

# THE TEACHER SELF-CARE TOOLKIT

How to Look Out for Yourself, Avoid Toxic Colleagues, and Spread Positive Energy through Your School and Classroom!

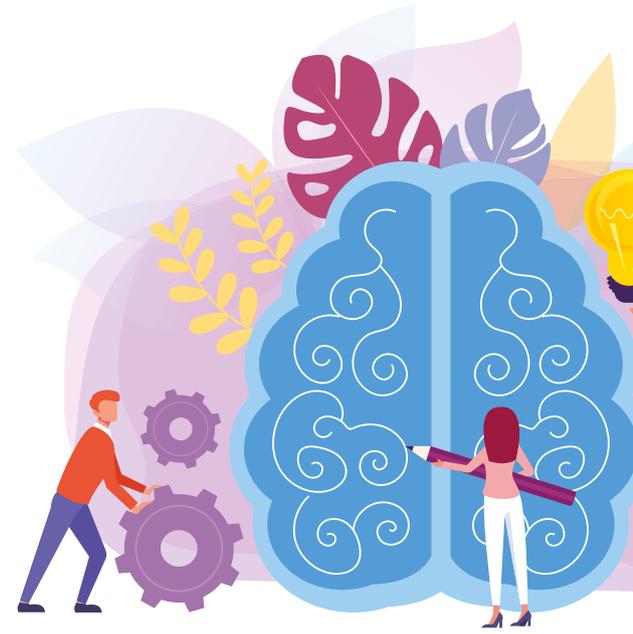


# INTRODUCTION

Educators, you are superheroes. But even superheroes need to be taken care of!

We know you pour out everything you have into your role, but how can you avoid burnout? How might you re-ignite a positive atmosphere in your school and lead your students to love learning? What are some ways you might be able to cultivate healthy relationships with colleagues? Better yet, leaders—how can you implement school-wide support for teacher well-being?

Check out these chapters from bestselling Routledge Eye On Education titles. We hope they help you mentally prepare for the school year.



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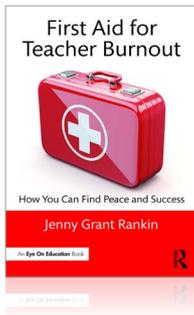
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The following is excerpted from *First Aid for Teacher Burnout* by Jenny Grant Rankin.

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**Teacher Confession:** “I used to eat lunch in the staff lounge, but not anymore. It’s way too toxic in there. I need to vent like any teacher does, but no one in my school’s lounge offers solutions to problems. I hear lots of ‘it’s because our student demographics are so bad,’ ‘these kids can’t learn,’ ‘technology spoils the kids’ brains so they can’t focus,’ and ‘if their parents can’t do their jobs at home, we can’t do our jobs at school.’ I’m not blind to the strains placed on my job by diverse needs, learning challenges, bad technology habits, poor attention spans, and bad parenting. And I get that my colleagues have plenty of reason to gripe. But I want to overcome the challenges, not just dwell on them.”

— *Hera Nuff*

**Teacher Confession:** “The other day I heard myself say, ‘I hate that kid.’ He’s just a kid, and here I was saying I hate him. I have never been so ashamed of myself. How had I become so cold? I want to care for all my students.”

— *Dez B. Leaf*

In researching teacher burnout, I found a lot of commentary as opposed to evidence suggesting attitude is the main decider of whether a teacher gets burned out. This chapter will offer strategies for having a proactive mindset that will help as you implement each chapter’s recommendations. However, I need to first be clear that a good attitude will not, alone, defy burnout.

Burnout is often caused primarily by the organization within which someone works rather than by the individual (Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2011). Asking you to “grin and bear it” while chaos and pressure reign around you would not be humane or effective as a long-term strategy. Thus, this book will help you actively troubleshoot problems around you that contribute to burnout. In other words, when reading this chapter, note:

- attitude is only part of the equation, and
- help is on the way for the rest of your circumstances.

Teachers have plenty of justifiable reasons to complain about their jobs. That is a fact that won’t be argued in this book. Yet there are thousands of teachers who love their jobs. Loving your work as a teacher and experiencing peace and success on a daily basis are certainly within your reach. The first step is to ensure your mindset is primed for any changes that need to take place. Attitude might not be everything, but it certainly is a lot.

### AVOID TOXIC TRAPS

One of the primary hazards for burnout is the presence of negative colleagues, which can include negative superiors, and these stakeholders’ cynicism and negativity can spread like an infectious disease (Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2011). In this chapter’s teacher confessions, Hera Nuff encountered such negativity in the staff lounge, whereas Dez B. Leaf battled a negative outlook within himself. Some negativity culprits might even be your close friends. The following strategies can help teachers



avoid toxic talk. Apply these strategies as appropriate for your circumstances:

- **Avoid complainers.** Trying to remain upbeat in the face of negativity is taxing and time consuming. Educator author Annette Breaux (2015) suggests claiming to be on your way elsewhere, such as to the bathroom, when a negative colleague tries to corner you. A colleague might warrant avoidance or conversation shifting if he or she:
  - regularly blames administration, parents, or students for issues within the classroom.
  - seems to have “given up” on making this a worthwhile job.
  - is an overall downer, usually seeing the negative in a situation rather than seeing (or searching for) the positive.
  - cannot control his or her temper.
  - spends more time complaining than focusing on solutions.
- **Avoid gathering areas where negative talk is commonplace.** For example, sometimes time in the teachers’ lounge causes more harm than good. Since it is best not to isolate yourself, arrange for a regular lunch date in someone’s classroom with a few teachers you regard as positive influences.
- **Suggest solutions.** When a colleague complains to you, first affirm the gripe (e.g., “That must be so frustrating; I’ve had that happen, too”) and then model constructive thinking (e.g., “I find it helps to...” or “I wonder if it would help if you...” or “You might want to talk to...”). Each teacher makes a contribution to the school’s culture, and you would be helping the culture, helping your own mindset, and possibly helping your colleagues find solutions.
- **Share your burnout efforts.** If a negative colleague is also a friend with whom you’d like to remain close, talk to him or her about your efforts to avoid burnout. Share what you’ve learned about the power of positive thinking and ask him or her to help you infuse positivity into your conversations.
- **Talk to your educator leaders if toxic conversation derails collaboration time.** For example, if staff meetings become gripe sessions, point out to your administrators that you find this discouraging. If grade-level or department meetings digress into toxic forums, tell your grade/department chair that you find this discouraging.
- **Identify your burnout triggers.** For example, if you feel especially exhausted after lunch, rethink the way you spend that time. If your sixth period is the most challenging, start applying this book’s burnout first aid with that class period primarily in mind. If talking to your principal exacerbates you, forgo this book’s recommendations to reach out to her until a later time. Triggers force us into a survival mode in which we are less effective, whereas identifying triggers can help us resist them (Schwartz, 2010).



### AMEND TOXIC THINKING

Expansive research has shown that the view you choose to have has a profound impact on how you behave and the results you achieve (Dweck, 2007). For example, nurses who enlisted positive thinking and avoided negative thinking were found to prevent and alleviate burnout (Espeland, 2006). The same is true for teachers, who also work demanding jobs caring for others. One commonality among teachers who last in the profession despite its many obstacles is they remain hopeful about their role in society, communities, and students' lives (Nieto, 2015).

The following strategies can help you avoid toxic thinking. Apply these strategies as appropriate for your circumstances:

- **Decide things you cannot control are not worth thinking about.** For example, in this chapter's teacher confessions, Hera Nuff acknowledged the strains that students' at-home technology habits have on their attention spans. As a teacher, you cannot directly control how many hours of TV your students watch at home. Thinking about the problem is thus not worth your time or energy. Tweaking your lessons to be more engaging, or another project, would be a more worthwhile focus in this case.
- **Learn about growth mindset.** Read the research or books (e.g., Dweck, 2007) by Stanford University psychologist Carol Dweck. Having a growth mindset will help you better deal with challenges and help you excel. Not only do educators benefit from having a growth mindset but they model (such as through their comments and reactions) a growth mindset for their students. Students who have a growth mindset earn higher grades, show greater motivation in school, achieve greater academic success, and score higher on academic tests (Dweck, 2007).

### GROWTH MINDSET DEFINITION

Growth mindset involves understanding that intelligence and abilities can be developed (as opposed to being “fixed” qualities) and has been repeatedly shown to lead to school success.

- **Find a healthy place to vent.** Professional venting can help you guard against burnout (Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2011). Sharing struggles and frustrations with a friendly colleague can break a teacher's isolation and improve even the worst day of teaching (Rauhala, 2015). Share your frustrations with someone who will sympathize but who will also encourage you to overcome obstacles. In other words, venting about your job is not the same thing as wallowing in negativity or ignoring ways you can prompt change.
- **Journal your frustrations.** Skovholt and Trotter-Mathison (2011) found that releasing negative emotions through writing can help practitioners guard against burnout. Writing has an added benefit in that you can take a break after journaling, perhaps when you are too frustrated to think of solutions, and then revisit your words when you are feeling less angry and more open to solving problems.



- **Play the “swap it” game.** It’s OK to have negative thoughts (you’re only human!); you just don’t want to get stuck there. When high school art teacher Christine Friedrich catches herself thinking about something negative, she stops herself and thinks about two positive things going on in her classroom instead. When you catch yourself stewing over a negative thought, try replacing it with a more constructive one (see, for example, Table 2.1).

If thinking up a constructive alternative to each negative thought is too cumbersome, simply use Table 2.1’s last thought (“Every obstacle can be overcome”) or other mantra every time you catch your mind dwelling in a negative place. The more you repeat a mental exercise, the more likely it will occur automatically (Schwartz, 2010).

- **Find opportunities to laugh.** Infuse appropriate humor (the positive, non-sarcastic kind) into your teaching, or peek at a joke-a-day website (like the K–12 Teachers Alliance’s [www.teachhub.com/teacher-joke-day](http://www.teachhub.com/teacher-joke-day)) between classes. Employing humor was found to prevent and alleviate burnout in the case of healthcare workers (Demir, Ulusoy, & Ulusoy, 2003; Puig et al., 2012)

TABLE 2.1 EXAMPLES OF SWAPPING THOUGHTS

Unconstructive Thought	Constructive Thought
My students just can’t learn or grow.	Every student can learn and grow.
My students’ parents don’t care about them or their education.	Parents generally care very much about their children and want their children to succeed.
I can never be an effective teacher.	I can be an effective teacher.
My students (or I) face too many obstacles to succeed.	Every obstacle can be overcome.

### ADOPT HEALTHY HABITS

There is a definite connection between how you treat your body and how you feel mentally. The following strategies can have a positive impact on your health and mindset. Apply these strategies as appropriate for your circumstances:

- **Exercise.** Yes, exercise. Exercise:
  - improves executive function (e.g., being able to strategize, ignore distractions, manage and alternate between tasks; Guiney & Machado, 2013)
  - reduces anxiety in a long-lasting way (Smith, 2013)
  - provides relief from depression (and is in some cases as valuable as therapy or antidepressants; Cooney et al., 2013)
  - can actually reorganize the brain so it can better resist stress (Schoenfeld, Rada, Pieruzzini, Hsueh, & Gould, 2013). Some teachers power walk as a group during their lunch break to recharge.



- **Establish healthy rituals.** Rituals work best when they are performed in a precise way and at a consistent time, and over time they will require less energy or conscious effort (Schwartz, 2010). Find rituals that help you deal with events that have occurred and/or prepare for events to come. For example, every morning when you first touch your classroom’s doorknob, take a deep breath and remind yourself why you teach and that progress is more important than perfection.

Countless studies recount the power of gratitude, so consider daily recalling ways in which you are blessed. If you are burned out, better days are surely ahead because you are taking positive steps to make it so.

- **Get enough sleep.** Sleep influences our effectiveness more than any other behavior, and adequate sleep makes people healthier and happier (Schwartz, 2010). Stick to a bedtime that will allow you 7 to 9 hours of sleep (depending on what best sustains you). If you typically take 1 hour to fall asleep, go to bed 1 hour earlier to account for it.
- **Wash your hands and get outside.** Physical debilitation makes burnout even harder to avoid. Kids are often less diligent than adults about keeping clean, and schools are swarming with germs. A University of Connecticut study involving 11 years of data revealed teachers have double the death rate from autoimmune disease often provoked by exposure to infectious disease, poor air quality, and old building materials like lead and asbestos than people in other professions (Delisio, 2015).

Find opportunities like nutrition break and lunch break to spend time outdoors. If your classroom has windows, keep them open when it’s warm. On nice days, take students out onto the lawn for group discussions. Develop a routine for hand washing (or at least use of hand sanitizer), and when you do get sick . . . *take that sick day.*

- **Replace emotional eating with healthy rewards.** Poor eating can make you feel sluggish and lower your self-esteem. Many teachers eat too much or make unhealthy food choices because they’re seeking to nurture or treat themselves. When you give, give, and give some more in a job while not feeling as if you “get” much back, the urge to binge or eat junk food can be strong.

Give yourself regular rewards with better consequences. For example, maybe at the end of the week you’ll buy something you’ve been pining for, or maybe you’ll start each day with home-brewed tea, or maybe you’ll listen to a “guilty pleasure” audiobook on your commute to work. Start your day with healthy protein (e.g., vegetarian based) for fuel to get through your day, and avoid sugar, which can cause your energy to crash. If diet is one of your biggest struggles, consider joining a program or pairing up with a coworker to get added support.

Teachers I worked with once established a “Biggest Loser” contest to mirror the TV show by the same name. They had weekly weigh-ins privately with the colleague running the game, who would tell three of us (the game’s “Prize Patrol”) the weekly winner so we could surprise him or her in the classroom with a treat (e.g., we



might cover the teacher’s after-school supervisory shift the following week). The teacher who lost the most weight at the end of the school year won all the money his coparticipants had added to the pot (\$25 each). The greatest win, however, was the staff wide focus on health and the support colleagues gave one another in this endeavor.

- **Play your own soundtrack.** Research suggests inspiring music can stimulate varied neurobiological systems to improve mood, motivate, enhance perception, and even create self-fulfilling prophecy (Bergland, 2012). Create a CD or playlist of songs that inspire you and listen to it regularly.

### REFLECTION EXERCISES

The following items can be answered individually and/or discussed as a group. If you are an aspiring as opposed to current) teacher, there is an eResource offering versions of this book’s reflection exercises reworded just for you.

1. Reflect on which of your colleagues are overly negative. What strategies will you enlist to steer clear of (or influence) their negativity?

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2. What are your burnout triggers? What ideas do you already have for tempering them? Return to this item after reading the rest of this book to add additional strategies you learn.

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3. What toxic thoughts do you commonly have, and what are more positive thoughts with which you will try to replace them?

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4. What healthy approach to venting will you enlist? Consider where you vent (e.g., to whom) and how you vent.

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5. What unhealthy habits do you have, and what healthy habit or ritual will replace each of these?

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# MINDSET

## “MY ATTITUDE IS (ONLY PARTLY) EVERYTHING”



Excerpted from *First Aid for Teacher Burnout*

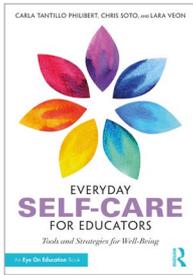
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# WHOLE SCHOOL IMPLEMENTATION AND SUPPORT FOR TEACHER WELL-BEING



Excerpted from *Everyday Self-Care for Educators: Tools and Strategies for Well-Being*



The following is excerpted from *Everyday Self-Care for Educators: Tools and Strategies for Well-Being* by Carla Tantillo Philibert, Christopher Soto, Lara Veon

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As we read in Chapter 1, teachers are under tremendous stress, and our educational systems are not providing well-being supports like other industries. As a nation, our data on student and teacher well-being is daunting. Increased suicide rates and fear of gun violence for both students and teachers has left districts scrambling for solutions. When the issues facing districts are so weighty, it can feel impossible to categorize them with any importance. Is it that our sense of urgency is missing? Have we become complacent? Or rather, we would argue that this is an issue of decreased capacity instead of complacency.

We see many school districts either experiencing initiative paralysis or initiative overdrive. The fear is that beginning with one thing, such as well-being, might appear to some like we are ignoring other significant issues that should take precedence. Conversely, the “shotgun” approach leaves us with multiple layers of task forces, committees, PLCs, BHTs, ILTs – and other assorted acronyms – all with similar goals, timelines, and myriad Google Docs. While these are all important, if not done well the result leaves us all too tired to be creative or to take on “one more thing,” even our self-care.

To begin, we must decide to prioritize teacher well-being and move forward without apology. We must end a culture of complicity within our school cultures. We are not prioritizing teacher well-being at the expense of other pressing student issues. We are taking care of the people that take care of students. There will be more success with all other initiatives and goals if our teachers are at their best. We care best for our youth when we care about the teachers that serve our youth.

We know that teachers who practice and implement self-care need encouragement and support to sustain their efforts even when they and others see the benefits of implementing mindfulness in their personal and professional life. In Chapter 3 we saw that when teachers grow in their understanding and practice of self-care, the impact on their classroom experience and their students becomes more and more apparent to other teachers, administrators, students, and students’ families. Now how do we bring these individual success stories into a systemic movement of positive change?

The good news is that these positive individuals are naturally inspiring others around them. Over and over again in our work with teachers and schools across the country, we see this happen. When colleagues see their peers handling stress more effectively, more relaxed, and enjoying their students more, even a little bit more, they want to know how this is happening and how they can have the same experiences.

To build on this naturally contagious phenomenon, we can forge even stronger teacher alliances and supports with more intention. Let’s not rest on isolated, sporadic victories. Let’s build a grassroots support system to make intentional changes to the system at the school, district, state, and national level. Let’s make this a concerted and organized push. Our focus now is on opportunities for systemic teacher support in school systems.



## INFORMAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR INTENTIONALITY BUILDING COMMUNITY

In the beginning, this may still look like isolated individuals making changes for just their daily well-being and mood. These informal opportunities might look like:

- Cultivating the pause or any short moments that bring you back – (it could be every time you sit at your desk, or walk to the copy room, or set dedicated moments at scheduled points throughout your day)
- Breathwork while cutting vegetables
- Taking a breath before opening the door
- Walking to work or taking a walk during a break
- Reaching out to a colleague once a day with a positive comment
- Taking five minutes of meditation at lunch instead of checking your phone
- Noticing more closely during any sensory moments (wiping the whiteboard clean, pushing in chairs, sorting folders)
- Setting an intention or dedicating a day or class period to a student
- Taking short hallway walks during your plan periods
- Devoting self-care time before or after the school day
- Inviting a colleague to join you

Remember that one person's informal practice is not someone else's. Also, if you are going to be doing something anyway, add the intentionality, without adding the time to your day. This way it becomes a form of practice and not just another thing to pile on your to-do list.

Included below are two breath work activities that teachers, practitioners, and school stakeholders can use daily. These visualization activities, developed by Elias Patras, are rooted in nature and help educators be present in the moment by focusing on the very core of their being, their breath.

### ACTIVITY: BREATHE IN THE BREEZE

Take a deep breath. Pause. Slowly exhale out. Be intentional about your breathing. Slowly close your eyes, if closing your eyes feels accessible and safe. If not, focus your gaze on a spot on the floor. Take another deep breath in and slowly exhale out. Follow this with another breath in and slowly exhale out. Now imagine that you are in your favorite place in nature, it's relaxing and calming. You can see that it's a beautiful sunny day. You can almost sense a warm breeze surrounding you. This breeze starts at your feet. As you feel the breeze at your feet, you can feel your feet relax, as the breeze whisks away the tension that you keep here. You can sense, or feel, this beautiful breeze as it hits your legs, taking away the stress of the day that you might have. You can now feel it on your hips, removing all tension here. This breeze travels up your body to your stomach and whole torso and arms, allowing you to feel relaxed and calm. Traveling up to your neck and head, having this amazing breeze blow out



any tension that is stored in your head or neck. Now you can sense or feel the breeze blow around you, releasing any left-over tension or anxiety that you might have. With a final breath in, slowly exhale out and release all that is left of that uneasiness. Slowly come back to the here and now and breathe naturally.

## ACTIVITY: BREATHE IN THE SUN

Take a deep breath. Pause. Slowly exhale out. Be intentional about your breathing. Slowly close your eyes, if closing your eyes feels accessible and safe. If not, focus your gaze on a spot on the floor. Take another deep breath in and slowly exhale out. Follow this with another breath in and slowly exhale out. Now imagine that you are in a place of nature, it's relaxing and calming. You can see that it's a beautiful sunny day. Focus on the sun, this beautiful ball of orange glow. Feel the sun's rays coming down hitting the top of your head, giving you a sense of peace and calm. Moving down to your forehead, releasing any tension, overthinking, or stress in this area. As these beautiful sunshine rays of gold come through, you can feel the warmth on your throat allowing yourself to communicate clearly, coming on down and shining upon the center of your chest, warming your heart and expanding your places of the heart that you share with others and yourself. The sun shines a bit more brightly as you feel it on your stomach and as it goes down to your toes. Feeling a warmth or a glow of peace and relaxation. Take another deep breath in as you look in your mind, picturing the sun and sharing a smile in gratitude for the wonders of nature that the sun brings. Open your eyes and smile. Feel the glow that you created inside of yourself on the outside.

Because teachers often feel very isolated, it is essential to make the most of the quick opportunities to connect with colleagues. This could include the short chats walking from the parking lot to the building, in line to use the copy machine, waiting for students to file out of assemblies, or grabbing a bite in the lounge. Just taking a moment to share your intention to be mindful with a colleague sets a powerful tone in the school community. This is one of many intentional moments that can start a ripple of change. When teachers get a break and choose to visit one another, this is another opportunity to go negative or positive. One teacher we worked with committed to giving a compliment each day to someone in the building. If she overheard students talking about a positive experience they had in a colleague's classroom, she would make a point to pass it on to the teacher. With energy and time at a premium in a teacher's day, small efforts can make an enormous difference, especially when there are few opportunities.

We worked with one school district where the superintendent asked all employees, including her, not just teachers, to be paired with a buddy. Throughout the school year, they would check in with their buddy at least once per week. By the end of the school year, people connected in ways that they never imagined.

One recommended strategy for checking in with a buddy is a three-part process: celebration, inspiration, action. Celebrate something positive you experienced, either something in your classroom or something you observed in the school. Share an inspiration, a small step you are inspired to take. Not something you feel you "should" do but something that will bring you lightness or joy; something as small as giving yourself and another person a sticker, or the compliment-a-day plan. For example,



one administrator we worked with, once a month would go around with a sheet of silly stickers, pop in to say hi, hand out a sticker, and that was it. No evaluation, no assignment, nothing more than a sticker visit. This brought him and staff joy every time, it was his small step. Once you decide what your small step will be, let your buddy know what you are inspired to do and what support you might need to make it happen. Buddies close the check-in by saying to one another: "I will support you by \_\_\_\_\_. And I look forward to celebrating with you next time." Take action to do it so that you have your celebration ready the next time you see your buddy.

## WHOLE SCHOOL IMPLEMENTATION AND SUPPORT

In many districts, administrator compassion fatigue is on par with the teacher burnout and, sadly, it is often administrators who unknowingly perpetuate a system of dysfunction in their school communities. Long hours and isolation often define the role of a school administrator; these conditions often lead to an empathetic failure on their part to see, without bias, the needs of their faculty and staff. Put differently: if burnt out teachers are depersonalizing their students, exhausted administrators are depersonalizing their teachers. They become unknowingly complicit in the system of dysfunction.

When looking to implement well-being practices across a school district, the mission is to start with intentionality. Define well-being at the individual system level, for every stakeholder in the building. What does practicing, modelling, and messaging well-being "look like" for the district leaders, teachers, para-professionals, security guards, school clerks, parents, and students? What does it mean to practice well-being for yourself and model and message it for others? Taking a page from our work with Social-Emotional Learning, these questions are rooted in each stakeholder cultivating self-awareness, first by learning from self-assessment and the practice of regulating behavior daily.

There are a number of tools easily embedded in the school day without adding more to anyone's workload. The steps below are a great start:

- School-wide Well-being Calendar.
- Breathwork at meeting start.
- Voluntary Teacher Buddies.
- Mobilize around the goal, teacher well-being, with a sense of urgency. Name a Call to Action. Design a one-pager: info-graphic, call to action, core beliefs, mission, vision, timeline, and goals.
- Build a task force of stakeholders with clear directives. Decide upfront how progress will be measured and collect that data (i.e., teacher attrition rates will go down, teacher satisfaction rates will go up).
- Provide a menu of well-being practices, both individual and social, both relaxing and invigorating (i.e., yoga, mindfulness, game of basketball, coffee with friends, etc.). There is no right or wrong way to access well-being practices; the critical piece is that they become a practice.



- Connect students and teachers (tools like Class Catalyst).
- Reflect and begin again with a single growth point. A single call to action that everyone can articulate and everyone will be able to see objectively when the goal is reached.

Not only will these strategies not be adding to the workload of anyone, they also will not feel mandatory or like another chore weighing teachers down. The schools will most likely find buy-in when they focus on providing the optimal space for teachers to find that practice. Instead of another item on the agenda, it is a sweet, enticing resource to fold into your day, whenever the teacher is ready or motivated. Schools should focus on and be the space holder and the library. You can't make them check out the book, but you can make them feel excited about checking out the book.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOR SCHOOL-WIDE SUPPORT FOR EDUCATOR SELF-CARE

These questions are intended to generate open sharing and non-judgmental listening of individuals' experience and perspective on the issues and impact of educator self-care, to move your learning community toward a collaborative approach to increasing the well-being of all educators.

1. What have you learned about the needs of educators from reading *Everyday Self-Care for Educators: Tools and Strategies for Well-Being*?
2. In what ways does your experience resonate with some of the emotional and physical impacts of teaching and working with children described in the research cited?
3. What moments during the day or week or school year do you notice that teacher self-care is needed most?
4. What challenging areas of teachers' lives in and out of the school day are opportunities for change and self-care?
5. Imagine what your school community might look and feel like if it cultivates a culture of self-care and wellness. Describe or imagine the details.
6. Who are the colleagues you think of first in your school community that you can take the first steps in sharing this message of self-care or buddying up with to support each other?
7. Who are the people or communities outside your school building or community that can be non-judgmental and neutral support to your professional and personal wellness?
8. What are some concrete actions or changes your school can take to create a culture of mindfulness and self-care?
9. How often are staff affirmations a regular and formal part of the school day?
10. Are opportunities for short mindfulness breaks actively encouraged by administration?



11. Are brief self-care strategies regularly a topic that has five minutes of the agenda in professional development (PD)/professional learning community (PLC) opportunities?
12. Is there a formal wellness champion or social events coordinator (or a similar position) on staff?

When colleagues or teams gather for discussion, using some or all of the following agreements can help establish a safe environment, conducive to open sharing and non-judgmental listening.

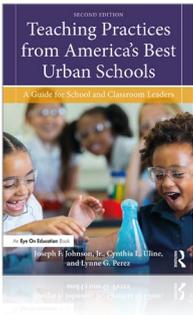
## AGREEMENTS

1. Be fully present – suspend phones and eliminate distractions
2. Be willing to experience discomfort – tolerate lack of closure
3. Keep an open mind
4. Listen actively
5. Assume good intent
6. Share your truth
7. Watch your air time

# LEADING STUDENTS TO LOVE LEARNING



Excerpted from *Teaching Practices from America's Best Urban Schools: A Guide for School and Classroom Leaders*



The following is excerpted from *Teaching Practices from America's Best Urban Schools: A Guide for School and Classroom Leaders* by Joseph F. Johnson, Jr., Cynthia L. Uline, Lynne G. Perez

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## A PERPETUAL QUESTION

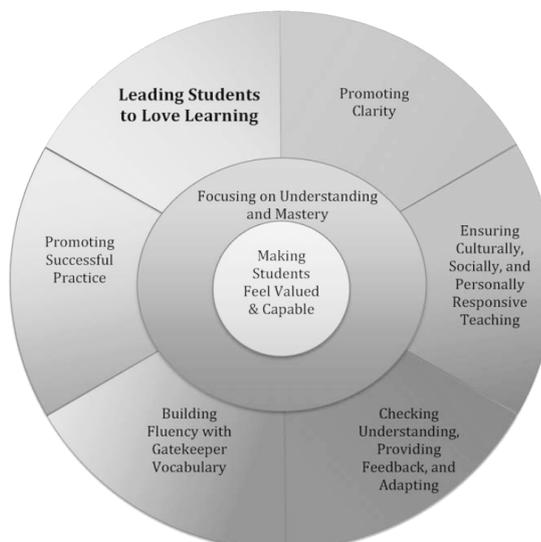
### ON THE MINDS OF EDUCATORS STRIVING TO PRODUCE EQUITY AND EXCELLENCE

*How can I get each and every one of my students to think, "I love learning about this! I can't wait to learn even more"?*

In high-performing urban schools, students are more likely to understand and master challenging academic content, in part because students learn to love learning. Teachers create learning environments that are interesting and exciting. Students willingly (and even eagerly) dedicate their time, thinking, and energy to learning, solving problems, accomplishing goals, and attaining deep understanding of concepts and skills. While not every lesson is as powerful as the heart bisection described at the beginning of this chapter, a variety of lesson characteristics magnify student interest in learning. Certainly, in our observations of high-performing urban schools, we saw few lessons that might be considered dull, monotonous, or overly repetitive. Consistently, students were eager to attend classes. Students were excited about what they were learning.

By leading students to love learning, educators completed the circle illustrated in Figure 8.1 in a manner that maximized the impact of the other outer-ring practices, heightened the focus on understanding and mastery, and powerfully affirmed to students that they were both valued and capable.

To lead students to love learning, teachers in high-performing schools exhibited sincere enthusiasm for the content they were teaching and for the students they were serving. Teachers deliberately helped their students understand how the content they were learning was relevant to their current and future lives. As well, teachers employed project-based, problem-based, inquiry-based, and experiential learning opportunities. Additionally, teachers integrated the arts, technology, and physical education into their teaching of core academic content and maximized opportunities for student-to-student interaction in learning processes. Finally, teachers provided opportunities for students to excel with challenging academic content.





## TEACHING ENTHUSIASTICALLY

Students are more likely to learn when teachers evidence enthusiasm for the content they teach. Hattie (2009) suggested that while teacher passion is rarely studied empirically, “it infuses many of the influences that make the difference . . .” (p. 24). Enthusiastic, passionate teaching increases the impact of teaching practices, including each of the practices described in this book. For example, when teachers at William Bryant School in Cleveland, Ohio; Uplift Education Peak Prep in Dallas, Texas; or Feaster Charter School in Chula Vista, California, were checking understanding, providing feedback, and adapting, they passionately sought to understand what their students knew. When teachers at Harriet Tubman Blue Ribbon School in Newark, New Jersey; William Dandy Middle School in Fort Lauderdale, Florida; or Revere High School in Boston, Massachusetts, enthusiastically taught lessons that were culturally, socially, and personally relevant to their students, the evidence of student understanding and mastery seemed to skyrocket. When teachers at Patrick Henry Preparatory School in New York City enthusiastically promoted clarity about learning outcomes and success criteria through their lesson plan template, exemplars, and expectations checklist and grading rubrics, the impact on student success was stunning. In high-performing urban schools, we observed many examples of the eight teaching practices described in this book, and we also observed many examples of the practices being implemented ardently.

Through their enthusiasm, teachers transmitted their love of subject areas to their students. At Fallon Park Elementary in Roanoke, Virginia, students spoke passionately about their work building volcanoes, conducting electricity experiments, and completing atom projects. Two girls sang a song they had learned about circumference and radius. Students proudly spoke of the hands-on projects they completed at school. “Teachers let us do experiments,” they explained and then added, “Teachers make it fun. My teacher talks in an exciting voice.”

In many classrooms at Dayton Business and Technology High School, students learned to love academic content areas they had previously hated. Teacher passion and enthusiasm were compelling forces for many students. As one student shared:

At this school, every day, in each class, teachers do something to make the subject real. They show you how what you're learning is practical. They show you how you can use it. They help you see why they love it. So, you start to love it, too.

In high-performing urban schools, teachers exhibited their enthusiasm for their students even more than they exhibited enthusiasm for their subject areas. We observed the sincere, proud smiles of kindergarten teachers who listened to their students read sentences independently with understanding. We watched a middle school math teacher give avid high-fives after listening to students explain their multistep solutions to real-world problems. We saw the gleam in the eye of a government teacher as she looked over a student's shoulder who accurately scored his essay as a perfect “5” using a rigorous rubric. We saw fist pumping and heard celebratory shouting from a team of sixth-grade science teachers as they recognized that each of their students mastered the formative assessment given the week prior. Teachers were enthusiastic because they cared deeply about their students. Specifically, they cared deeply about their students succeeding in school and life.



Their enthusiasm was obvious to outside observers. Most likely, their enthusiasm was even more obvious to their students.

Teaching enthusiastically requires energy, but it also transfers energy. In many classrooms in high-performing urban schools, the energy was palpable. One teacher at Signal Hill Elementary in Long Beach, California, explained, "I make sure my students are exhausted by the end of the day. They work hard all day long. We're constantly moving. And, of course, this means that [by the end of the day] I'm exhausted, too."

## HIGHLIGHTING RELEVANCE

In high-performing urban schools, teachers help students understand the importance of the content being taught. As students at Franklin Town Charter High in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, explained, "Here, we learn things that we will need in college and in life." Students are more likely to love learning when they understand the relevance of the content.

Frequently, when we observed classrooms in high-performing urban schools, we interrupted students and asked them what they were learning. When they answered, we followed up by asking why they were learning the content they described. First, it is important to note that typically students explained the lesson objective accurately and often with great detail. Second, it was common for students to share rationale such as, "We're going to need to be able to understand this in order to understand computers or become engineers" or "I need to know this in order to succeed in college" or "This is important because this was a real event and it could happen again in my lifetime."

Teachers took time to explain why their learning objective was important to their students. Teachers helped students understand how the lesson could influence their lives currently or in the near future. For example, an algebra teacher at Hambrick Middle School in Houston, Texas, explained:

*If your employer paid you by the hour and gave you a bonus for good work, you might need to use a linear equation to help you make sure that your paycheck was accurate. Who wants to learn how to use a linear equation to make sure your paycheck includes all the money you are owed?*

Instantly, Hambrick students decided this objective was critically important. Students decided that they needed to understand. (And not just for the purpose of performing well on the state assessment.) Although teachers deliberately ensured that students learned the most important content included on state examinations, they offered students more powerful reasons for engaging and wanting to learn.

Often teachers enhanced student perceptions of relevance by making concepts seem real to students. For example, at Mueller Charter School in Chula Vista, California, seventh-grade students spent one day each week at a nature center, where they engaged in real science activities with real scientists. The activities helped students learn about issues that influence local ecosystems in important ways. Kensler and Uline (2017) demonstrated the potential for green schools, schools that practice

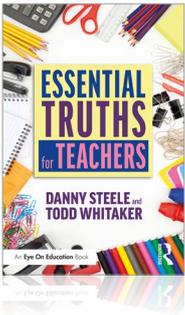


whole-school sustainability, to maximize student learning, while at the same time cultivating stronger, healthier local communities and reducing the school's ecological footprint.

In various classrooms throughout the country, we observed students acting out activities related to the three branches of government, using food to solve problems with fractions, writing letters to real people in response to real issues, charting and graphing student preferences and accomplishments, and using a wide array of manipulatives. Teachers helped students understand complex abstract concepts by using concrete objects and examples that were highly relevant to students' lives.

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The following is excerpted from *Essential Truths for Teachers* by Danny Steele, Todd Whitaker

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## WHEN TEACHERS LOVE THEIR JOBS, STUDENTS NOTICE. WHEN TEACHERS ARE COUNTING DOWN THE DAYS, STUDENTS NOTICE. IT TURNS OUT, STUDENTS NOTICE A LOT!

We all give off vibes, and in the classroom, it's not hard for students to pick up on the vibes of the teacher. The students notice if teachers are in a good mood or a bad mood. They notice if they are enjoying the day or if the day seems like drudgery. They notice when the teacher is exasperated. And make no mistake, the energy projected by the teacher will affect the energy that the students bring to the lesson. The positive energy of the teacher is the single most important factor in determining the climate of the classroom. When teachers realize their own attitude affects the motivation of their students, it can be a game changer.

The best teachers don't show up for "work," they show up for the kids. It's not just a job . . . it's a passion. And their passion will define them more than any lesson plan. The students will more than likely remember that passion longer than any lesson. They may not remember what their teachers taught them, but they will always remember if their teachers enjoyed teaching them.

## WHEN TEACHERS ARE IN IT FOR THE STUDENTS, THEY ARE NOT AS QUICK TO COMPLAIN ABOUT MINOR ISSUES.

Students sometimes act immature. Sometimes they are too silly. Sometimes they fidget too much. Our students are sometimes preoccupied with ridiculous things. And kids sometimes do unexpectedly ridiculous things in class. They shouldn't, but they do. It is so significant when teachers do not sweat the minor misbehaviors. It makes such a difference when teachers look at things from the students' perspective. After all, some things that drive adults crazy capture the imagination of the students. It is greatly appreciated when teachers do not allow minor annoyances to distract them from the number one priority: Teaching students and building relationships with them.

## THE BEST TEACHERS FIGURE OUT HOW TO HANDLE THEIR FRUSTRATIONS WITHOUT COMPLAINING – THEY HAVE CHALLENGES, BUT THEY DON'T DWELL IN NEGATIVITY.

All teachers are confronted with challenges during the day; they all face circumstances that could be discouraging. But good educators are not victims of unfair mandates, unruly kids, or unsupportive parents. They are change agents and they rise above the adversity. Many of the challenging circumstances are out of the teacher's control. Teachers cannot control the parents, the mandates, or the class size. They can control their quality of instruction and the passion they bring into their classroom. Good teachers realize that they can control their own attitude. They choose to focus on what is positive. They remain mindful of the role that they play in the classroom, and they never forget their potential for impacting students. It is in fact possible to see the glass as being half-full. That's what good teachers try and do. All teachers have bad days, and all teachers need to vent from time to time. Great teachers keep things in perspective.



### **WHEN A GREAT TEACHER IS IN A BAD MOOD, ONLY ONE PERSON KNOWS. WHEN A BAD TEACHER IS IN A BAD MOOD, THE ENTIRE SCHOOL KNOWS.**

All of us have better days and worse days. No one is at the top of their game every day. However, some teachers somehow seem like they are. They are able to prevent their personal mood from affecting their classroom and their relationships. When a great teacher is in a bad mood they work diligently to keep it from impacting their students and peers. They seemingly magically do not allow it to permeate their teaching.

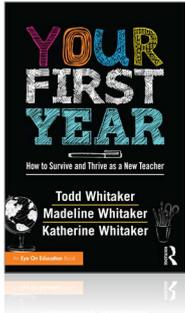
At the same school there may be other teachers that, when they are in a bad mood, the entire school knows it. Not because it is so noticeable, but because they may even announce it. They sort of use it as a weapon. They may even walk into class in a threatening manner and bark at their students, "Don't try me today! I am in a bad mood!" With a few people this may even be accompanied by a daring glare hoping for pushback.

This does not mean, on those rare occasions, the best teachers do not share with their students that they are not feeling the best, or that something is weighing heavy on their minds or hearts. They just do it with empathy and concern for their students. They do not want to risk the relationships they have worked hard to establish in their classroom.

We all have ups and downs. Some people just work harder at limiting the negative impact on others.

### **THE BEST THING TEACHERS CAN DO FOR THEIR COLLEAGUES IS BRING A POSITIVE ATTITUDE TO WORK EVERY DAY. POSITIVE ENERGY IS CONTAGIOUS.**

Your child was up all night with an ear infection; you spilled your coffee on the way to school; the copy machine ran out of toner when you were scrambling to finish your copies for the day. There are a million things that could ruin your day, and sometimes the world seems to be conspiring against you – sapping all your energy and all your joy. There is a picture in my office of Michael Jordan jumping from the free-throw line to dunk a basketball. I added a caption to the picture that reads: "What are YOU rising above?" We cannot always control our circumstances, but we can always control our response to those circumstances. Are you a victim of your circumstances or do you choose to rise above them? And our attitude does not just affect our own emotional well-being, it affects everyone around us. Our attitude is felt at the lunch table, in the hallway, in the workroom, in the faculty meeting, and certainly in our classroom. Good days do not just happen to us; we decide to have good days.



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## WORKING WITH PEERS

### PEER SUPPORT

As we know, in every classroom there are students who make our lives easy and others who take more energy. There are students who want to do what is right and others who want to test the limits. If we think about it, these students become adults. Some of these adults become teachers. Just like the skills and attitudes of students vary, the skills and attitudes of adults cut just as wide a swathe. In every school there is a large number of teachers who work hard each day, have a positive attitude and consistently make a difference with students. Seek these people out. Learn from them. Steal ideas from them—if they are really good they will love to share with you. Draw from their experience and their energy. If you have a chance, go in their classrooms on your plan time and observe them. Learn from the best of the best. The better they are, the more welcoming they will be. Remember that.

Hopefully some of these people are in your hallway, at your grade level, in your department or team, share a common plan time or lunch period. Maybe one of them is your mentor and can become a trusted colleague. If you can link up with them, milk it for all it is worth. It will make your first year—and the rest of your time at that school—much more pleasurable. If you can find that special person or persons, we call them empowerers, full speed ahead! This is addressed in the following chapter. However, we would be remiss to not issue a gentle warning that there might be others in the school who do not have the same altruistic perspective of teaching every day of the school year.

We probably remember from when we were students that some teachers had a countdown on their chalkboard of how many days of school remained in the year. When you were a student you probably thought that was for you. Upon reflection it may have been for them. Did you ever have a teacher who warned the class that they were in a bad mood that day? Did you ever have one do that more than once?

Watch and listen to how the teachers in your school greet their students when they arrive at their class. Do some smile warmly and issue a personal welcome every day regardless of their mood? Do you have others who do it depending on day of the week, how they are feeling or how much they like the class? Have you ever seen a teacher who doesn't even smile every day when the students arrive at their door? Which one are you? Which one do you want to be? Which one do you want to associate with?

Teaching is a very rewarding profession. No question. It is also very intense and draining. Making sure that you are in a positive frame of mind each day is essential. People tend to interact with those who have similar abilities and belief systems. Positive people are drawn to others with similar approaches. Negative individuals are much more comfortable around others who want to complain and whine.

As a new teacher, many groups are working to have you join them. If there are some constant complainers, they will try griping around you. If you chime in, they have you. They want to find others who feel they are overworked, underpaid, and unappreciated. Do not let yourself be recruited by this crew! They are really good at drawing people in and they love to go after the fresh recruits. Think about this in an elementary school. Have you ever known a teacher who cannot wait to tell next year's teacher about how



horrible their students are going to be? We have to realize that not only is that person rooting against next year's teacher, they are even hoping to ruin their summer by causing them to worry all break. But, more importantly, they are even rooting against the students. They are hoping they will not learn anything next year either.

Our peers can be incredibly supportive and the vast majority are. But there can be some who do not always choose that path. We need to be nice to everyone, but emulate certain ones. It is essential to having a wonderful inaugural year in teaching. With that heads up, now find those special people who help build your confidence on a daily basis.

## THE EMPOWERERS

### THE EMPOWERERS AND NAVIGATING THE WATERS

During your first year, you are going to work unbelievably hard to attempt to make sure things go smoothly every day. You will spend hours planning lessons. Each day will be spent building relationships with your students. You will also work hard to smile and greet everyone you come in contact with because you want to be a positive influence in your classroom and in your building. Then, the unexpected will occur.

No matter how hard we humans try, at some point every one of us will end up with one of those unexpected terrible, horrible, no good, very bad days. Those days might be caused by a lesson not going well, a student interaction that did not end the way you had hoped, a negative teacher, or an upset parent. When these situations arise, what do you do?

For a while you can work through these ups and downs alone. Hopefully at first you can reach out to family and friends for guidance. However, eventually it is beneficial to find another expert educator to turn to in those times of strife or frustration. Someone who has a similar educational philosophy, but more importantly, someone you can trust to be there for you. We call these special educators your "empowerers." Since this is an original word, we are going to include a definition. An empowerer is someone who builds confidence, happiness, and strength in another. True empowerers are precious gifts but where can we find them?

### FINDING YOUR EMPOWERER

The work day(s) before school starts is a perfect time for the first year teacher to begin this empowerer search! The year is new and everyone is excited, including yourself. Even if you are a bit nervous, there are people in your faculty who are so looking forward to meeting you! New teachers always help to rejuvenate the passion of a school. Many people are going to be drawn to that and will want to help you in any way that they can and also learn from the knowledge you bring to the school. Use this time to not only plan your classroom, but also get to know the people in your building.

You will probably start off interacting with teachers from your grade level, team, or department. Typically you also have chances to interact with others who are new to the school. This is a perfect time to sit back, listen, and observe. Take mental notes: Who is the person who brings positive energy to the situation? Who seems excited

# WORKING WITH PEERS AND THE EMPOWERERS



Excerpted from *Your First Year: How to Survive and Thrive as a New Teacher*

about the new school year? Identifying individuals who can assist when needed and provide the big picture when you feel discouraged is very important for new teachers. Empowerers are consistently positive and the type of people you want to associate and interact with regularly.

You may find your empowerer your very first day on the job. Ideally, your empowerer would be someone assigned to you officially as a mentor. But what about those who may not end up so lucky? Let us pretend that you are placed on a team or in a department where things are not as supportive as you had hoped. If your empowerers are not handed to you, then you are going to have to start searching for them. You have to find like-minded people to lift you up and those like-minded people may not be in the classroom adjacent to yours. So how do you find them?

There are four places you could look: your school, your district, outside professional development, and social media. We mentioned the preservice days, but what about all the other meetings? Take those as opportunities to sit by and meet people outside of your grade level, content area, or team. What about others who share a lunch with you or have a common plan time? Most teachers have to serve on a building-level committee. These committee meetings are great ways to meet people who you may not see on a regular basis. These people could be a source of optimism and support.

Use any district event as a way to do the same thing. Whole district curriculum-writing groups, serving on a district committee, or in-service days are a few examples of ways to interact with people outside of your building. Usually whole district meetings have break times for lunch, so feel free to go with people from other buildings. See if anyone you meet at these meetings could be a source of strength or support for you.

Outside professional development is another option. Ask other teachers or your principal about conferences in the area or state. Use Google to find some based on your interests and schedule. Sometimes getting a sub your first year can be scary. Try to find conferences that occur on the weekend such as Edcamps. The reason we encourage you to try and attend conferences is that people who are passionate, care, and try, flock to them. These conferences can be huge learning experiences but also unbelievably rejuvenating.

If, for whatever reason, you do not have any of those opportunities, there is one last resort. And honestly, we may have saved the best for last: Twitter. Make a Twitter account (right now!). There are so many amazing educators all over the Twitter universe. Just search "education" or #NTChat (New Teacher Chat). Thousands of people, articles, lesson plans, and inspirational quotes will appear in seconds. All of these can be used as constant reminders as to why you became a teacher and why your job is so important.

Keep in mind that everyone needs empowerers and you just might end up being someone's empowerer too! If this happens, not only will you go to them to brainstorm solutions to problems within your classroom, but they will also come to you. Just remember that they should fill your cup much more than empty it, and vice versa. Work together to create a safe and positive educational relationship that will get you through the hard times and help you celebrate the great ones.

# WORKING WITH PEERS AND THE EMPOWERERS



Excerpted from *Your First Year: How to Survive and Thrive as a New Teacher*

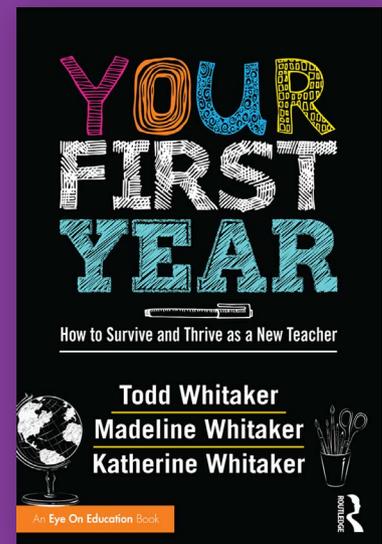
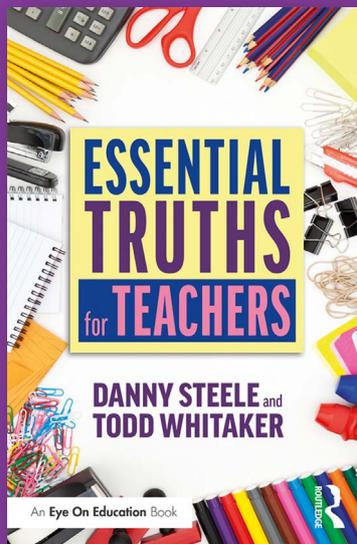
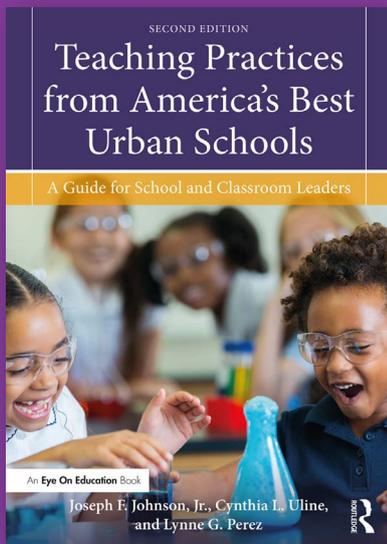
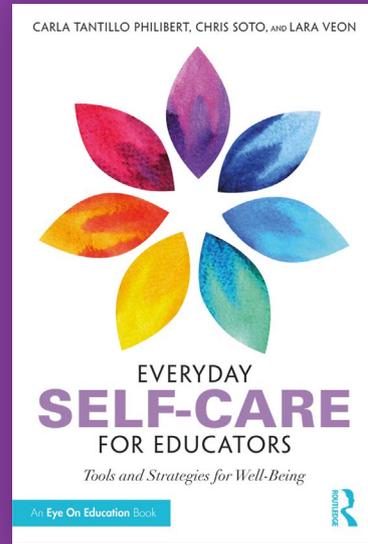
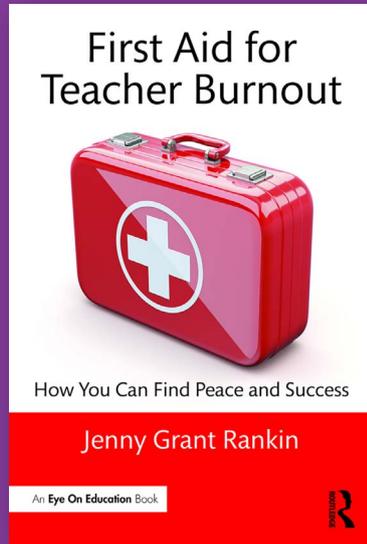
## WHAT ABOUT EVERYONE ELSE?

Empowerers will always be your number one “go-to” when things tend to get hard, but the other people in your building can play huge roles in helping you develop as an educator. These people all have various skills that they bring to the table, and many of these individuals have something that you can learn and draw from. For example, a teacher on your team might not be a strong classroom manager, but the way they organize field trips is impeccable. Work with them to learn that skill. The band teacher may not teach your subject matter, but you have heard through the grapevine that their technology integration is jaw dropping. Although these teachers may not be your empowerers, appreciate them for the gifts they bring.

Fortunately for you the majority of the teachers in your school have insights and ideas that will help you grow professionally. And the majority of them are more than happy to share, especially if you ask for their assistance. Unfortunately there may be a sliver of your peers that do not always have an altruistic purpose. This final category of teacher might be called the 2 percent. They exist in the majority of schools. If we give them too much power, the 2 percent can certainly damage the morale of the school. The 2 percent are often the teachers who complain the loudest and most frequently. They also, ironically, may be the ones who work the least. The 2 percent can sometimes be seen sleeping or texting throughout staff meetings (if they even come). They may even be known for secretly wanting others, including the students, to fail so they can have more proof as to why they cannot succeed in their classroom.

These teachers are going to be negative, they are going to complain, and they may try to get you to do the same. Your one and only goal is to always be nice to them but never join in with them. Stay positive and strong because it is best for the students in your school. Learn to avoid this 2 percent and stick close to your empowerers. Through them you will grow to become the teacher you want to be and impact your students positively every single day.

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