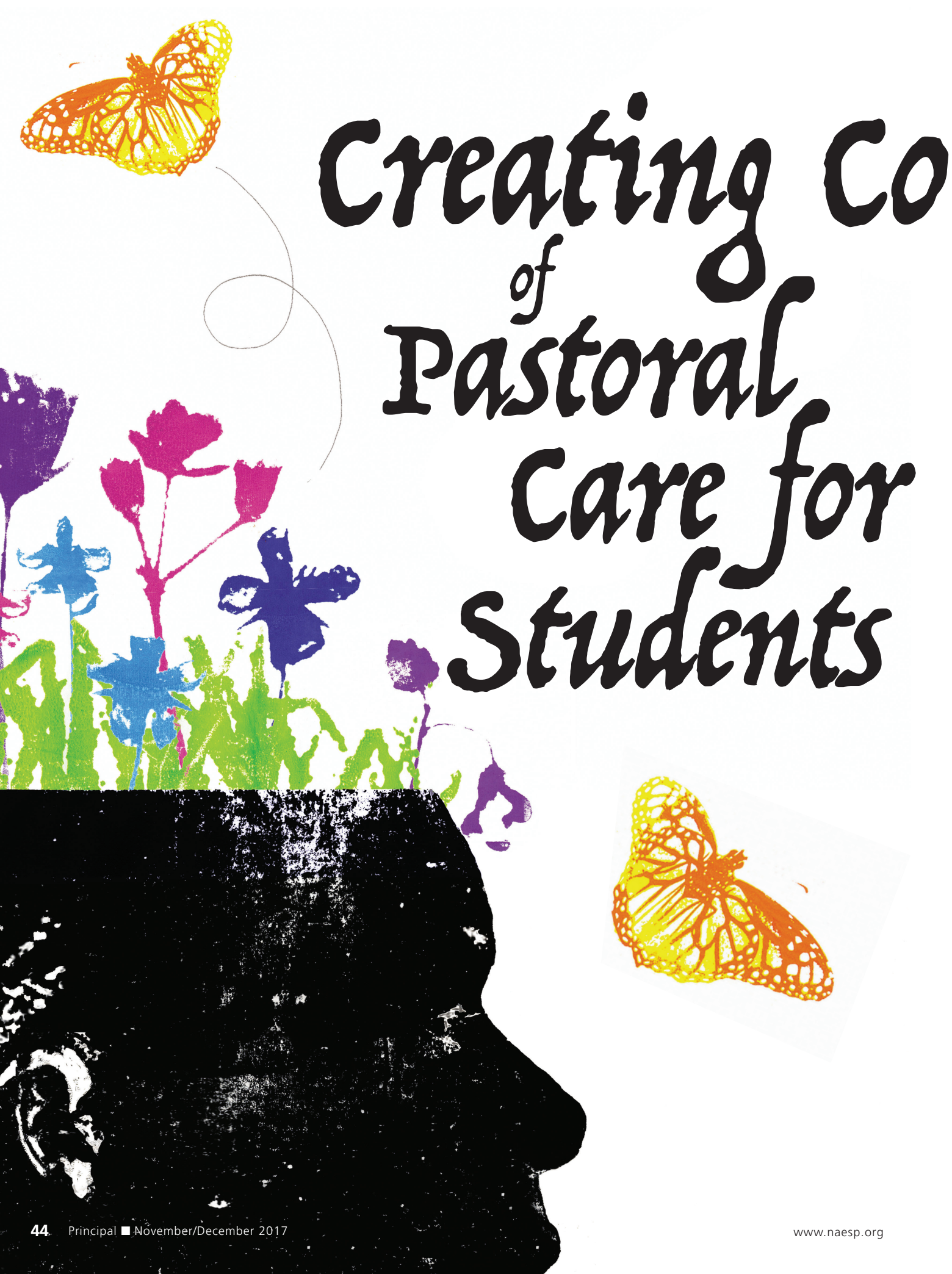


# Creating Co of Pastoral Care for Students



# mmunities



## Meeting students' nonacademic needs can improve academic outcomes

By Joseph Murphy and Daniela Torre

Over the last 35 years, researchers, developers, and school practitioners have substantially deepened our understanding of the characteristics of schools that work well for youngsters and their families. We have learned that schools that ensure all students reach ambitious targets of performance are scaffolded on two foundational pillars that are braided together: strong academic press and supportive culture. Effective schooling is as simple and complex as this.

Based on this distilled knowledge and on forensic analyses of schools' failures, a massive and vigorous assault on underachievement in America's schools has started. New tools—including charter schools and communities of professional practice—have been forged for the battle, while older tools such as evaluation and accountability have been refurbished and polished anew.

At the center of this struggle is a steadfast focus on making schools more academically challenging and crafting strategies to help youngsters climb to levels of achievement that were considered unattainable for their parents and grandparents.

This is wise policy and practice.

### Academic Efforts Alone Are Inadequate

Strong academic press is a major component in the equation of school and student success. But alone, it is insufficient for many, perhaps the large majority of young persons, and particularly students in peril of not reaching the new bar of success. What we know, but often fail to address, is that the school culture that surrounds students is critical to helping them rise to the demands of 21st century schools.

The major difficulty of focusing almost exclusively on the academic side of school reform is that it ignores the following foundational truths of education, or pretends they can be pushed aside:

- Students learn more from their peers than they do from adults.
- The “modal” level of student engagement is in the “passive disengagement” zone. (Academic press can help push engagement up somewhat, but has limited influence, especially for students most in peril. It also carries the seeds of disengagement—a reality that requires careful management.)
- Learning pivots first and foremost on relationships, not textbooks.
- Academic success often has to pass through the door of culture.

# What Is Pastoral Care?

Pastoral care in education is a holistic approach to student health and well-being. While traditional models of education have focused primarily on academics, pastoral care draws attention to nonacademic needs. Pastoral care involves the entire school community, and it can help students and staff attain a sense of safety, self-confidence, and connection.

If we acknowledge and work from, not against, these realities, we arrive at the empirically anchored conclusion that schools need to add highly visible strands of support—what we call a culture of pastoral care—to the tapestry of school, not as an add-on or supplement, but as a foundational and integrated dimension of the educational enterprise. Many, perhaps most, children and adolescents are not going to be molded into better scholars using only an academic press.

## Pastoral Care Meets Students' Nonacademic Needs

If our goal is to help all students master ambitious learning targets, we need to spend as much time and energy building, updating, and monitoring a culture of pastoral care as we expend nurturing academic achievement. First, we need to be explicit about the elements, such as a feeling of membership or belonging, that define a culture of care for students. Second, because the tools to assess these components are rather primitive compared to those available to measure academic learning, we will need to spend time to forge and refine such tools. Third, we will need to be as religious in tabulating, displaying, and using this information to enrich pastoral care as we are in using data to nourish academic press.

Nurturing the development of pastoral care is productive and equitable in its own right, but our concern here is about its cardinal role in facilitating academic success. Our empirically anchored logic model for pastoral care comprises four powerful norms: care, support, safety, and membership. Each of these norms, in turn, is made up of key ingredients, which schools can use to track the positioning and growth of students and plan improvement strategies. We can use the seven elements that define the norm of care to plot assessment of pastoral care.




## Elements of the Norm of Care

Challenging students
Making classes meaningful
Emphasizing creative and active work
Orchestrating structured classrooms
Employing collaborative activities
Pulling students to success
Teaching beyond the textbook

The logic model of pastoral care also leads us to conclude that educators must be more aggressive and scientific in measuring conditions that mediate connections between the four norms and student learning. A thick line of research tells us that the effects of a caring and supportive culture pass through the critical variables of social integration, sense of self, and learning dispositions. The key ingredients of each of these variables can provide a platform for needed assessments.

## Elements of Student Sense of Self

Self-esteem
Efficacy
Resilience
Agency
Autonomy
Identity
Self-awareness

Social integration, sense of self, and learning dispositions together exercise significant influence on student engagement, both with the school and with their schoolwork. Active, committed engagement is the undisputed doorway to student social and academic learning. 

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