

Mind Shift on Health and Learning



If you're like me, the start of the holiday season escalates the constant struggle with maintaining a healthy balance between work and wellness.

The nation's principals know this tug-of-war far too well: The enormous demands on educators in the profession far outpace any efforts to provide for their own care and well-being. What is more, "Many educational leaders neglect their own health and family time trying to fulfill their seemingly all-consuming professional roles, often at a time in their lives when they need to pay closer attention," write researchers Sally Beisser and Randal Peters in their article, "Here's to Your Health" (see page 34.)

The resulting repercussions on educators are palpable. Consider for example the fact that the principal turnover rate has steadily increased over the past decade from an average of 10-plus years in the job to a current average of only three years in the job. This trend can be attributed largely to the unrelenting pace of educational reform and mounting systems pressure in the U.S. that have taken a toll on the health and well-being of educators.

To compound the issue, these competing demands make it challenging for principals to lead schoolwide efforts that promote positive, safe, and nurturing school environments that embed health as part of the natural educational experience. Teachers and students, too, are subjected to chronic and often toxic stress in their school environments.

NAESP believes a well-rounded and complete education must place a high priority on the health and well-being of all students as essential to their learning. An integrated culture of health and learning will require deliberate action that begins with principals examining and improving their own health.

An Integrated, Symbiotic Approach

Healthy principals are ideally situated to be champions for healthy school communities. The 2016 class of National Distinguished Principals (featured in this magazine starting on page 39) have lent their voices with the following ideas about what it will take to create a mind shift in creating an integrated culture of learning and health.

"It takes a clear mission and vision with all in the building working toward that goal. There needs to be a positive leader who is open and willing to learn and grow. High expectations must be set with follow-through." —*Jennifer Nauman, Delaware*

"One needs a committed team willing to do whatever it takes to make a difference in the lives of the children. This requires resources to have a nurse, psychologist, PSA counselor, etc., as well as opportunities for professional development for teachers and parents." —*Marcia Sidney-Reed, California*

"As the building leader, I try to model for staff and students by sharing my healthy eating habits and exercise regime. I have offered yoga for my teachers in the past and am looking to implement an after-school yoga and mindfulness workshop." —*Alexandra Nannicola, Ohio*

"A new direction requires integration of health as a component in the classroom culture, curriculum, and activities. Grants and seed money to jump-start a major emphasis for a few years to ingrain health in the school culture have benefited our school. Parental buy-in is critical as well." —*Brian S. Knippers, Mississippi*

In the coming months, look for voices of your school leadership colleagues to be increasingly showcased in this space. At NAESP, we are dedicated to ensuring you are listened to, heard, and impactful.