

August

Now is the Time to Develop Ways to Avoid *Burnout*

The beginning of a new school year is a time of optimism and renewed commitment and energy. Students have a “fresh start;” most teachers have enhanced energy and positive expectations; school support staff and administrators are committed to school improvement and programs to enhance student success .

. . . so far so good.

But, what has been planned to ensure the optimism and good intentions are not undermined?

The announcement on every airline is a familiar one:

“When the oxygen mask falls, adults should put their’s on before assisting children.”

Rather than simply addressing burnout as inevitable as the year progresses, here are some ideas for what a school might do from the beginning of the year to support staff so that they will be better able to do their best for students. The focus is on:

Enhancing the Resilience of Adults at School and Creating a Sense of Community

One of the most important research findings related to good outcomes for children and youth is understanding that by enhancing protective factors or buffers, risks can be reduced and barriers overcome. We must remember that this applies to adults as well.

In describing the characteristics of someone who is resilient, Demos says they have

- C a sense of self-esteem and self-efficacy, successfully coping with challenges
- C an active stance toward an obstacle or difficulty. The ability to see a difficulty as a problem that can be worked on, overcome, change, endured, or resolved in some way
- C reasonable persistence, with an ability to know when “enough is enough”
- C a capacity to develop a range of strategies and skills to bear on the problem, which can be used in a flexible way.

In his work, David Hawkins emphasizes the importance of developing strong bonds. He stresses these arise from (a) opportunities for meaningful involvement (ways to make a real contribution and feel valued for effort and accomplishment); (b) developing skill (social, cognitive, emotional, behavioral) that enable success, and (c) recognition for involvement (including corrective feedback) to motivate continued contributions.

It is unlikely that a school that does not promote resilience for staff can promote it for students.

Opportunities to Initiate from the Beginning of a School Year

Extra Support for New Staff

New staff need a considerable amount of support and on-the-job training. Inducting newcomers into the school culture in a welcoming and socially supportive way is needed if they are to survive the challenges and become career professionals. The crux of the matter is to *enhance collegial supports* in ways that ensure effective welcoming and orientations, personalized mentoring and staff development, teaming with experienced staff, and special assistance as soon as problems arise.

Special Roles for Experienced Staff

Working conditions can be transformed by *opening classroom doors and enabling experience staff to work with newcomers and to learn from each other*. Personalized contacts increase opportunities for staff (and students) to support, guide, nurture, and enhance each other's competence every day. Learning from colleagues is not just a talking game. It involves modeling and guiding change (e.g., demonstrating and discussing new approaches; guiding initial practice and implementation; and following-up to improve and refine). Depending on practicalities, such modeling could take place in a teacher's own classroom or be carried out in colleagues' classrooms. Some of it may take the form of team teaching. Other special roles for staff include enhancing their involvement in meaningful decision-making and celebrating their accomplishments in ways that enhance their positive social status.

Working with Unions to Enhance Resilience

A major function of unions is to improve the working conditions of the members. Moving to a proactive stance, the National Education Association created the Health Information Network. Their website features "Resiliency 101." ([Http://www.neahin.org](http://www.neahin.org)) They stress:

"...Resilience applies to everyone at school. Identify at least one protective factor that exists for school staff. How can faculty and administration maximize the benefit of that protective factor to enhance your own resilience? ... Are mistakes, bad decisions, discipline problems, difficulties with academic performance or crises always signs of failure? Or, could they also be 'teachable moments'? ... If you believe that nothing you do will make much of a difference, then coming to work at school each day becomes something you have to do, rather than something you want to do."

Then, they ask: "What can you do to make your work and your experience at school more rewarding and enjoyable? ... How might you begin your own journey as a resilience-oriented educator?"

Expanding on this, a good question for support staff and teacher union leaders at the school to explore with school staff as part of a staff development session is: *How can we all promote a climate that strengthens the resilience of school staff?*

Focusing this Year's Staff Development on Engaging and Re-engaging Students in Classroom Learning

In keeping with prevailing demands for higher standards and achievement test scores, the focus of most staff development is on curriculum, standards, and test preparation. Every teacher must have the ability and resources to bring a sound curriculum to life and apply strategies that make learning meaningful. At the same

time, however *teacher and student support staff must learn how to “enable” learning by addressing barriers to learning and teaching – especially factors leading to low or negative motivation for schooling.*

There is a major disconnect between what teachers need to learn and what they are taught about addressing students problems. Think in terms of strategies to engage student interest and attention, one to one or small group instruction, enhancing protective factors, and asset building, as well as varied forms of special assistance. All this expands definitions of good teaching to encompass practices that enable teachers to be effective with a wide range of students. From this perspective, good teaching involves fostering a crating context for learning; it encompasses development of a classroom infrastructure that transforms a big classroom into a set of smaller units; in encompasses many strategies for preventing and addressing problems as soon as they arise.

The Center has a set of continuing education modules to aid with staff development focused on engaging and re-engaging students in classroom learning. The work is entitled: *Enhancing Classroom Approaches for Addressing Barriers to Learning: Classroom-Focused Enabling*. The emphasis is on enhancing classroom-based efforts to enable learning by increasing teacher effectiveness for preventing and handling problems in the classroom. This is accomplished by providing personalized help to increase a teacher's array of strategies for working with a wider range of individual differences in student motivation and capability (e.g., through use of accommodative and compensatory strategies that engage and re-engage students in learning, peer tutoring and volunteers to enhance social and academic support, resource and itinerant teachers and counselors in the classroom). Through classroom-focused enabling programs, teachers are better prepared to address similar problems when they arise in the future. Anticipated immediate outcomes are fewer behavior problems, increased mainstream efficacy, reduced need for special services, and fewer absences; over time, there should be fewer dropouts and enhanced achievement.

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Ideas presented here are brief and meant to initiate a planning process. For more detail on all of these ideas, you will see links to indepth resources at <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu>.

See Related Center Materials:

- >> *Working Collaboratively: From School-Based Teams to School-Community-Higher Education Connections*
- >> *Understanding and Minimizing Staff Burnout*
- >> *Addressing Barriers to Learning: A Set of Surveys to Map What a School Has and What it Needs*
- >> *Welcoming and Involving New Students and Families*

See the following Center *Quick Find topics* (with links to online resources and centers)

- >Burnout; >Collaboration; >Environments that support learning; >Mentoring; >Motivation;
- >Resilience/Protective Factors; >Volunteers