

Student Well-being: A Collective Responsibility

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Integrative Thinking and the School Principal

DAN TAYLOR: The issues of well-being, they're very pervasive in education. And that's well-being issues for students and for staff, and it doesn't get talked about a whole lot, but well-being for administrators is also very key. And so, for an administrator to be successful, there is something to be said for being able to be showing, you know, be coming to your school on a daily basis in a positive frame of mind, in a method and a way that really, you know, does bring some enthusiasm to the task that you're doing every day. It's a key piece. People do notice when -- and you need to be keenly aware as an administrator -- when you're noticing issues of well-being either through the students or if things are becoming a very stressful part of the year for staff, even the way that you plan your year, you need to know when the really more dominantly heavy times of the year are for the staff so things are planned around that in time. And when you do get involved in issues of well-being for the staff, it's important, again, to listen to the voices in the same, but the students as well. The students understand when they heavier parts of the time are for the year for them, and to make sure that you are taking that into account. When you start to notice things like some of the stats start going up, [inaudible] number of office referrals or the number of questions you're getting from parents about, you know, something that occurred that day, you can usually map it out on a school year in terms of it's happening this time of year, that time of year, or that time of year. And those are the issues that are usually around issues of well-being that need to be considered as an administrator because there are those things happening in everybody's life. Both the administration, the staff, and the students, and these things need to be taken into account when you're running your school. Doesn't matter if you're the solo administrator or if you're at a larger school, but indeed, you've got to come to your school every day with a lot of energy. You've got to be able to come and feel very positive about what you're doing when you need to feel that the direction that's being set for the school is one that you're enthused by as well, because it still does come down a lot to your own enthusiasm for those rules or those positions are part of the administrator of the school. I find by going through this process, through integrative thinking, that it's really allowed me to approach the day each day as being, you know, very excited about it but coming in a really positive framework and that the staff now, the interactions between the admin and the staff, I don't think it ever feels like it's a different level of, you know, eschalon, if that's the right word, at the school. I feel that we're all working together towards a commonly agreed to direction, and it doesn't matter if it's a lunchroom supervisor coming to speak to me at lunch or if it's one of the parents coming to speak to me at the end of the day or if it's one of the teachers coming in to make suggestions with regards to what we might be doing for our next PD sessions, everyone is now speaking sort of

towards a similar goal. In terms of my own well-being, it's sort of allowed for, you know, I would say just a much more enthused and collaborative approach to the daily tasks that go into being a principal at the school. Integrative thinking, there's a genuine piece to it. It never feels like you're doing a set, prescribed piece of work with integrative thinking. You're always approaching it through whatever issue it may be. You're approaching it through sort of a collaborative approach that really allows your voice and other voices to come together and come up with a more rich response to whatever task you're looking to accomplish. What it's meant to me in terms of my own well-being, I would say that it never takes the onus off the importance of the administrator of the school, but it kind of changes what the parameters are for that. So, for me now, I find that the parameters have changed. That the, you know, I find one of the main key pieces of being a successful administrator now is that to embed collaborative decision-making through integrative thinking models through the daily and the long-range and the short-term and the daily planning that goes to running a school successfully.