

# *Fostering Resilience*

Expecting All Students to  
Use Their Minds and  
Hearts Well

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SECOND EDITION



# Contents

<b>Preface</b>	<b>ix</b>
<b>Acknowledgments</b>	<b>xix</b>
<b>About the Author</b>	<b>xxi</b>
<b>1. Whatever Happened to That Old Gang of Mine?</b>	<b>1</b>
Definitions	2
Whatever Happened to That Old Gang of Mine?	3
Whatever Happened to That Old Gang of Theirs?	4
Moving from Risk to Resilience	6
What Is This Resilience Stuff?	7
Does the Presence of These Protective Factors Relate to Student Learning?	10
Where Do We Go From Here?	10
Case Study: Anzar High School	11
<b>2. Prerequisites: First Things First</b>	<b>29</b>
First Things First: The Head	31
The Right Leg: Collegiality	33
The Left Leg: Professionalism	33
The Arms: Managing and Leading Change	33
The Heart: Resilience	33
Case Study: Oak Grove School District	34
<b>3. What's in It for Me?</b>	<b>41</b>
Collegiality	42
Intellectual Stimulation	44
Voice	44
Respect	45
Increased Job Satisfaction	46
Shared Ownership and Leadership	46
Obstacles	47

What Does It Look Like?	52
Why Me?	52
What Do I Do First?	53
Will There Be Public Schools in the Twenty-First Century?	54
Case Study: Two Oak Grove Schools	54
<b>4. I Care, You Care, We All Care—But How Do Students Know?</b>	<b>63</b>
What Would a School Look Like Whose Culture Is Centered on Caring?	66
What Would Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment Be Like in a School That Is Centered on Caring?	68
What Do Teacher and Administrator Roles Look Like in a School Focused on Caring?	70
Case Study: Rosemary School and Cezar Chavez School	72
<b>5. Providing High Expectations and Purposeful Support</b>	<b>87</b>
Taking the Easy Way Out	88
High Expectations: Focus on Literacy	89
High Expectations: Habits of Mind	89
What Gets in the Way?	91
What Else Gets in the Way?	92
High Expectations Mean Believing That All Students Are Capable of Using Their Minds and Hearts Well	93
Purposeful Support	94
What Would a School Look Like Whose Culture Is Centered on High Expectations and Purposeful Support?	94
What Would Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment Be Like in a School That Is Designed to Foster High Expectations and Purposeful Support for All Students?	95
What Do Teacher and Administrator Roles Look Like in Such a School?	97
Once Again, Does It Matter Which School a Child Attends?	97
Case Study: Alum Rock Small Schools of Choice	98

<b>6. I Value Your Participation: Now Sit Down and Shut Up</b>	<b>107</b>
Participation as the Third Protective Factor	108
What Would a School Look Like Whose Culture Is Centered on Meaningful Participation by All Students?	110
What Would Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment Be Like in a School Designed to Foster Meaningful Participation by All Students?	112
More Details on Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment	113
What Do Teacher and Administrator Roles Look Like in such a School?	114
Case Study: Homestead High School	115
<b>7. Managing Change: On Your Mark, Get Set, Are You Ready to Go?</b>	<b>127</b>
What We Do Know About Change	128
What We Can Do With What We Know	130
The Section You've All Been Waiting For: What About All the Resistance?	140
A Final Word	142
Case Study: Mission Hill Middle School	143
<b>8. Marty Krovetz's Top-Ten List of Commonly Asked Questions About Resilience</b>	<b>163</b>
Question 10: Our staff is very congenial, and we are known for how caring we are with students. Aren't we doing resilience already?	163
Question 9: How can what happens in my classroom or in my school overcome the problems my students encounter outside of school?	164
Question 8: What is the role of the district office in fostering resilience?	164
Question 7: How do we coach our principal so that she sees the building of a resilient learning community as a priority?	165

Question 6: How can we create change in individual teachers about attitudes and expectations towards certain groups of students such as Title 1, English language learning, migrant, and special education?	166
Question 5: How do you get a mature staff that has a history of mistrust and private practice to talk with each other about fostering resilience?	167
Question 4: How will we know we are succeeding in fostering resilience? What measures would we use? Who would we use them with? When would we use them?	167
Question 3: Should we teach students about resilience and help them understand how to foster resilience in themselves?	168
Question 2: Given the pressure of NCLB, how do we find time and resources to foster resilience?	169
Question 1: I am exhausted. How do I foster resilience for myself?	169
<b>9. A Final Word or Two</b>	<b>171</b>
<b>Resources</b>	<b>173</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>201</b>
<b>Index</b>	<b>205</b>

# Preface

Public schooling has changed since the first edition of this book was published in January 1999. Three years later, on January 8, 2002, President Bush signed No Child Left Behind (NCLB). The idea that no child should be left behind is an excellent one. The impact on practice, particularly for schools serving large numbers of students from high-risk environments, has been mixed. On the positive side, NCLB has caused schools to look deeply at the learning needs of individual students. No longer can students of color and English language learning students be excused from high expectations. On the negative side, there are many schools at which students are making large achievement gains, but not large enough to meet the federal NCLB standards. In what way are students at these schools served when their schools are identified as “Program Improvement” and thereby as “failing” within their communities? Many teachers and administrators at these schools feel under siege; many leave the school and/or the profession.

A second change is the opening of charter schools in many communities. The distinction between public and private schooling has become less clear as a result. Charter schools, funded with public monies, are competing with neighborhood and magnet schools for families and for students. When charter schools enroll a student population that is reflective of the diversity in the community, including children of color, English language learners, and special education students, we may learn from these schools. When charter schools enroll a more select group of students or return students to the neighborhood school when they are not performing well or fitting in, the playing field is not level and public schooling is being undermined.

I opened the first edition with the following:

“How do you like my school?” asked María.

“I’m very impressed by how friendly everyone is,” said I.

“More important, they really trust me here,” said María.

Now more than ever, it is imperative that schools be places where students feel welcome and safe. Of equal importance, students need to feel valued, respected, and known by the adults at the school. Parents, teachers, and administrators need this also. After reading this book, I hope you will be motivated to seek out such schools in your community and work to support the deep commitment and hard work that it takes to sustain them. Truly believing in the potential of all students requires changes in daily practices that are deeply embedded in school culture. This book will encourage you to look at your own deeply held beliefs and offer you tools to examine and redesign the school’s culture and practices. It will take considerable skill and courage to lead this effort. Be skillful! Be courageous!

## **SEEKING EXEMPLARY SCHOOLS**

Initially, Corwin Press asked me to travel and to write about schools that best exemplify fostering resilience for their students. In March 1997 I visited New York City and observed three extraordinary, small, public high schools serving primarily students of color: Vanguard Academy, Urban Academy, and the acclaimed Central Park East Secondary School (CPESS). I also went to New Hampshire to visit Souhegan High School, a very innovative school serving middle- and upper-middle-class students. Several years earlier, on two separate occasions, I had visited María’s school, South Pointe Elementary School in Dade County, Florida. These are wonderful schools from which we can learn a lot.

Why, however, should you or I have to look far from home to find schools that demonstrate a deep commitment to every student? Such schools should and do exist in every community. The leaders of these schools are courageous and need our voices and support. One of these leaders may be you! Given that school leadership comes from many sources—administrators, teachers,

classified staff, parents, students, and community members—reading this book may help you become such a leader.

When I wrote the first edition of *Fostering Resilience: Expecting All Students to Use Their Minds and Hearts Well*, I told the story of seven schools fighting for the hearts and souls of their students. The adults in these schools know their students and their students' work well. They also know their colleagues and their colleagues' work well. As professionals, they accept the responsibility to work with students, parents, the community, and colleagues to create a learning community in which every student is expected and supported to learn. And they come to school knowing how important their work is. All seven schools are within a forty-five-minute drive of my house.

In preparation to write the second edition of this book, I revisited each of the seven schools on several occasions. Some of the schools I was still in close contact with. I made several changes in how I approached the new case studies. First, and of great importance, I know through experience that the theory that school change happens one school at a time is faulty. It is very difficult to sustain change over time without district support. Oak Grove School District truly exemplifies what can happen when a district dedicates itself to closing the achievement gap. Their superintendent, Manny Barbara, is inspirational in his commitment to the education of every child. The new case study in Chapter 2 is about Oak Grove. Rather than update the case study of Stipe, one of the Oak Grove Schools, I have chosen to include case studies of two other Oak Grove schools and how they have been affected by this district commitment.

I wrote in the first edition about my belief in the importance of small schools. In my role as director of the Leading for Equity and Achievement Design Center (LEAD, [www.lead-ces.com](http://www.lead-ces.com)), a regional center affiliated with the Coalition of Essential Schools ([www.essentialschools.org](http://www.essentialschools.org)), I have supported the opening of four small schools in our region, all educating students from high-risk environments. The three described in Chapter 5 opened in 2004. The fourth opened in 2006. All are wonderful schools, operating as small schools of choice within existing school districts.



I have updated case studies on Anzar, Rosemary, Chavez, Homestead, and Mission Hill. Moss Land Middle School closed in 2004 and is not included in this edition.

## **POTENTIAL OF ALL STUDENTS**

*Fostering Resilience* is much more about the passionate belief in the potential of all students and what it takes to foster that potential than it is about particular schools. More than any other single factor, the lack of a deeply held belief in every child's ability leads to students achieving at levels lower than their potential. Most teachers enter the profession believing that every student can be successful, but few experienced teachers hold onto that belief. I do not hold individual teachers or administrators accountable for this. Our society clearly does not believe in the potential of every individual. Our financial priorities as a nation demonstrate our lack of commitment.

At the same time, many of our school practices get in the way. Large schools, large classes, teacher isolation, lack of adequate instructional resources, poorly conceived professional development, inability to stay focused on what is most important . . . these lead to far too many compromises by teachers and administrators, and thereby to a lowering of expectations for students and for themselves. It is not possible for an elementary school teacher, responsible for teaching reading, writing, math, social studies, science, physical education, art, and music to thirty-three students, to demonstrate caring for each of the students. It is not possible for a high school or middle school teacher, responsible for 150 to 200 students, to know each student and the student's work well. It is even harder when multiple languages are spoken by the students, or the societal problems of poverty, drugs, racism, and struggling families impose on the lives of the children and adults in our schools. How can teachers in this situation value the participation of each student? In fact, most teachers welcome students being out sick or cutting classes because the number of bodies is reduced. Most teachers demand that students sit quietly and listen to the teacher talk, because the teacher is overwhelmed by the demands of the job. And yet, there are schools that are working to remove roadblocks to student success.

## **RESILIENCE**

My vision for the community I want to live and work in is based on fostering resilience, the belief in the ability of every person to overcome adversity if important protective factors are present in that person's life. Resilience is founded on the proposition that if members of your family, community, and/or school care deeply about you, have high expectations and purposeful support for you, and value your participation, you will maintain a faith in the future and can overcome almost any adversity. When the school community works together to foster resilience, a large number of students can overcome great adversity and achieve bright futures.

## **THIS IS NOT A SIMPLE FIX!**

As you read about the schools featured in this book, you will come to understand the depth of change in school practice and in school culture required to foster resilience for all students. Fostering resilience starts by challenging our underlying beliefs about student potential and how students learn. This strikes at the heart of not only who we are as educators but also who we are as people.

Thus, fostering resilience involves far more than altering the discipline policy, adding social service support to the school, adopting a new curriculum program, buying computers, or having teachers go through a new staff development program. As you read this book, you will come to understand that for a school to attempt to foster resilience for all its students honestly, school practices must be examined. What we teach, how we teach, and how we assess are all central to fostering resilience. How we organize the school and how we group students are central. Likewise, expecting and supporting all students to be literate and to demonstrate the habits of mind to think critically are directly related to fostering resilience.

Fostering resilience serves as a lens to guide school redesign. Look critically at school practices: How does this practice demonstrate caring for every student? How does this practice demonstrate high expectations for every student and support students' efforts to meet these expectations? How does this practice demonstrate valuing student participation?

Focusing my writing on schools is not meant to reduce the important role of family and community.