



Debrief: Taking Care of Teachers: SEL Starts with Adults

NEASC Virtual Global Forum, September 21, 2021

At our NEASC Forum on September 21, 2021 a panel of educators and leaders from schools and associations around the world shared their insights and expertise about how they are creating a culture of ‘well-being for all’ in their schools. 500 educators joined the discussion, asking their own questions, but also sharing their experiences in the chat. It was a powerful time of sharing, learning, and support and as one attendee put it: “this was great SEL for us!”

If you couldn’t join the discussion, you can view the webinar recording along with a list of related resources for supporting adult SEL: [View recording](#) | [Browse resources in the Forum archives](#)

Below are excerpts of the advice shared by our panelists and attendees at the Forum...

When asked how they support their staff socially and emotionally, panelists and attendees shared concrete ideas and practices such as:

“I cannot speak highly enough of the utilization of restorative practices in schools and communities. I would highly recommend the International Institute for Restorative Practices. One thing that we use is listening circles which you can do with students, faculty or the community. There is often a theme and the role of the listening circle is not to formulate solutions, which is really hard for educators and administrators- we want to solve it and make it better. A listening circle is about being present and really hearing each other authentically. It also removes the administrator or facilitator as an administrator and provides that person the opportunity to be equal in the circle.” - Deanna Zilske, Principal, Keene Middle School, NH, USA, Panelist

“We’ve encouraged teachers to go outside with their classes- breathe in the fresh air and talk; feel the sun.” – Reginald Roberts, Principal, Norwalk High School, CT, USA, Panelist

“Every morning our teachers meet in small interdisciplinary faculty clusters for a DSU where they share their wins and ‘stucks’ from the previous day and their priorities for that day. It has been an absolute game changer for our team – people feel safe, heard and that they have a space to be vulnerable with their colleagues. It’s also great for line managers to hear what our teachers are struggling with day on day so that our priorities for the day are to work towards finding or proposing solves.” – International School Leader, South Africa, Attendee

“We instituted something called a mood meter and teachers can do that individually as well as with their students. They check in everyday about how they are feeling- am I happy, am I sad, am I anxious- and then we gave them a list of things as possible resources that you can do with that emotion. And some of that includes speaking to our social workers or counselors or speaking with me, every day, through my ‘Chat and Chews’. They can also speak with their colleagues and department members through our Advisory which is a once-a-week program, or in every other day team meetings, and so,



even though the original purpose was to talk about student data and lesson planning, we've retooled them so that you can talk about 'this is how I am feeling, and this is what I need.'" – Reginald Roberts, Principal, Norwalk High School, CT, USA, Panelist

"Don't underestimate the power of informal (support). I have an open 'Coffee with the Superintendent' in the mornings. You can stop in on your way to work, grab a cup of coffee... you can sit down with me for a few minutes or I'll just wave to you on your way to class. I love hearing their stories; I also love hearing their frustrations. I think any chance for them to unburden themselves in an informal way is important." -Paul Smith, Superintendent, East Hampton Public Schools, CT, USA, Panelist

"It may sound really simplistic, but we talk a lot about just having fun and allowing time for it every day. I tell our staff to take time within those 42 minutes (of each class period) to be mindful at the beginning, do a mindful minute or two, breathe; and then go outside for part of it. Integrating game and play into the day has provided teachers the opportunity to take a breath. Our teachers have buddy classrooms so if they just need to take a breath or to step away, they have a peer in the school- it could be an administrator or a tutor or para or another teacher- who can step in for them so that they can just step out for a few minutes and take the breath that they need to really be present with their students." - Deanna Zilske, Principal, Keene Middle School, NH, USA, Panelist

"We made a 'wall of celebrations' and the theme was to write anything on it that we accomplished or just got through it- people wrote lots of notes from 'submitted college apps' to 'put up the soccer net'." – Head of School, USA, Attendee

"We invited teachers to take a self-assessment for compassion fatigue (no need to share any results) and then personally reflect on locating themselves. Since there wasn't anything to 'do' with it, I was surprised how many cited it as helpful. <https://proqol.org/>" – Online School Leader, USA, Attendee

"We created a Wall of Remembrance & Gratitude where parents, students and staff could pin a red ribbon for a loss and a blue ribbon for gratitude for recovery or not getting sick. Optional notes could be added. Our country suffered severe losses in July, and many of them from our community. This is how we honored them." – School Counselor, Namibia, Attendee

When asked the small ways they take care of their own mental health:

"The Headspace App is free for educators in CT. I highly recommend it and it's a tool I use in my personal life that has helped tremendously." – School Administrator, USA, Attendee

"I take as many meetings as I can outside and on a walk. I feel more present, energized, and peaceful all at once; it seems to help my meeting mates too!" – School Administrator, Attendee

"Every day I say to myself, I'm not alone, there are thousands of people across the world experiencing the same thing and we'll get through it." – Reginald Roberts, Principal, Norwalk High School, CT, USA, Panelist



“The importance of laughter.” Paul Smith, Superintendent, East Hampton Public Schools, CT, USA, Panelist

“Teaching myself how to breathe” Deanna Zilske, Principal, Keene Middle School, NH, USA, Panelist

“The importance of beauty. I try to get out into nature as much as I can.” – Chanel Worsteling, Association of International Schools in Africa, Australia, Panelist

Key takeaways included:

“There’s no one size fits all for social and emotional learning. We would often do one professional development for everybody- learn to breathe in and breathe out, learn meditation, or mindfulness. But just as our students need individual care, so do our teaching staff.” - Deanna Zilske, Principal, Keene Middle School, NH, USA, Panelist

“The panel have used the term “permission giving” quite often. The staff are the experts in their fields and the school leaders are there to support them, rather than tell them what they have to do and when. Some wonderful professional reflection in this panel discussion. Thank you all for promoting “re-humanizing” our learning approaches and environment.” – School Association Leader, United Kingdom, Attendee

“It’s not one big thing, as sometimes the school leadership feels, and it’s not empty, transitory gestures but the sum of lots of little things, actions, words, and conversations and these felt from the heart.” – International School Educator, United Kingdom, Attendee

“It’s important to differentiate between activities and approaches- approaches are embedded as part of your practice each day vs a group of activities at the beginning of the year.”
- Educational Leader, USA, Attendee

“A key finding from the program we implemented was how valuable the modules were in giving people the language to even talk about their well-being, and giving them permission that its ok to talk about your own well-being in a school context with your colleagues.” – Chanel Worsteling, Association of International Schools in Africa, Australia, Panelist

"I've often said to our staff, 'If you can't remember everything you're trying to do with your students, when in doubt give them your heart.'" Jim Grout, Executive Director, High Five Adventure Learning Center, VT, USA, Panelist

“It’s providing space and letting the teachers know that they are important and that they as humans are essential and they're our greatest resource. We need them to sustain so just letting them know that it's okay, and actually courageous, to say I need help and then finding the way to get help for them and support them.” - Deanna Zilske, Principal, Keene Middle School, NH, USA, Panelist