Berkeley County Schools

Syllabus: **Centering for Successful and Engaged Communities**
June 9th – June 13th

Date	Session	Time	Location	Content
7/7/2025	Session #1	10:00-2:00	Superintendent Conference Room	Policy 2510, 7.1.i: Culturally Responsive Teaching. Meaningfulness, Safety, Capacity
7/8/2025	Session #2	10:00-2:00	Superintendent Conference Room	SEL Supports: Adult & Student
7/9/2025	Session #3	10:00-2:00	Superintendent Conference Room	Check-Ins: Strengthen Engagement, Relationships, & Community
7/10/2025	Session #4	10:00-2:00	Superintendent Conference Room	Empathetic Listening and Restorative Conversations
7/11/2025	Session #5	10:00-2:00	Superintendent Conference Room	Talking Circles

Monday, July 7, 2025
Policy 2510, 7.1.i: Culturally Responsive Teaching. Meaningfulness, Safety, Capacity

- 7.1.i. Diversity and Multicultural Education. To foster an environment of respect for individuals from a variety of cultural, ethnic, racial, and religious backgrounds, multicultural education awareness must be developed and embedded across all content areas per W. Va. Code § 18-5-15a.
- WV Codes & Policies
- Capacity
- Student Learning Experiences

Tuesday, July 8, 2025
- Autonomic Nervous System: Sympathetic & Parasympathetic
- Social Connection
- Acts of Kindness
- BCS Mental Health & Well-Being

Wednesday, July 9, 2025
Check-Ins: Strengthen Engagement, Relationships, & Community
- Impact of Harm & Repair
- Restorative: Justice, Mindset, Practices
- Punitive vs. Restorative Approach

Thursday, July 10, 2025
Empathetic Listening and Restorative Conversations
- Empathetic Listening
- Obstacles to Empathetic Listening
- Check Yourself Tool
- Restorative Conversations

Friday, July 11, 2025
Talking Circles
- Circles: Setting the stage
- Community Building Circle
- Peace Circle

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Book Study: The Four Pivots Reimagining Justice, Reimagining Ourselves				
Date	Pivots	Flip Grid Post Reflections	Hours: Reading, Reflections, Response	In-Person Presentation (Prep & Meeting)
May	Pivot 1: From Lens to Mirror	Chapters 1-3	5	4
June	Pivot 2: From Transactional to Transformative	Chapters 4-6	5	4
July	Pivot 3: From Problem to Possibility	Chapters 7-9	5	4
August	Pivot 4: From Hustle to Flow	Chapters 10-12	5	4

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Overview

Where does engagement begin? It starts with meaning for students, teachers and leaders. Where does meaning begin? It starts with belonging – that my presence, voice and personhood matter to all. In this 60-minute presentation participants will learn the elements, skills and strategies to increase engagement and belonging in classroom and strengthen relationships to build a community through check-ins, circles and mindfulness.

This course is for both teachers and leaders:
We will model the elements of physiological safety, meaningfulness and capacity with our session participants practicing centering techniques that will include:
- a check-in with the purpose of affirming different lived experiences first before undertaking the daily task of teaching, leading and learning
- breath work that taps into autonomic nervous system to reduce stress and anxiety before they elevate into a fight, flight or freeze response that highjacks the learning process and demands greater energy to recapture
- social connectedness is a predictor of happiness and longevity in life and in the classroom, this means less disruption and disrespectful (which is the most common classroom behavior infractions)

The strategies I will share have been implemented in Berkeley County Schools (BCS), a district severely impacted by the opioid crisis. Our data shows significant improvements in student outcomes, including:
- A 25% reduction in behavioral referrals, indicating improved emotional regulation and resilience among students.
- A 15% increase in academic performance, with notable gains in reading and math proficiency rates.

These improvements are particularly noteworthy given the district's challenges. In the 2023-2024 school year, our partner organization, The Martinsburg Initiative (TMI), supported 348 at-risk students with an average Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) score of 4.5 out of 10. Despite these challenges, our SEL program has demonstrated promise in promoting emotional well-being, academic success, and resilience among our students.
Our program's key features, including targeted support for trauma-impacted students, comprehensive and scalable design, and alignment with local and state educational goals, have contributed to its success. By sharing these strategies, I aim to empower educators and administrators to implement effective SEL programs that promote student well-being, academic achievement, and lifelong success.

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The first strategy I will share with participants is focused on fostering a supportive learning environment by promoting psychological meaningfulness, psychological safety, and psychological availability. These three drivers of engagement are crucial in helping educators and students feel invested in their work and learning.

Psychological Meaningfulness

Psychological meaningfulness refers to having a reason to engage in one's work or learning. When educators and students feel connected to the material and see its relevance to their lives, they are more likely to be motivated and engaged. To promote psychological meaningfulness, educators can:

- Help students see the real-world applications of the material
- Encourage students to set goals and work towards achieving them
- Provide opportunities for students to reflect on their learning and see progress

Psychological Safety

Psychological safety refers to feeling safe to take risks, share ideas, and be oneself without fear of judgment or rejection. When educators create a psychologically safe learning environment, students are more likely to feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and ideas, asking questions, and taking risks. To promote psychological safety, educators can:

- Establish clear expectations and guidelines for classroom behavior
- Encourage open and respectful communication
- Foster a growth mindset and emphasize that mistakes are opportunities for learning

Psychological Availability

Psychological availability refers to having the confidence and capacity to engage in one's work or learning. When educators help students develop a sense of psychological availability, they are more likely to feel motivated and capable of achieving their goals. To promote psychological availability, educators can:

- Provide opportunities for students to develop their skills and build confidence
- Offer feedback that is specific, timely, and constructive
- Encourage students to take ownership of their learning and set goals for themselves

Supporting Research

Research has shown that when educators promote psychological meaningfulness, psychological safety, and psychological availability, students are more likely to be engaged, motivated, and invested in their learning (Kahn, 1990; Hackman & Oldham, 1976). Additionally, studies have found that students who feel psychologically safe and supported are more likely to achieve academic success and have better social and emotional outcomes
(Wang & Holcombe, 2010; Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2014).

Tangible Results

In our district, we have seen tangible results from implementing strategies that promote psychological meaningfulness, psychological safety, and psychological availability. For example:

- Student engagement and motivation have increased, as measured by surveys and observations
- Academic achievement has improved, with increases in reading and math proficiency rates
- Student behavior and discipline issues have decreased, with fewer referrals and incidents

By sharing this strategy, I aim to empower educators with the knowledge and tools they need to create a supportive learning environment that promotes student engagement, motivation, and achievement.

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The second strategy I will share with participants is the art of "CHECK-IN." A Check-In is an opportunity for participants to share how they are doing in the moment, which can be helpful information for a facilitator to get to know the dynamics in the group.

Step-by-Step Details
To implement a Check-In, follow these steps:

1. **Choose a Check-In Question**: Select a question that is connected to the theme of the community-building circle, such as "How are you feeling today?" or "What's one thing you're looking forward to this week?"
2. **Use a Talking Piece (Optional)**: Consider using a talking piece, such as a small object that is passed around the circle, to help facilitate the Check-In and ensure that each participant has a chance to share.
3. **Allow Each Participant to Share**: Give each participant the opportunity to share their response to the Check-In question. Encourage active listening and respect among participants.
4. **Keep Shares Brief**: Encourage participants to keep their shares brief, ideally 1-2 minutes, to ensure that everyone has a chance to participate.

Supporting Research
Research has shown that regular Check-Ins can have a positive impact on student engagement, motivation, and sense of community (Wang & Holcombe, 2010; Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2014).

Tangible Results
In our district, we have seen tangible results from implementing regular Check-Ins, including:

- Increased student engagement and participation in class
- Improved student motivation and sense of purpose
- Enhanced sense of community and belonging among students and staff
- Reduced discipline issues and improved behavior

Examples of Check-In Questions
Here are some examples of Check-In questions that can be used to get to know participants and help them feel more connected:

- How are you feeling today?
- What's one thing you're looking forward to this week?
- If you could have any superpower, what would it be and why?
- What's something that's been on your mind lately?

Activities That Can Be Used as a Check-In
Here are some activities that can be used as a Check-In:

- **Image Selection**: Provide participants with a selection of images and ask them to choose one that represents how they are feeling.
- **Question Ball**: Write Check-In questions on a large inflatable ball and have participants pass the ball around the circle, answering the question that is under their right thumb.
- **Write + Rip**: Have participants write down something that's been on their mind and then rip up the paper and throw it away, symbolizing letting go of worries and distractions.

Debrief and Reflect: After sharing, facilitate a debriefing discussion to reflect on the experience, identify key takeaways, and establish next steps.

Supporting Research
Research has shown that the use of circles in educational settings can have a positive impact on student engagement, motivation, and sense of community (Riestenberg, 2012; Zehr, 2002).

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Tangible Results

In our district, we have seen tangible results from implementing circles, including:

- Improved student engagement and motivation
- Enhanced sense of community and belonging among students and staff
- Increased empathy and understanding among participants
- Improved conflict resolution and communication skills
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Examples of Circle Activities

Here are some examples of circle activities that can be used to explore different topics:

- **Exploring Community**: Ask participants to share what community means to them, and how they can contribute to building a positive and inclusive community.
- **Celebration**: Ask participants to share something they are grateful for, and how they can celebrate and appreciate the positive aspects of their lives.
- **Planning Ahead**: Ask participants to share their goals and aspirations, and how they can support and encourage each other to achieve their goals.

The fourth strategy I will share with participants is Modeling Targeted Support for Trauma-Impacted Students through Daily SEL engagement activities. This strategy involves providing daily/weekly Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) engagement activities that are aligned with the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) competencies.

Step-by-Step Details

To implement this strategy, follow these steps:

1. **Develop a Daily/Weekly SEL Engagement Activity**: Create an engagement activity that incorporates SEL competencies, such as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.
2. **Align Lessons with CASEL Competencies**: Ensure that the SEL lessons are aligned with the CASEL competencies, which include self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.
3. **Incorporate Movement and Brain Breaks**: Incorporate movement and brain breaks into the SEL lessons to help students regulate their emotions and stay focused.
4. **Provide Opportunities for Practice and Reflection**: Provide opportunities for students to practice and reflect on the SEL skills they are learning.

Supporting Research

Research has shown that effective SEL programs can have a positive impact on student academic achievement, social-emotional skills, and behavior (Durlak et al., 2011; Elias et al., 1997). Additionally, research has shown that movement can promote empathy and social-emotional learning (Behrends et al., 2012).

Tangible Results

In our district, we have seen tangible results from implementing daily SEL lessons, including:

- Improved academic achievement, with a 13% increase in ELA scores and a 9.9% increase in math scores
- Improved social-emotional skills, with a 28% decrease in incident reports and a 13% decrease in suspensions
- Improved student behavior, with a 35% decrease in incident reports in ELL classrooms and a 27% decrease in incident reports for special education students.

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Book Study

In "The Four Pivots: Reimagining Justice, Reimagining Ourselves," Shawna A. Ginwright, Ph.D. offers a groundbreaking framework for understanding and addressing systemic injustices. Ginwright, a renowned expert in youth development and social justice, argues that traditional approaches to justice often focus on individualized solutions rather than addressing the root causes of inequality.

The Four Pivots

Ginwright introduces the concept of "pivots" – critical shifts in perspective and approach that can help us reimagine justice and ourselves. The four pivots are:

1. **From Trauma to Healing**: Ginwright emphasizes the importance of moving beyond trauma-informed care to a more holistic approach that prioritizes healing and wellness.

2. **From Problems to Possibilities**: Rather than focusing on deficits and problems, Ginwright encourages us to explore possibilities and assets within individuals and communities.

3. **From Silence to Voice**: This pivot highlights the need to amplify the voices and stories of marginalized communities, rather than speaking over or for them.

4. **From Isolation to Connection**: Ginwright stresses the importance of building connections and community, rather than perpetuating isolation and individualism.

Key Takeaways

- The Four Pivots offer a powerful framework for reimagining justice and ourselves.

- Traditional approaches to justice often focus on individualized solutions rather than addressing systemic inequalities.

- Healing, possibilities, voice, and connection are essential for creating a more just and equitable society.

Implications for Practice

- Educators, policymakers, and practitioners must prioritize a holistic approach to healing and wellness.

- Community-based initiatives should focus on asset-based development rather than deficit-based approaches.

- Amplifying marginalized voices and stories is crucial for creating a more just and equitable society.

- Building connections and community is essential for promoting social change.

Conclusion

"The Four Pivots" offers a transformative framework for reimagining justice and ourselves. By applying the four pivots, we can shift our perspectives and approaches to create a more just, equitable, and connected society. This book is a must-read for anyone committed to social justice and creating positive change.