From Toxic Stress to Health and Hope: Leading for Change
We envision an America in which a legacy of economic security and educational success passes from one generation to the next.
This is not the America we have achieved for our children, yet...
We need to ask just two questions...

First, how can the science of brain development help us to understand challenges to a healthy, hopeful and productive future for everyone?
We can use the “Arc of Science” to ask, Where am I?

Poverty
Chronic Instability
Racism & Implicit Bias
Politics?

Mindfulness
Kindness
Health
Hope
Resilience
Social Capital
Empathy

Cognitive and Social-Emotional Development
Executive Function Self-Regulation

Trauma
Toxic Stress
Early Childhood Adversity (ACES)
Understand the long arm of childhood adversity: The ACE Study
Normal: Getting immunized; Meeting new people; First day at school. First day at work. Presenting big ideas at a public meeting

Tolerable: Serious Illness; Death of a loved one; Frightening accident; Acrimonious divorce; Persistent discrimination

Toxic Stress: Tolerable stress that is not buffered by caring, actively-present adults or peers. The body’s stress system activates and stays at high levels “like revving a car’s engine for hours every day.”

This causes damage at the cellular level of our bodies, impacts our health and mental health, and can be passed from one generation to the next at the genomic level.
Second, now that we know...

What can we DO that is BETTER than the best we have done so far?
We can listen with humility
Because, everybody has a story
We can support those who are buffers in the face of adversity in children’s lives...

Parents, across generations
Teachers
Mentors
Coaches
Family navigators
We can honor connections across generations.
We can adopt a “developmental health” approach and invest early

- Born Healthy
- Ready at K
- Reading at 3rd
- Mighty in the Middle
- Whole & Healthy in HS
- Successful in Life
We can support agencies that employ a neuroscience-informed, strength- and place-based, outcomes-focused approach.
We can partner with schools to invest in mindfulness and to promote trauma-informed practice and social-emotional learning.
We can be fearless investors in fast-paced, science-informed innovation and honest reporters of what we have learned.

A word from Jack Shonkoff, Harvard Center on the Developing Child
And now that we know...

Hope, health and resilience are ours to build, together