TEAM-BASED APPROACHES TO SERVING STUDENTS

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NEW HEIGHTS CHARTER SCHOOL
LOS ANGELES, CA

"You have to have a risk-free or a low-risk environment, because . . . to learn is to put yourself out on the edge and to try new things. No one's going to do that unless they feel comfortable."

AMY BERFIELD
Executive Director

Deep, trusting relationships between staff and students have been shown to improve resilience and well-being in students.[1] This is one of many reasons that New Heights Charter School opened in 2006 with a focus on developing a caring, responsive learning community that integrates social, emotional, academic, and physical development.

At New Heights, the first step toward creating such a culture is hiring teachers who believe that "kids do well if they can" rather than "kids do well if they wanna," as noted child psychologist Dr. Ross Greene has put it.[2] Teachers with this mindset are more likely to take personal responsibility for shaping the conditions needed for all students to learn and thrive, rather than attributing credit or blame to a child.

New Heights' team-based approach

New Heights also provides teachers with training on working as a team so they can learn from and rely upon each other. Each grade-level team consists of two teachers, a paraprofessional, a counselor or social worker, and a resource team staff member. The team works collaboratively to problem-solve student or family challenges, with the expectation that team members will learn from one another and that they will pull in other staff as needed to resolve any issue, including those who have more experience with a student or expertise on a certain subject.

For example, one New Heights team noticed that Black and Brown boys were being over-referred for behavior incidents in a particular teacher's classroom. The team pulled in school counselor Trina Mitchell to step into the classroom and model for the teacher how to communicate, provide reinforcement, and demonstrate to students that their voice and concerns

mattered. These actions helped that teacher shift their perception of student behavior as well as their use of language.

This team-based approach is critical to mitigating the burnout and confidence loss that new teachers often experience, especially in under-resourced schools or those serving many students of color, where teacher turnover rates are often far higher.[3]

Collaboration serves students

Developing the social-emotional skills of teachers through mentoring and creating trusting relationships at school allows teachers to reflect that climate into their classroom for the benefit of their students. In addition, New Heights students have also come to appreciate how valuable teamwork can be by seeing their teachers model it. As a result of being part of a community that values caring relationships, students at New Heights have started to build their own collaborative conflict resolution and problem-solving skills.

> "For teachers that have a hard time, we're in the room with them. We're modeling. We're inviting them to visit other rooms. We're inviting them to talk to teachers who've had that kid in the past. We're doing all sorts of things so that they start to feel like they are in a safe enough space to develop and to take some risks to try new things."

AMY BERFIELD
Executive Director

New Heights Charter School BY THE NUMBERS

Number of Students	429
Geographic Setting	Urban
Grades Served	K–8
School Model	Public charter school
Conditions for Equitable Learning & Development	Personal & Learning Environment

Student Demographics

- **76%** Latinx*
- **23%** Black
- **0%** White
- **0%** Asian or Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
- **0%** Native American*/Alaska Native
- **0%** Multiracial
- **15%** Students with disabilities
- **33%** English language learners
- **97%** Eligible for free/reduced-price lunch

Student Demographic data sourced from ed-data.org and nces.ed.gov. NCES lists Latinx as "Hispanic" and Native American as "American Indian."

TEAM-BASED APPROACHES TO SERVING STUDENTS

Consider while you listen . . .

TEACHER MINDSETS

School leader Amy Berfield shared that New Heights aims to hire teachers that consider themselves responsible for shaping the conditions that support student behavior and outcomes. How does this mindset promote equitable learning and development? What type of strategies can your school use to promote these conditions and outcomes?

TEAM-BASED APPROACH

School counselor Trina Mitchell reflected on a time that the team-based approach helped mitigate the over-referral of Black and Brown students in one teacher's classroom. Why do you think teacher collaboration is especially important in scenarios like this? Have there been times you have benefited from another staff member's expertise?

Related Resources

WestEd's Center to Improve Social and Emotional Learning and School Safety hosted this webinar with Ellen Moir of the New Teacher Center and David Adams of the Urban Assembly on the benefits of promoting teacher social-emotional learning for entire school communities.

Dr. Ross Greene, clinical psychologist and author, discusses an important theme of problem solving in this video.

Conditions for Learning and Development

In their work, school leaders and educators must attend to a range of conditions that can promote — or inhibit — learning and development.[4] These include Personal Conditions, Learning Environment Conditions, and System Conditions.
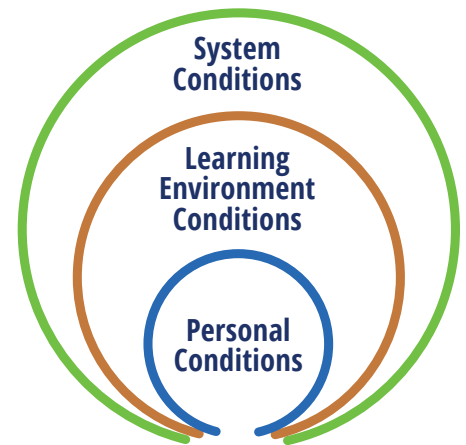
PERSONAL CONDITIONS

Conditions that bolster and ensure health and well-being within individuals in school communities, including social and emotional health and well-being as well as the physical, mental, and behavioral health of students and the adults who care for them.

LEARNING ENVIRONMENT CONDITIONS

Conditions that foster safe, supportive environments and responsive, reliable relationships. These conditions include school climate and trauma-informed and restorative practices, as well as the policies, structures, and systems in place at the district, school, and classroom levels. Together, these can promote resilience, provide protective factors, and ensure that every person — regardless of background, circumstance, or identity — can learn, grow, and thrive.

SYSTEM CONDITIONS

Conditions stemming from the complex community and social factors that can influence health and well-being. Here, cross-sector collaboration between schools and other sectors — such as health, mental health, justice, child welfare, housing, and anti-poverty efforts — can accelerate schools' positive impacts on the development and well-being of students and families.

System Conditions

Learning Environment Conditions

Personal Conditions

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The **BEYOND SEL Audio Gallery** is a series of stories that capture promising practices shaping the landscape of social and emotional learning and support in schools across the country.

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[1] Bellis, M.A., Hardcastle, K., Ford, K., et al. (2017.) Does continuous trusted adult support in childhood impart life-course resilience against adverse childhood experiences — a retrospective study on adult health-harming behaviours and mental well-being. *BMC Psychiatry,* 17(110). https://bmcpsychiatry.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12888-017-1260-z.

[2] Greene, R. (2010, September 10). Kids Do Well if They Can [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jvzQQDfAL-Q

[3] Carver-Thomas, D. & Darling-Hammond, L. (2017). *Teacher turnover: Why it matters and what we can do about it.* Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute. https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/product-files/Teacher_Turnover_REPORT.pdf

[4] Garcia Coll, C., Lamberty, G., Jenkins, R., McAdoo, H. P., Crnic, K., Wasik, B. H., & Garcia, H. V. (1996). An integrative model for the study of developmental competencies in minority children. *Child Development,* 67(5), 1891–1914. https://doi.org/10.2307/1131600