oppenheimer --- moppenheimer@motthallcs.org

- Elizabeth Weiner --- Lweiner@motthallcs.org