Family and Community Engagement in Addressing Childhood Trauma

March 22, 2017
Agenda

• Why family engagement is important to responding to toxic stress

• How to build partnerships

• How to engage parents and the impact of parent leaderships

• Q&A
While some stress is normal and can have a positive effect, severe chronic stress is “toxic”

**Positive Stress**
Moderate and brief. When a young child is protected by supportive relationships with adults, she learns to cope with everyday challenges and her stress response returns to baseline. *Example: sports*

**Tolerable Stress**
Occurs when more serious difficulties, such as the loss of a loved one, a natural disaster, or frightening injury, are buffered by caring adults. *Example: death of a relative*

**Toxic Stress**
When strong, frequent or prolonged adverse experiences such as extreme poverty or repeated abuse are experienced without adult support, stress can be said to be “toxic.”

Learn more: Center on the Developing Child
[http://developingchild.harvard.edu/](http://developingchild.harvard.edu/)
There is a growing understanding that trauma and toxic stress are widespread with far-reaching impacts.

Trauma also manifests at the community level.

It needs to be about more than understanding and intervening.

It’s equally important to:

- tackle root causes of toxic stress
- help parents and caregivers buffer their children from toxic stress responses
- build protective factors in families and communities

Community-level strategies are needed to support families, reduce and address adversity, and promote healing.
WORKING TOWARD Well-Being
COMMUNITY APPROACHES TO TOXIC STRESS

About the Early Childhood-UNC Learning Lab on Community Approaches to Toxic Stress

In recent years, significant attention has been paid to the concept of toxic stress and the impact of adverse experiences in childhood on lifelong health and development. As scientific understanding continues to grow, communities are working to prevent and respond to toxic stress in the form of adverse childhood experiences. Leaders from communities have come together with CSSP on community approaches to developing local early childhood learning networks for children. A network of communities—it becomes a learning and collaboration network for communities—works together to develop programs to prevent children from experiencing toxic stress and develop programs to help them cope with it. The Early Childhood Learning Network on Community Approaches to Toxic Stress (see above) is an example of how communities can come together to provide the necessary support for children experiencing toxic stress.
Working Toward Well-Being: A Framework of Community Approaches to Toxic Stress

**Agents for Change within a Community System**

- Parents and caregivers organize to:
  - Develop strategies to prevent and respond to stressors in their families and communities
  - Learn, develop and share strategies to respond to the impact of toxic stress in their children and families
  - Develop leadership skills and partner with program, system and community leaders

- Providers work to:
  - Build awareness of the impact of toxic stress
  - Develop and implement strategies to promote healthy development and prevent stress for both parents and children
  - Effectively screen and assess to identify needs for services
  - Build capacity to respond to intensive needs with appropriate services and referrals

- Multisystem, community partners and policymakers coordinate their efforts to:
  - Engage all sectors of the community in supporting families
  - Support programmatic changes
  - Ensure an array of services/supports are available
  - Promote policies, practices and techniques that mitigate stress and promote healthy development
  - Reduce or eliminate root causes of toxic stress in the community
  - Develop/implement financing strategies

**Community Context**

- Parents and other caregivers have opportunities to:
  - Understand effects of toxic stress
  - Learn/implement positive parenting strategies
  - Make decisions for their families and communities

- An aligned set of formal and informal, effective services, interventions and opportunities are available for children and adults.

**Individual & Family Experiences**

- Service providers recognize and respond appropriately to symptoms of toxic stress.

- Other community entities are family-friendly and trauma-informed.

- Protective factors are robust in families and communities.

**Outcomes**

- Children grow up in a rich environment of positive experiences.
- Children have minimal exposure to severe and/or prolonged stress.
- Parents and other adults provide buffering to prevent a toxic stress response.
- Children and adults receive appropriate support for toxic stress experienced.
Agents for Change within a Community System

- Parents and caregivers
- Service Providers
- Multisystem, community partners and policymakers

Parents and caregivers organize to:
- Develop strategies to prevent and respond to stressors in their families and communities
- Learn, develop and share strategies to respond to the impact of toxic stress in their children and families
- Develop leadership skills and partner with program, system and community leaders
Strengthening Families: Five protective factors we can help families build

- Parental Resilience
- Social Connections
- Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development
- Concrete Support in Times of Need
- Social and Emotional Competence of Children
Many resources available at www.strengtheningfamilies.net
BPS Parent University

Theory of Change

If we provide all BPS parents with the knowledge and experiences that build their capacity to advocate and support not only their child’s learning but their own personal learning, then parents will become more engaged and intentional in demanding and supporting quality education for their children that will result in improved student outcomes and whole school improvement.
PARENT UNIVERSITY

Enriching - Engaging - Empowering

THE BPS VISION

“Every school welcomes every family and every student, actively engaging them as partners in student learning and school improvement.”

OUR GOAL

To educate and empower parents as partners, advocates and lifelong teachers in their child’s education through educational courses and leadership opportunities.

WHAT IS PARENT UNIVERSITY?

Parent University is an opportunity to sharpen your skills as you work in one of life’s most important and demanding roles. Parent University provides parents and caregivers with information about their vital responsibility in shaping children’s lives.

Sessions focus on child development, what children are learning in schools, advocacy, parent leadership and effective parenting skills. All parents and caregivers are invited.

WHAT WILL I LEARN?

Parent University learning sessions are focused on four areas that support parents in ways that empower them to be leaders and advocates for student learning and school improvement.

Parents are Teachers – provides a clearer understanding of how children grow and learn and the teaching and learning approaches used in BPS.

Parents are Advocates – builds capacity to advocate for children, understand the standards and expectations for learning, and support learning at home.

Parents are Leaders – helps parents build the skills necessary to assume leadership roles in schools and the community.

Parents are Learners – provides parents with the opportunity to build upon their own skills for personal and professional growth.

HOW DO I REGISTER?

For more information call 617-635-1683. Email us at parentuniversity@bostonpublicschools.org.

WHAT IS THE RESEARCH SAYS

When parents are involved in their educational process, students achieve more, regardless of socioeconomic status, ethnic/racial background, or the parent’s level of education.

Adapted from 2012 National Center for School Engagement

HOW DOES PARENT UNIVERSITY WORK?

The University offers 12 day-long Saturday learning sessions in October, January and May, with additional sessions offered throughout the year at schools, libraries and community centers.

Parent University is free for all BPS parents.

In June, there will be a Parent University graduation for parents who have completed the required set of learning sessions.
BPS Parent U and MJE Partnership
Mother’s for Justice and Equality

Mission

The mission of MJE is to end neighborhood violence by empowering mothers and youth to challenge the normalization of violence and become effective catalysts for change in their homes, schools, and communities. By reclaiming the identity of our communities we restore a sense of hope and purpose for children, youth, and adults.
Problem

- Communities with high levels of violence are often located in urban areas of larger or mid-size cities.
- Higher levels of unemployment, incarceration rates and poverty than surrounding areas.
- Low high school graduation rates and low student academic performance.
- The vast majority of Boston homicides occur in the Dorchester, Roxbury, Mattapan and Jamaica Plain neighborhoods.
Our Approach

Education

Engagement
“We believe empowered and engaged mothers and youth, working together with civic leaders and law enforcement, are key to ending neighborhood violence”.
Approach

**Education and Engagement:** Adult programs are designed to help victims recover from trauma and become advocates for change in the communities where their families live and work.
Impact

- 200 individuals have completed the You Matter Training both at MJE and at new community-based locations such as libraries, local schools, and other sites.
- 100% of participants gained understanding about the impact of trauma and violence on their lives and in the community.
- 100% of participants increased their ability to educate and advocate for change in the community and through public processes.
- 100% of women participate in workforce readiness initiatives following their You Matter training.
- 85% of participants have obtained sustainable employment within 12 months of program completion.
- 100% of the house of correction inmates will successfully develop a financial plan before re-entering the community.
Impact

• 250 youth served since the program began in 2013.
• 100% of graduating seniors during the past three years have gone to college prepared to succeed.
• 100% of students progressing to next grade on schedule in 2016.
• 100% of youth will increase their ability to educate and advocate for change in the community and through public processes.
• 85% of youth become involved in Civic Engagement efforts with MJE in their communities.
• 100% learn self-awareness and leadership skills that promote personal development and meaningful decision-making.
• 100% of youth engage with positive, ongoing, caring adult mentors from MJE’s You Matter program participants and Alumnae Network as well as college-age mentors.
• 85% of youth stay actively engaged with MJE through high school.
Our Mission

The **National Parent Leadership Institute (NPLI)**
exists to coordinate and increase the civic skills and impact of diverse parents to improve child and community outcomes as they build caring communities.
Our Journey

NPLI began as the national replication arm of the Connecticut Parent Leadership Training Institute (PLTI) designed by the Commission on Children in 1992. PLTI facilitates parents, who wish to improve the lifelong health, safety and learning of children, how to become practiced change agents for the next generation.

Parents Who Care Can Become Parents Who Lead!
What We Do

We are developing the field of parent leadership by embracing a cross-race, cross-class, parent-informed and pro-social learning approach to building parents as a constituency for community and recognizing children as the beneficiaries.
Our Partners

NPLI works with agencies, community organizations, local/state governments and other systems and trains parents, agency and community leaders to view parents as valuable leaders and assets working to build caring communities.

Parents Who Care Can Become Parents Who Lead!
Parent Leadership Training Institute (PLTI)

Our Core Work with Parents Who Care Becoming Parents Who Lead Across the Nation

- California
- Colorado
- Connecticut*
- Florida
- Hawaii
- Louisiana
- Maine
- Massachusetts
- Michigan
- New York
- Rhode Island
- Virginia
- Washington
- Wind River Nation
- Wyoming

Parents Who Care Do Become Parents Who Lead!
Because of PLTI, a Parent Leader Can…

Lead Parent Programs

Advocacy ~ Bonding ~ Connection

Helping Parents Who Care to become Parents Who Lead

By

Maureen O’Neill - Davis
CT Parent Leader
Who I am and Why I’m a PLTI Parent Leader
Around Childhood Trauma

- Married mom of 3 amazing, adopted children: son 12, daughters 12 & 14
- My daughters (formerly my nieces) witnessed life-altering trauma (domestic violence death of their mom) when they were 13-months & 3-years
- My youngest was profoundly affected - her most debilitating diagnoses: PTSD, RAD
- I researched RAD & traumatic stress and its potential impact across the lifespan
- I engaged early therapeutic interventions, for her and our family as a whole
- At 6 years old her manageable behaviors became unmanageable; our home became chaotic, unpredictable and unsafe
- Our family was in crisis as her RAD and toxic traumatic stress raged
The Faces of Trauma: ‘Fight ~ Flight ~ Freeze’

- Her trauma/attachment disruption history gave way to unstable emotions
- Visceral memories inform her behaviors despite the absence of a threat
- She lacks an inner sense of safety
- Behaviors became overwhelming, complicated and hopeless for our family

**Sadness: Withdrawn**
Fierce; too cool for connection; blames others; no responsibility, suicidal

**Scared: Reactionary**
Alarmed; reactions don’t match situation; aggressive; rigid; lying

**Shame: Defiant**
Angry; disgusted by everything; resentful; lacks self worth or value
Causes of Childhood Trauma

- Loss of biological connection (adoption)
- Loss of parent through deployment, child protection removals, divorce or death
- Extended infant/toddler hospitalization
- Community or environmental violence
- Abuse/neglect
- Parent defect
- Poverty
- War
- Not having ones needs consistently met as an infant/toddler
CT System Response to Parents Raising Traumatized Children w/Specialized Needs

• Connecticut is 1 of only 5 states that administers its Children’s Behavioral Health system through its child protection services agency.

• Adoptive parent experience: Child protection guided response often presumes that the ‘forever family’ is a “trauma” cause
  • The current family environment is “blamed”
  • Opportunities to support the child and family through school and community services are lost in favor of physical protection.

• Biological parent experience: Children with environmental and organic brain disorders, and those with I/DD with co-occurring trauma/mental illness
  • Are also blamed
  • Are viewed as inadequate, unable to meet the child’s specialized needs

• When parents are viewed as a cause, they’re role as advocate and as a parent partner in service delivery is lost - therapeutic healing is compromised
Purpose
• When CT’s systems of care, education and child protection failed my family
• We were not heard or viewed as knowledgeable
• System change required

Navigating systems were long on blame and short on benefit
• Ill prepared systems harmed my family, wasted resources and delayed access to care
• My character, my family’s integrity and our daughter’s future were threatened
• Moved to activism

Confidence & Coalition Building
• Strong parent voice around childhood (complex & developmental) trauma and child mental health care system delivery in Connecticut was missing at system tables
• Parent leadership coupled with collective community voice was unorganized
• A roadmap to reform
A PLTI Parent Leader is:

- The glue within the family system
  - Family members and the identified traumatized child rely on the parent(s) to guide and keep all informed & safe
  - Parents provide the ‘boots on the ground’ view

- The missing link within the circle of child serving systems
  - Educational systems
  - Children’s Behavioral Health system
  - Insurance systems
  - Child Welfare system
  - Family Court system
  - Juvenile Justice system

- The critical resource to legislative systems
Because of PLTI
A Parent Leader can...

- Redefine parent engagement in community
- PLTI gave me the tools to:
  - Expand parent-to-parent connectivity (expand actionable base)
  - Reframe conversations across beliefs/cultures
  - Employ ‘I’ over ‘E’ - intelligence over emotion
  - Inform system change through collaborative engagement
  - Effectively lobby lawmakers (educate & inform)
  - Lead public policy reform (partner to champion legislation)
- A PLTI Parent Leader will:
  - Run for public office
  - Lead the free world
  - Forge global solutions
Because of PLTI
A Parent Leader leads

• One parent’s voice can be a powerful tool
  • Parents are professionals within their own vocational fields, possessing valuable skill sets
  • The skills parents bring to the table provide alternative perspective, but they must be heard
  • Credibility of voice comes through training and numbers
  • Learning to place greater emphasis on INTELLEGENCIE rather than EMOTION is invaluable

• Collective voice is powerful, more credible and inclusive

• Connecting parent strengths can change systems, cultures & outcome
PLTI 2014 Community Project
Roadmap to Reform

- Refined mission thru critical planning
- Provided formal recommendations to PA 13-178/Plan 4 Children development
- Forged strategic stakeholder alliances across systems at state and national levels
- Secured appointments to CBH advisory & oversight councils, committees & panels
- Maximized social & traditional media platforms
- Fine tune messaging

PLTI brought it all together.
Organizations Affiliation and Legislation

- Attachment & Trauma Network, Inc. (www.AttachTrauma.org)
- Family Forward Project / Family Forward Foundation (Facebook@FamilyForwardProject)
- Family Forward Advocacy CT (Facebook@FamilyForwardProjectCT)
  - Grassroots advocacy group leading state level ‘Custody for Care’ public policy reform
  - Advocates, family matters defense attorneys, parents and trauma model proficient providers
  - A statewide, nationally aligned, movement to improve child behavioral health systems where they intersect with the child welfare industry and child protection services policies

- Custody for Care - Custody Relinquishment Prevention Legislation
  - CT HB 6297 - An Act Concerning Voluntary Admission to the Department of Children and Families (Voluntary Placement in the Custody of DCF)
  - Partnered with Child Advocate, Chief Public Defender & family advocacy organizations
  - Media coverage - four investigative articles, NPR Radio, local ABC affiliate news
  - Mobilized base to testify at a February 7th, 2017 Public Hearing
  - Unanimously voted out of Committee as a task force on March 9th, 2017
PLTI Parent Leaders
Parents who Care becoming Parents who Lead
and so much more.

Action Builds Change

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Q&A
Resources

- Trauma Informed Care Twitter Chat – April 2017 | #CSchats
- Addressing Trauma in Community Schools Webinar
- Working Toward Well-Being: Community Approaches to Toxic Stress
- Strengthening Families: Protective factors research briefs and action sheets
Resources

- Trauma and Brain Development: A protective factors approach: Slides and script
- Attachment & Trauma Network, Inc.
- Family Forward Project | Connecticut Group
- CT Health News: Desperate Choices: Giving Up Custody For Care
- CT HB 6297: AAC Voluntary Admission to DCF
Contact Information

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