# From Risk to Resiliency: What Schools Can Do

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"Instead of alcohol and drug counselors and educators asking,
'What are you doing?' We need to ask, 'How are you doing?"
(Mary Beth Blegen, Minnesota Teacher of the Year)

"The major message we want to get across [in our research] is
that perspective really matters. If adults were to stop viewing
young people as something to be fixed and controlled, and
instead, helped enable their development, there would be
phenomenal change in their lives and society in general."
(Milbrey McLaughlin, Stanford University)

## The At-Risk Paradigm:  Studying the Problem

For nearly two decades prevention and education discourse has been steeped in the language of risk. Researchers have documented that between 1989 and 1994 alone, over 2,500 articles were published on "children and families at risk" (Swadener and Lubeck, 1995, p.1). Over 40 years of social science research has clearly identified poverty--the direct result of public abdication of responsibility for human welfare-- as the factor most likely to put a person "at risk" for social ills such as drug abuse, teen pregnancy, child abuse, violence, and school failure (Currie, 1994;  Lubeck and Swadener, 1992; Males, 1996). Nonetheless, and perhaps providing a convenient smoke screen for the naming and blaming of poverty, policymakers, politicians, the media, and often researchers themselves have personalized "at-riskness,"  locating it in youth, their families, and their cultures. Even when well-intentioned, such as the desire to get needed services to children and families, research has shown this approach has not had this desired effect in drug education (Caston and Brown, 1998). Moreover, this risk focus has increasingly led to harmful educational practices such as lowering expectations, stereotyping, labeling, tracking , and expelling to more drastic public policy practices like incarcerating a growing number of these labeled students.

Most dangerous of all, this deficit approach has encouraged teachers and other helping professionals to see, identify, and name children and families only through a deficit lens. This "glass-as-half-full" perspective blocks our vision to see capacity and strength, to see the whole person and hear the "real story," thus creating stereotypes or "myths" about who people really are. As one educator warns, "When we don't know each other's stories, we substitute our own myth about who that person is. When we are operating with only a myth, none of that person's truth will ever be known to us, and we will injure them--mostly without ever meaning to" (Wehmiller,1992, p. 380).

## Resilience:  Studying "What Works!"

While our commonsense and wisdom certainly caution us against this deficit approach, we now have the most rigorous of scientific research on human development--prospective longitudinal studies--that should put permanently to rest this risk preoccupation. These

studies on resilience, on how individuals successfully develop despite risk and adversity, ask questions such as the following: Do most young people considered at high-risk for problem behaviors like alcohol, tobacco, and other drug abuse and violence actually become abusers and perpetrators? Are there any personal strengths that assist a young person in navigating the environmental risks all around them-- troubled and often abusive families, overcrowded and underfunded schools, besieged communities without employment opportunities, an exploitive media, and public policies that would rather incarcerate than educate or rehabilitate them? Are there any environmental resources that "protect" a young person exposed to these pervasive risks?

Resilience research certainly proves the lack of predictive power of risk factors--unless we create self-fulfilling labels based on them. It also situates risk in institutions and harmful public and social policies, not in children, youth, families, and cultures. Most important to educators and preventionists, however, is that resilience research offers the gift of a research-based answer to the questions, "What works to promote healthy development and successful learning?" and ,"What can I do in my classroom and school to prevent my students from getting in trouble with alcohol, tobacco, drugs, gangs, as well as early pregnancy and unsafe sexual practices?"

Resilience research clearly reveals to all who work with youth the following key points:
• Most youth "make it"
• All individuals have the power to transform and change
• Teachers and schools have the power to transform lives
• It's how we do what we do that counts
• Teachers' beliefs in innate capacity start the change process

### Most Youth Make It

These long term developmental studies have followed children born into extremely high-risk environments, such as poverty- stricken or war-torn communities as well as families with alcoholism, drug abuse, physical and sexual abuse, and mental illness . When tracked into adulthood, researchers worldwide have documented the amazing finding that at least 50% and usually closer to 70% of these "high-risk" children grow up to be not only successful by societal indicators but "confidant, competent, and caring" (Werner and Smith, 1992) persons (Masten and Coatsworth, 1998). More specifically, these studies, first of all, found the personal strengths most often associated with resilience--with healthy development and successful learning despite risks, include the following:
- social competence: empathy, communication skills, cross-cultural competence, humor; problem-solving and metacognition : planning, goal-setting, critical thinking, resourcefulness;
- a sense of autonomy and identity: self-efficacy, internal locus of control, mastery, self-awareness, detaching from negative influences;
- a sense of purpose and belief in a bright future: a special interest, imagination, goal-direction, achievement motivation, educational aspiration, persistence, optimism, spiritual connectedness, sense of meaning (Benard, 1992; Higgins, 1994); Masten and Coatsworth, 1998; Werner and Smith, 1992).

### All Individuals Have the Power to Transform and Change

Many researchers and practitioners have latched onto these personal attributes, creating a myriad of social and life skills programs to directly teach these "resilience skills." The strong message in resilience research, however, is that these attitudes and competencies are

outcomes--not causes--of resilience. These are the growth capacities which have enabled survival throughout human history. Moreover, they are the very same personal strengths that have enabled each of our own life journeys.

Resilience is clearly something more. Werner and Smith (1992) refer to resilience as our innate "self-righting mechanism" (p. 202) and Lifton (1994) identifies resilience as the human capacity of all individuals to transform and change--no matter their risks. Basically, we are genetically hard-wired with developmental needs that move us naturally toward these resilient outcomes:

| Needs | Outcomes |
|---|---|
| Love and Belonging | Social Competence |
| Mastery | Problem Solving and Planning |
| Power | Autonomy and Identity |
| Meaning | Sense of Purpose and Coherence |

The critical question becomes, "If all individuals have these innate needs and capacities, why do some youth turn to drugs and gangs to get their needs met while other youth turn away? "

The answer comes to us from both the lifespan studies of resilience as well as research into healthy families, successful schools, competent communities, learning organizations, and program evaluation research (Hattie, Marsh, and Richards, 1997; Ianni, 1989; McLaughlin, Irby, and Langman, 1994; Meier, 1995; Resnick, Bearman, Blum, Bauman, Harris, Jones, Tabor, Beuhring, Sieving, Shew, Ireland, Bearinger, and Udry, 1997; Rutter, Maughan, Mortimore, Ouston, and Smith, 1979; Schweinhart and Weikart, 1997; Tierney, Grossman, and Resch, 1995; and Tobler and Stratton, 1997). These positive developmental outcomes, that is, the personal strengths of resilience, consistently result from the presence of a nurturing climate that draws them forth and encourages their expression. Research validates what has nurtured most of us in our own life journeys. It consistently identifies the power of three environmental protective factors that buffer risk and allow development to unfold: caring relationships, positive and high expectations, and opportunities to participate and contribute (Benard, 1991).

### Teachers and Schools Have the Power to Transform Lives

So what does this mean for educators and preventionists working in schools? A common finding in resilience research is the power of a teacher--often unbeknownst to him or her--to tip the scale from risk to resilience. Werner and Smith (1989) found that, "Among the most frequently encountered positive role models in the lives of the children . . . outside of the family circle, was a favorite teacher. For the resilient youngsters a special teacher was not just an instructor for academic skills, but also a confidant and positive model for personal identification" (p. 162). The approaches, or "strategies," used by these turnaround teachers provide a set of best practices or benchmarks to guide our work in classrooms and schools. Repeatedly, these mentors are described as providing, in their own personal styles and ways, the three protective factors.

#### Best Practices: Caring Relationships

Relationships are the key to tapping the resilience of youth. It is through caring relationships that young people's needs for love and belonging, and for connection are met.

This rapport is the critical motivational foundation for successful learning and development. As Noddings (1988) states, "It is obvious that children will work harder and do things – even odd things like adding fractions – for people they love and trust" (p. 4).

The impact study of Big Brothers/Big Sisters (1995) mentoring effort, which intentionally creates caring relationships, found that young people matched with developmental mentors (mentors who did not try to "fix" kids but rather to have fun and be a friend) were 46% less likely to use illegal drugs (70% less likely if they were minority youth!), 27% less likely to drink, one-third less likely to hit someone, and half as likely to skip school (Tierney et al., 1995).

<u>Loving support</u> – The bottom line message is one of being there for a youth, of trust, of unconditional love. This means, to the greatest extent possible, teachers and other adults in the school help meet the basic survival needs of overwhelmed students and their families. First of all, they have on hand extra school supplies, hats, mittens, personal hygiene items. Secondly, they connect their students and families to outside community resources in order to find food, shelter, clothing, counseling, treatment, and mentoring.

Loving support also translates into meeting emotional safety needs. Resilient survivors talk about teachers' "quiet availability," "fundamental positive regard," and "simple sustained kindness" – a touch on the shoulder, a smile, a greeting (Higgins, 1994, pp. 324-25).

<u>Respect</u> – having a person "acknowledge us, see us for who we are – as their equal in value and importance" figures high in turnaround relationships and schools, according to renown urban educator Deborah Meier who transformed a high school in Harlem using resiliency best practices (1995, p. 120).

<u>Compassion</u> – These teachers convey nonjudgmental love that looks beneath the students' negative behavior and sees the pain and suffering . They do not take the students' behavior personally. They understand that no matter how negative a student's behavior, she or he is doing the best she or he can given how she or he sees the world. Sandy McBrayer, founder of an alternative school for homeless youth and 1994 National Teacher of the Year, declares, "People ask me what my 'methods' are. I don't have a method. But I believe one of the things that makes me an adequate or proficient teacher is that I never judge" and "I tell my kids I love them every day" (Bacon, 1995, p. 44).

• Being interested
• Actively listening
• Validating feelings
• Getting to know interests, dreams, strengths and gifts

These inter-related strategies clearly convey the message, "You matter." In her research on resilient survivors of childhood abuse and trauma, psychologist Alice Miller (1990) claims, "It turns out in every case that a sympathetic witness confirmed the child's perceptions, thus making it possible for him to recognize that he had been wronged" (pp. 50-51). Similarly, case histories of hard-to-reach youth mention teachers and counselors who looked for a special "hook": "Mr. Lambert . . . had no training in bonding with relationship-resistant youth. Few of us do. But he doggedly attempted to find a special interest of mine, namely my dreams of being a sports hero. Although I did not trust other adults, he connected with me through a special interest" (Seita, Mitchell, and Tobin, 1996, p. 88).

### *Best Practices: High Expectations*

At the core of caring relationships are positive and high expectations that not only structure and guide behavior but also challenge students beyond what they believe they can do.

Belief in the student's innate resilience and self-righting capacities – A consistent description of turnaround teachers is their seeing the possibility and promise. They do not use past behavior or current risks to predict future outcomes: "They held visions of us that we could not imagine for ourselves . . . They were determined that, despite all odds, we would achieve" (Delpit, 1996, p. 199). Similarly, Werner found, "One of the wonderful things we see now in adulthood is that these children really remember one or two teachers who made the difference . . . They mourn some of those teachers more than they do their own family members because what went out of their life was a person who looked beyond outward experience, their behavior, their unkempt--oftentimes--appearance and saw the promise" (1996, p. 24).

Challenge-with-support messages – This translates as, "This work is important; I know you can do it; I won't give up on you" (Howard ,1990). One African American educator recalls, "Once I had a black teacher who was really tough – but I loved her because she cared. She even dared to flunk people. She made us do difficult tasks, made us think hard about what we were doing. The others thought we didn't need schooling because we'd never be anything anyway, so there was no need to worry about teaching" (Delpit, 1995, p. 119).

Guidance without coercion/Freedom with structure – Providing a safe space for learning and healthy development absolutely means creating (with student input!) structure, rituals, and rules as well as having adult guidance. However, the structure must allow for the freedom to grow – the space to take risks and make mistakes. This strategy appears to be critical in the research on adventure programs (such as Outward Bound) which has documented the positive developmental outcomes – including academic success – that continued to increase even long after the programs ended (Hattie et al., 1997).

Strengths-focused – Starting with students' strengths – instead of their problems and deficiencies – enlists their intrinsic motivation, their positive momentum, and keeps them in a hopeful frame-of-mind to learn and to work on any concerns. Turnaround teachers look for existing strengths, mirror them back, and help students use them to work on challenges. They use a language of strengths, pointing out to students, for example, how they have used empathy in helping their alcoholic mother, how they've problem-solved just to show up at school, how (in the case of gang leaders) they have leadership abilities--even if they are negative ones now , and how even their resistance is a strength that can be used in a positive way.

Reframing – Turnaround teachers especially assist those overwhelmed youth who have been labeled or oppressed by their families, schools, and/or communities in transforming their personal life narratives from damaged victim to resilient survivor (Wolin and Wolin, 1992).

Teach youth about their innate resilience – Turnaround teachers help youth see the personal power they have to think differently about and construct alternative meanings to their lives. They help them  (1) to not take personally the adversity in their lives ("You aren't the cause – nor can you control – your father's drinking or your friend's racist remarks"); (2) to not see adversity as permanent ("This too shall pass"; "Your future will be different");  and (3) to not see setbacks as pervasive ("You can rise above this"; "This is only one part of your life experience") (adapted from Seligman, 1995).

This also involves helping students recognize how their own conditioned thinking – the environmental messages they have internalized that they are not good enough, smart enough, thin enough, and so on – blocks access to their innate resilience. Teaching metacognition, the recognition of how their thinking influences their feelings and behaviors, is the most powerful tool we can give our youth. In a Miami, Florida study, the dropout rate for youth from a public

housing community fell to nearly zero when they were taught they have this power (Mills, 1991).

Student-centered – Turnaround teachers do not have a one-size-fits-all approach to teaching. Rather, they start where young people are and take them where they want to go. They use the student's own strengths, interests, goals, and dreams as the beginning point for learning. They then actively assist students in developing mastery and competency--but based on the youth's own interests and future plans. Thus, they tap the students' intrinsic motivation, their existing, innate drive for learning.

*Best Practices: Opportunities for Participation and Contribution*

Creating opportunities for student participation and contribution is a natural outgrowth of working from a resilience and strengths-based perspective. It is through having the opportunities to be heard in a physically and psychologically safe and structured environment that youth develop the attitudes and competencies characteristic of healthy development and successful learning: social competence, problem-solving, and a sense of self and future. According to Kohn, "It is in classrooms and families where participation is valued above adult control that students have the chance to learn self-control" (1993, p. 18). The power of participation to effect these individual outcomes clearly speaks to our deep human need – across the life span – to have some power and control over the events of our lives.

Interactive group process – providing students the chance to work cooperatively in small groups has been found in hundreds of studies (Slavin, 1990) to promote virtually all the positive developmental outcomes of resilience. Moreover, Tobler and Stratton found the interactivity that occurs in small groups was the critical component in school-based drug education programs that promoted reduced drug use (1997). According to these researchers, "The paramount question for school boards and administrators is whether they will provide the necessary money, class time, extra personnel, and aggressive teacher training in the use of interactive group process skills. An interactive program must include participation by everyone, preferably in small groups . . . [to insure] active involvement, exchange and validation of ideas with their peers, and enough time to practice and truly acquire interpersonal skills" (1997, p.118).

Reflection, dialog, and critical thinking – When asked by researchers, young people continually say they want safe places for honest and open reflection and dialog around issues salient to them, especially those related to sexuality, drug use and abuse, and family communication (Caston and Brown, 1998; Englander-Golden, Golden, Brookshire, Snow, Haag, and Chang, 1996). Teachers can give youth the opportunity to give voice to their realities – to discuss their experiences, beliefs, attitudes, and feelings – and encourage them to critically question societal messages, especially those from the advertising media as well as their own conditioned thinking. Through a critical inquiry process that starts with the reality of their lives and a constructivist perspective that acknowledges youth are meaning-makers and construct their own realities, youth are thus given the opportunity to develop their innate capacities for problem-solving and self-awareness, traits consistently identified with healthy development.

Responsibilities – Having valued responsibilities emerges in resiliency literature as a powerful protective factor (Rutter et al., 1979; Werner and Smith, 1992). In his seminal research on effective urban schools in poor communities, Michael Rutter discovered schools in which the rates of delinquency and dropping out actually declined the longer students were in them! In these schools, students "were given a lot of responsibility. They participated very

actively in all sorts of things that went on in the school; they were treated as responsible people and they reacted accordingly" (1984, p. 65).

Inviting students to help create the classroom rules, curriculum, and school policies – We ensure student buy-in, ownership, and sense of belonging by giving them a voice in decision-making. Even in classroom discipline issues, "Bring the kids in on it! . . . Instead of reaching for coercion, engage children and youth in a conversation about the underlying causes of what is happening and work together to negotiate a solution" (Kohn, 1993, p. 14). By infusing student participation into the very fabric of classroom life, students have the opportunities to develop not only conflict resolution, communication, problem-solving, and decision-making skills in a meaningful way, but they learn the most vital lesson of all: what it means to live in community as an involved citizen.

Youth-owned and driven – In terms of extra-curricular activities, including any non-classroom prevention programs, it is critical that young people have more than a voice; they must actually be in charge. This means they are involved in planning, in all phases of decision-making. Ultimately they do the work. It is this ownership that consistently tips the scale from failure to success in youth-serving organizations (American Policy Forum, 1997; Komro, Perry, Murray, Veblen-Mortensen, Williams, and Anstine, 1996). For example, in the Project Northland alcohol use prevention program, 7th-graders who helped plan alcohol-free activities such as open gyms, ski trips, or roller skating outings – compared with youth who either simply attended those events or did not participate at all – were significantly less likely to report using alcohol during the past year and during the month preceding the post survey. The effects were indeed the strongest for youth who already had used alcohol during the 6th grade! (Komro et al., 1996).

Applying this principle to the classroom, one of only a few longitudinal outcome studies of an actual educational intervention again makes the case for youth-driven programming. The High/Scope Educational Research Foundation followed children who had attended three different models of pre-school education for 20 years. Their key finding was that child-initiated learning, in which children at ages 3 and 4 actually planned their own activities, based on their own interests, resulted in significantly lower involvement in problem behaviors as well as more positive developmental outcomes at age 23 (Schweinhart and Weikart, 1997).

Mastery experiences – Resiliency researchers are unanimous in stating that the development of competence is essential to healthy and successful outcomes (Masten and Coatsworth, 1998; Rutter, 1979; Werner and Smith, 1992). Youth need experiences that allow them to be good at something – anything--in order to develop that critical sense of self-efficacy and self-confidence. For some youth, academics provides this hook; for others it is art or sports; for yet others it is auto mechanics, organic gardening, community service, and so on. Rutter's research on turnaround schools in inner-city London found a critical component was offering a variety of classes and extra-curricular activities through which students could follow their own interests and build the skills necessary to work towards their personally defined goals and dreams (Rutter, 1979). As teachers, our task is to find this hook in each of our students and then connect them to experiences and opportunities that will allow them to follow their individual callings.

Creative expression – Having the opportunity to express one's imagination, to tell one's story; to connect one's inner experience, drive, call, and feelings to the outer world is a powerful protective factor in the lives of young people, especially those growing up with multiple challenges (Higgins, 1994). Making art--storytelling, creative writing, painting, drawing, video production, drama, dancing, music--not only can heal deep wounds but also can prevent negative outcomes, including substance abuse, which often result when we don't

find a positive channel for expressing our inner self and calling (Learning Systems Group, 1998; Magie and Miller, 1997).

Service – Opportunities to help others, to give one's gift back to the community  is sine qua non a powerful prevention and education tool (Rutter et al., 1979; Wade, 1997; Werner and Smith, 1992 ). While creating helping opportunities within the classroom on an informal basis is essential to institutionalizing an ethic of caring, research and practitioner anecdotes have identified some programmatic approaches that are particularly effective in producing positive developmental outcomes. These include peer tutoring, peer helping, cooperative learning, community service, service learning, and cross-age mentoring (Benard, 1990; Melchior, 1998; Slavin, 1990; Wade, 1997).

In a national evaluation of over 1,000 students involved in over 300 service learning projects, researchers found  statistically significant, positive impacts on several measures of civic and educational development, including engagement in school, grades, core subject GPAs, educational aspirations, personal responsibility, social responsibility, acceptance of cultural diversity, and leadership. Furthermore, a year after their involvement ended, the researchers found significantly less involvement with alcohol (and teen pregnancy) in the students that had been part of these projects! (Melchior, 1998).

An exciting resilience-based substance abuse prevention approach is Project TIGHT (Tobacco Industry Gets Hammered by Teens) in Contra Costa County, California (Benard, 1998). TIGHT incorporates not only youth-driven community service in which young people become activists in changing local tobacco ordinances, it does so using a cross-age mentoring model using an adult facilitator, older youth coordinators, and finally younger youth advocates that do peer education in schools and community-based organizations. TIGHT also uses the critical pedagogy of media literacy and advocacy to develop critical consciousness around being targeted by both media and corporate industries and develops strategies for fighting back. Not only are the lives of the involved youth (most of whom would be labeled "high-risk" were this a risk-focused prevention project) being transformed by their involvement, the youth are actually helping change community norms and their communities for the better.

### *It's How We Do What We Do That Counts*

The major message from longterm studies of successful human development in high-risk contexts as well as of successful schools in urban settings is that it's how we do what we do that counts. In other words, context matters more than content; process more than program. Making this point loud and clear and validating all the longitudinal studies of resilience is the powerful ongoing, Congressionally-mandated National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health. This study is the largest ever done of both risk behaviors (alcohol use, tobacco use, drug use, suicidality, emotional distress, pregnancy, unsafe sex, and violence) and protective factors. The most astounding finding so far, based on surveys of 90,000 students from grades 7 through 12 at 145 schools around the U.S. as well as interviews with 20,000 students and their parents and with 130 school administrators, is the following:  "Parent-family connectedness and perceived school connectedness were protective against every health risk behavior measure (except history of pregnancy)" (Resnick, et al., 1997, p. 823). The Add Health researchers conclude, "It is clear that . . . social contexts count. Specifically, we find consistent evidence that perceived caring and connectedness to others is important in understanding the health of young people today" (Resnick, et al., 1997, p. 830).

The three protective factors we've discussed are precisely what create this sense of connectedness; they are precisely how humans (not just youth!) meet their basic needs for safety, love and belonging, power, accomplishment, and ultimately for meaning. No matter

what subject matter we teach – nor, for that matter, what official role we play in a young person's life (teacher, parent, neighbor, youthworker, etc.), we can do it in the caring and empowering way that describes these turnaround teachers – and at no extra cost!

It is clearly what we model that makes the final difference. Social learning theorists tell us that most of our learning comes from the modeling around us . If we are caring and respectful; if we help our students discover and use their strengths; if we give them ongoing responsibilities as active decision makers, our students will learn empathy, respect, the wise use of power,  self-control and responsibility.

Moreover, when we ourselves model this invitational behavior – we are creating a classroom climate in which caring, respect, and responsibility are the behavioral norms. Schools and classrooms that have been turnaround experiences for stressed young people are continually described by them as being like "a family," "a home," "a community" – even " a sanctuary":  "School was my church, my religion. It was constant, the only thing that I could count on every day . . . I would not be here if it was not for school" (Children's Express, 1993). Creating these safe havens means building inclusive communities through relationships and responsibilities that invite back our disconnected and disempowered youth.

### Teachers' Beliefs in Innate Capacity Start the Change Process

Certain programmatic approaches we have already discussed have proven particularly effective at providing the structure for developing caring relationships as well for providing opportunities for active participation and contribution:  small group process, cooperative learning, peer helping, cross-age mentoring, and community service learning. However, the key point from resilience research (and our own life experience) is that successful development and transformative power exists not in programs per se but at the deeper level of relationships, beliefs and expectations, and willingness to share power. Asa Hilliard (1991) advises that, "To restructure we must first look deeply at the goals that we set for our children and the beliefs that we have about them. Once we are on the right track there, then we must turn our attention to the delivery systems, as we have begun to do. Cooperative learning is right. Technology access for all is right. Multiculturalism is right. But none of these approaches or strategies will mean anything if the fundamental belief system does not fit the new structures that are being created" (p. 36).

The bottom line and starting point for creating both classrooms and schools that tap students' capacities is the deep belief on the part of teachers and school staff that every youth has innate resilience. This means every adult in the school must personally grapple with questions like:  "What tapped my resilience? What occurred in my life that brought out my strength and capacity?  How am I connecting this knowledge to what I do in the classroom?" "What does it mean in my classroom and school if ALL kids have it?"

Believing in our students' capacities requires foremost that we believe in our own innate resilience, our own capacity to transform and change. Our walk always speaks louder than our talk. It means too that in order to teach our students about their internal power,  we first must see we have the power – no matter what external stresses we face – to rise above, to let go of our conditioned thinking and access our innate capacities for compassion, intuition, self-efficacy, and hope,  Once this belief is in place we are able to model the caring, positive expectations, and inviting that engage the innate resilience in our students.

Nurturing and sustaining this belief is not only the critical task of teachers; it should be the main focus of administrators. Resilience applies to all of us:  what has sustained youth in the face of adversity is equally what enables teachers and administrators to overcome the incredible stresses they face in schools today. Just as teachers can create a nurturing

classroom climate, administrators can create the nurturing school environment that supports teachers' resilience: caring relationships with colleagues; positive beliefs, expectations, and trust on the part of the administration; and the ongoing opportunities and time to reflect, dialog, and make decisions together. A wise administrator once remarked, "If you don't feed the teachers, they'll eat the students." Research has shown that supporting teachers by providing them the time and opportunity to work collegially together, and thus build a sense of professional community, is the critical variable in both sustaining school change efforts and raising students' academic scores (McLaughlin and Talbert, 1993). Just as students need the structure of the small group process to reflect and dialog in relationship to ideas and to each other, so do teachers.

In closing, remember, you matter! Resilience research clearly tells us when you care, believe in, and "invite back" our nation's most precious resource – our children and youth – you are not only enabling their healthy development and successful learning. You are, indeed, creating inside-out social change – building the compassionate and creative citizenry that will be critical to the 21st century.

## Two Tips for Moving from Risk to Resiliency in Schools:

Form a resiliency study group. Read the research on resiliency, including the studies of successful city schools. Share stories--both personal and literary--of successful overcoming of the odds. "It is important to read about struggles that lead to empowerment and to successful advocacy, for resilient voices are critical to hear within the at-risk wasteland" (Polakow, 1994, p. 269). Working against the dominant risk paradigm means we need the support and "shelter of each other."

Try an initial experiment using the resiliency approach. Choose one of your most challenging students. Look for and identify all her strengths. Mirror back her strengths. Teach her she has innate resilience and the power to create her own reality. Create opportunities to have her participate and contribute her strengths. Be patient. Focus on small victories (they often grow into major transformations!).

Relax, have fun, and trust the process! Working from our own innate resilience and well-being engages the innate resilience and well-being of our students. Thus, teaching becomes much more effortless and enjoyable. Moreover, resiliency research as well as research on nurturing teachers and successful schools gives us all the proof we need to lighten up, let go of our tight control, be patient, and trust the process.

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ABSTRACT Many "at risk" students are successful in middle school and high school, and are college bound, despite the fact that they face numerous factors that place them at-risk for academic failure or for dropping out of school. One of the key factors that makes these students unique and academically successful is resiliency. Resiliency is identified as the ability to recover or adjust easily from misfortune or change. However, more research is needed in the field of education that unveils how students can transition from risk to resiliency. Statement of the Problem There is a higher percentage of English Language Learners, as well as a large percentage of Hispanic/Latino students who have decided to drop out of school. From risk to resiliency: What schools can do. Retrieved 26 Aug 2010 from http://www.tanglewood.net/projects/teachertraining/Book_of_Readings/Benard.pdf. Bhana, D., Morrell, R., Epstein, D., & Moletsane, R. (2006). The hidden work of caring: Teachers and the maturing AIDS epidemic in diverse secondary schools in Durban. Journal of Education, 38, 5–24.Google Scholar. Brooks, J. E. (2006). Strengthening resilience in children and youths: Maximizing opportunities through the schools. Children and Schools, 28(2), 69–76.Google Scholar. Creswell, J. W. (2009). Exploring resiliency: Academic achievement among disadvantaged black youth in South Africa. South African Journal of Psychology, 35(3), 574–591.Google Scholar. Department of Education.