Embracing Resilience in an *At-Risk* World Discussion Guide

Resiliency 101

Resilience is an inherent trait that exists in every person, school and community. People, schools and communities, however, all have their own, unique identities, situations, strengths and weaknesses, assets and deficits. Your understanding of resilience and how you put that into practice in your everyday life is, therefore, unique. So, while resilience exists in everyone and everywhere, there is no one-size-fits-all program or product that is guaranteed to make resilience happen.

The resilience-inspired practices at La Cima Middle School that contributed to the success they achieved (i.e., highest test scores, dramatically lower discipline referrals, zero staff attrition) came from ideas from among Mr. Woodall (principal), the faculty, other school staff, and students. What worked for them may or may not fit you and your school.

In addition to the protective factors identified in the "Resiliency 101" presentation (i.e., connection, high expectations, clear/consistent boundaries), practicing resilience requires you to be creative.

- What's your own, personal definition of resilience?
- Brainstorm, on your own and with your colleagues, a definition of resilience for your school.
- 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?
- Identify at least one protective factor that presently exists for students at your school. How, in your role at school, can you use that protective factor to enhance resilience for yourself and among your students and colleagues?
- Do a review of your school's rules/conduct code. Is it a list of "do's" or a list of "don'ts"? How are expectations for behavior communicated? A sign in the hallway at school that says "no running/shouting" conveys something different than one that says "walk/quiet." When someone sees a sign posted on school grounds (i.e., at the playground or in the gymnasium) that says:
    - o "no fighting"
    - o "no drugs"
    - o "no guns"

  what does that convey about the school's expectations of student behavior? How are messages about student behavior "packaged" at your school? What expectations of

students do they convey? What does a "no shouting" message convey about your expectations of student behavior?

- Are mistakes, bad decisions, discipline problems, difficulties with academic performance or crises always signs of failure? Or, could they also be "teachable moments"?
- The presentation outlined several myths that render a risk/deficit bias. Teachers and other school staff are more susceptible to "burnout" when they work in a school/school system that operates based on these myths. 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. What can you do to make your work and your experience at school more rewarding and enjoyable?
- "Resiliency 101" presents a tip: Start small and let your success speak for itself. How might you begin your own journey as a resilience-oriented educator?

Promoting Resilience in an *At-Risk* World: What Can Public Schools Contribute?

NEA Crisis Communications Guide & Toolkit

- Do you know what is in your school's/district's crisis plan? What role, if any, would you have if a crisis occurred at your school? What would be expected of you? Are there concrete procedures/instructions to help guide you?
- Compare your school's plan with the checklist presented in Vol. 1 of the *NEA Crisis Communications Plan & Toolkit*.
- Does your school/district have an up-to-date telephone tree to help facilitate communication in a crisis? See the phone tree template in Vol. 1.
- When a crisis occurs at school or in the community, how do you handle the first day back at school? See Vol. 2 for a sample curriculum.
- How does your school handle student and faculty participation in funerals or memorial services when someone at school has lost a loved one? How does your school respond when serious illness or other types of crises are happening in the life of someone at school?
- Some crises promote attention from the media. Does your school work with a district media coordinator or your local/state association to manage the media? Do you receive guidance and support from your school/district for handling requests for interviews by reporters? See Vol. 2 for tips and resources.
- After a crisis, schools have many choices to make regarding how they want to handle remaining physical reminders (e.g., building repairs), anniversary dates and other benchmarks such as graduation. Who do you think should contribute to that decision-making? Does your school's culture allow for a process that includes faculty, students

and parents? What would be a good way for these kinds of decisions to be made and communicated?

Violence in Communities and Schools:
A Stress Reduction Guide for Teachers and Other School Staff

- What is your perception of school violence? Are schools safe? What are the facts? See Section I of *Violence in Communities and Schools: A Stress Reduction Guide for Teachers and Other School Staff*.
- How do you manage stress? What can you do to reduce/manage stress? Brainstorm ideas.
- Is your school environment a stressful place to work? On your own and with interested colleagues, brainstorm ideas for making your work environment one that includes ways for making the inevitable stresses more manageable.
- Do you feel connected or isolated at school? Do you feel you have the opportunity to influence what goes on or do you feel powerless? Do you feel that you have the training you need to do what is asked of you at school? Are there administration or management issues that concern you? Is your principal a source of guidance and support? Are you concerned about safety at school? Complete the stress self-assessment. If possible, compare the results of your assessment with the overall average for your school's staff. See Section III for recommendations on how to address the four stressors measured.

Dealing with Trauma and Loss: Practical Strategies for Enhancing Resilience

- When traumatic events occur in schools, many offers of assistance come our way. How can school administrators make informed decisions about how to handle a mental health response at school?
- Typically, students receive assistance, attention and support to help them handle the psychological impact of a traumatic event. Most often, however, school staff do not. What would be helpful for you?
- Understanding what's normal in terms of a person's experience after trauma or loss can be a tremendous source of comfort. Does your school or local association distribute material, such as this pamphlet, to help people understand that what they are experiencing may be normal?
- When we ask too much of a computer, it lets us know. Sometimes, we have to reboot or do maintenance in order to get what we need from it. When there's more to process than your processor can handle, what do you do for self-care? How can your school/district encourage and support your efforts to take good care of yourself.
- What impact does the media have on you and your students? Does your school curriculum include media literacy? If not, how might you infuse media literacy into your lesson plans?

- Recovery from trauma or loss takes time. How can you remind yourself to give the gift of patience? What options do you have to give yourself what you need to feel better? How can your colleagues at school be supportive of you? Have they asked/have you communicated that guidance to them?
- Change and uncertainty provide us with many "teachable moments." How can you, your colleagues and your students make good use of "teachable moments"?

Additional "food-for-thought":

- Make sure your resilience journey is an enjoyable and rewarding experience. Serve refreshments. Allow time for storytelling. Storytelling helps people to "find their own voice" as resiliency thinkers.
- When faculty come together for professional development, encourage meaningful participation from everyone involved.
- Provide opportunities for faculty and other school staff, students, and parents to participate in planning school events, programs and activities that will impact them.
- Draw from the list of recommended resources included in this training package. Read on your own and with others. Form a resilience book club or study group.
- Pay as much or more attention to the successes you see and experience each day (your own and others') as you do to the failures.