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*Professionally  
Speaking*

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## **Voices from the Field**

*By Juliette Longchamp and Meaghan Morgan-Puglisi*

We welcome Vermont-NEA members to share your “voices from the field.” Please email Juliette Longchamp at [jlongchamp@vtnea.org](mailto:jlongchamp@vtnea.org) or [fill out this form](#).

Our intention with this section of our bi-monthly “Professionally Speaking” to showcase our member’s voices in “Voices from the Field.” For this first edition, we have compiled the voices of a number of members regarding the struggles of the first months of school, in a year where we all had hoped would be “back to near normal.” We realize that schooling will never be the same as it was pre-pandemic. While we have had successes that will carry forward to a post-pandemic world, we are not there yet.

This year is even more difficult for many educators. For one, the school schedule was different for most last year. Many high school teachers only taught a half of a class at a time.

Many schools had a remote Wednesday, allowing teachers time to plan with their colleagues and provide feedback to students. This year, students are back full-time, even though the COVID infection rate among students is higher than ever.

Many schools and/or classes have gone “remote” without notice. Many students are having a difficult time regulating their stress levels and behavior. Many schools are not fully staffed, making it difficult to support students who need guidance and professional care.

In the research on "[Stages of a Teacher's First Year](#)," the middle to end of October is called the disillusionment period. This is when the excitement of attaining one’s first teaching job begins to dwindle as they feel the enormous pressure of what it takes to be the teacher they want to be; they realize that they do not have all the skills, yet, and are often exhausted working nights and weekends to keep it all together. Some would argue that every teacher feels like a first-year teacher this year.

Many of the strategies that have worked well up to this point in regards to supporting students' social/emotional well-being are not working. The academic needs of students are more diverse. To add to this, the lack of staffing has resulted in many educators covering classes for teachers who are absent, resulting in lost prep time and the removal of paraeducators from supporting students to covering classes. The pace at which educators are running in most schools is unsustainable.

Educators are just surviving. One dedicated professional emailed me to let me know how difficult things are this year. She said if things don't improve by the end of November, she might consider leaving the profession. She also let me know her colleagues are also struggling, to the detriment of their physical health. Educators choose their profession because they are committed to supporting our young people to thrive.

When the time and support is not there, the first reaction is to work longer hours. However, working 10-14 hours a day will, over time, wear down the mind, body and soul. This may affect our patience with our students who need us to be there for them. It may affect our families and relationships. It may affect the support systems we need to do our jobs well. Our students are not better off if the educators who support them are exhausted.

So what do we need?

First, we need boundaries. Setting boundaries can help teachers avoid burnout and stay in the profession longer (Bernstein-Yamashiro & Noam, 2013). Additionally, "in work or in our personal relationships, poor boundaries lead to resentment, anger, and burnout" (Nelson, 2016). This is so much easier said than done, but if you find yourself resenting your job because of the time it is taking away from other aspects of your life, please take note and begin to adjust your time so you put your personal physical and emotional health first. "Children will always need more, so there is no clear end to the amount of giving a teacher can do. And when teachers give teaching their all, they often end up depleted, drained of the physical and emotional energy to be the sort of skilled practitioner we'd all like to be" (Cruz, C. (2020) Risk. Fail, Rise.

## A Teacher's Guide to Learning from Mistakes. NH: Heinemann).

Second, we need to have reasonable learning expectations. This year, learning is interrupted due to student SEL, moving to remote learning, and still wearing masks and trying to social distance (to name just a few). Not all learning standards are equal. Selecting the most important standards to address with students, and integrating SEL as you create these learning opportunities is important. Utilize short, classroom-based formative assessments to help determine what students need tomorrow. Also, consider rethinking what you are asking students to submit for grading/feedback. Perhaps shorter assignments that do not take 30 minutes per student to grade might be better use of time right now. Or consider spending time increasing students' ability to self and peer assess.

Finally, if systemic conditions are not sustainable or conducive to learning, reach out to your local association. Our working conditions are our students' learning conditions. If there are building/district conditions impacting our students' learning, coming together with one voice is a powerful way to improve teaching/learning conditions. The work we do as teachers/staff is the most important in regards to student learning. Our collective voice is critical right now.

A tired, stressed educator is not healthy for students. School districts and administrators need to take note and give educators the space, time, and autonomy to meet the immediate needs of their students. As Danielson says, "When teachers thrive, students thrive." Our teachers are not all thriving, and some are barely surviving, just doing the best they

can. As a result, many students are suffering. They deserve better.

Juliette Longchamp is the Director of Professional Programs at Vermont-NEA. Meaghan Morgan-Puglisi is the Professional Practice and Policy Fellow at Vermont-NEA for the 2021-2022 School Year.



## Upcoming Professional Offerings

### [Thriving as a Teacher in the First Three Years](#)

Are you a new teacher? Join Thriving as a Teacher in the First Three Years! We meet every other Thursday from 5-6pm to discuss the challenges and successes of the first leg of your teaching journey. This is a unique time to be a new educator.

Get the support you need in a community setting. [Fill out this form for the link and materials!](#)

### [Early Career Educator Seminar](#)

Covering different topics each month that are relevant to new educators, our Early Career Educator Seminars provide you with the skills you need in a short, interactive format. [Sign up here.](#)

### [Creating Healthy Boundaries Seminar](#)

Monday, November 1st 4:00-5:00pm

Do you feel overextended, exhausted, and like you can't possibly fit one more thing into your busy schedule? In this day and age, keeping yourself sane in the education field can feel like an impossible task. Learn how to cultivate a sustainable routine and a healthy practice of saying "no" with these tips and resources. [Sign up here.](#)

Please email Meaghan Morgan-Puglisi at [mmorganpuglisi@vtnea.org](mailto:mmorganpuglisi@vtnea.org) if you have any questions.

### **Exploring Engineering Design with the Young Inventors' Program**

TODAY! Thursday, October 28th 3:30-4:30PM

Welcome Vermont Educators!

Explore strategies to bring engineering design into your classroom with an introduction to the Young Inventors' Program. This K-12 project-based curriculum meets core standards, including the NGSS, and provides hands-on STEM activities to take students on an invention journey through the design process, culminating in a showcase of original inventions that may lead to local, regional, national and international competitions. Learners will have an opportunity for expression and creativity as they develop and practice higher-order thinking skills. This workshop will provide you with all of the resources you need to bring the Young Inventors' Program curriculum to your classroom – all FREE for your school. [More information and registration here.](#)

For other workshops and courses, including Peer Review and National Board Certification support, [check out our website!](#)

### **Articles Worth Reading**

## Helping ESPs Cope Through SEL

Educational Support Professionals (ESPs), like everyone else, have been experiencing confusion, anxiety, uncertainty, and frustration during the pandemic. With a focus on students in the classroom, many ESPs feel left out of the conversation.

NEA's Educational Support Professional Quality department held a webinar entitled "It Takes a Whole School to Support a Whole Child: Harnessing SEL to Support the Well-Being of ESPs During the COVID-19 Crisis," providing strategies to support ESPs to cope in healthy and productive ways. Utilizing Social Emotional Learning (SEL) can help ESPs manage stress and prevent burnout. A high level of emotional self-awareness and maintaining a growth mindset leads to better regulation of emotions, thoughts, and behaviors. Above all, prioritizing care for the whole school community is of the utmost importance in order to create a more positive emotional climate for learning.

## 6 Steps to ....Help a Distressed Student Get to the "Upstairs" Brain

Gutmann, A., and Badry, C. Educational Leadership, October 2021

This year, we have seen students "flip their lid" causing destruction, fear, loss of learning time, and a distressed system. The work many Vermont schools have done over the past five years on trauma-informed practices has provided a deeper understanding into the physiology of an unregulated student, but it is often difficult "in the moment" to remember what you have learned in front of a classroom of other

students. Additionally, with the turnover in our schools, some educators have missed this training. This quick article provides six steps to help a distressed student in crisis.

**Scan for Safety** - A student's dignity needs to be preserved in this situation. Ask yourself, "Is the student a threat or overwhelmed? Who needs to move - the class or student? Any plan should ensure that calm, familiar adults are present."

**Stay Calm** - We have to model calm for our students. "Humans look for someone who 'takes charge' because it indicates safety." This is important for the distressed student and the other students in the class.

**Talk Very Little** - We have to remember that a distressed student who has "flipped their lid" is not accessing their prefrontal cortex and will not be able to process much of what we say. "The best thing to do is be quiet and patient and use simple speech" such as "Let's get juice." "Snack?"

**Offer Food** - "If the student accepts food, you know they are ready for help. Food or drink helps activate the sucking reflex, which is calming for all children. Try different textures of food to hit the sensory needs - apples, carrots, a juice box, even a lollipop." In the moment, this might be difficult, so having a basket in your room "ready to go" in these situations will be helpful.

**Provide Something to Tinker With.** When students working from their "downstairs brain," have something to play with, like legos, playdough, markers, etc., may help them regulate.



Don't Rush - This may not be a quick process for some students. "Remind yourself the behavior isn't personal, but an adaptive response for the student." This trauma-informed approach "emphasises that the student is hurt, not bad, and that their problematic behavior is an adaptive response to their environment."

We may never know what the trigger was, but we can help them emerge from the crisis in a safe and respectful manner for all.

The October 2021 Edition of Educational Leadership, "[Compassionate Discipline](#)" has many articles that may be helpful to educators finding that this school year has many challenges with dysregulated students. You can find the edition [here](#).

Do you have feedback for Professionally Speaking? Have an idea for a future issue or want to write something in Voices from the Field? [Let us know!](#)



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