



NCYOJ's School Responder Model Podcast Series

SELF-CARE AND WELLNESS



INTRODUCTION

As a part of the National Center for Youth Opportunity and Justice School Responder Model podcast series, Dr. Crystal Brandow talks with Lauren Kazez, a consultant on the National Institute of Justice Comprehensive School Safety Initiative, operated by NCYOJ, about self-care and wellness for educators.

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| Crystal Brandow:

Hi, this is Crystal Brandow, Senior Project Associate with the National Center for Youth Opportunity and Justice. I am here today with Lauren Kazez to talk about self-care for educators. Lauren is an LMSW and founder of Living Slow. And she spent most of her career working with mental health topics related to staff and students in schools.

| Lauren Kazez:

Hi, Crystal. First, thanks so much for having me and for that introduction. It's an honor to be invited and I'm looking forward to our dialogue today around self-care.

| Crystal Brandow:

This area of self-care is a broad topic that's been in and out of fashion over the years in a number of different disciplines and industries. And the issue of educator self-care has really come to the forefront recently, why do you think that is Lauren?

| Lauren Kazez:

It's been really exciting actually, to see more focus on educator self-care. There's a definitely an increase in expectations of educators in the last few years. We're also really starting to see the stress that teachers are under. There's more conversation around burnout, compassion fatigue, secondary traumatic stress, emotional exhaustion. And there have been numerous studies done recently. One in particular, was a study of urban public school teachers that found, that 90% of teachers were in the high risk range for compassion fatigue. And 40% also, had high risk of burnout. So, there are many different studies that indicate that teachers are really showing signs of stress and fatigue in their position. There was a recent study also, from the American Federation of teachers that 73% of educators, and there was over 30,000 that participated in this survey, said that they find their work to be stressful.

| Lauren Kazez:

We've seen that about 41% of teachers will leave within five years. So I think, a lot of that is because there isn't a good support. Teachers are stressed. There's a lot of financial pressures. We've also seen in addition to that, the colleges of education have experienced a decrease in enrollment. So really, they have some numbers from 2009 until 2014, and it shows that colleges of education have seen a decrease in enrollment by about 35%. So, this is almost 240,000 less teachers in the field from 2009 until 2014. So, there really is I think, more focus and emphasis on trying to address educators self-care, just because we're seeing all of these different impacts to our teachers.

I Crystal Bradow:

Thank you. And that's a pretty significant decrease in the amount of educators available in schools all around the country. So, for those who are continuing to go to school to get an education to be teachers or otherwise work in schools, what are some of the conditions that these educators are facing in school now? And maybe, some things that might be unique now, versus maybe previous generations of educators.

I Lauren Kazez:

So, like I mentioned previously, we've seen an increase in expectations around academic achievement, so there's a lot more expectation. We hear people talking about teaching to the test and teachers feeling the pressure to make sure that they are meeting benchmarks and expectations. We know that, one in five students has a mental health issue that could impact their ability to learn. And so, teachers are having a hard time knowing how to resolve those misbehaviors in class and to meet the needs of the students. In colleges of education aren't typically teaching, preparing teachers on how to address mental health needs or giving them classroom management behaviors, skills and strategies to use in a classroom. So, that can be very difficult for teachers, being able to have those skills, to be able to address those classroom behaviors is challenging. And we also know, in schools now, that there is less parental support.

I Lauren Kazez:

So, there was another study done by psychology today that says, that one third of students say that, their parents have no idea how they're doing in school. One sixth of students say that, their parents don't even really care, if they make the grades or not. A fifth of students said that, parents are consistently not attending or only a fifth of parents are attending after school programs. And then, more than 40% never come to any school functions. And I know, working with schools that seems to be complaint frequently, is really how to engage parents. And I know, there are some great resources around that can help schools do that.

I Lauren Kazez:

And then finally, I think just the lack of funding and support and support staff available for teachers, can really make it also difficult. So, they may not have a school nurse. They may not have a school social worker or school counselors available. And so, a lot of this does then fall on the teachers to manage these different needs in their classroom while also, trying to meet the needs of the common core standards and the benchmarks.

I Crystal Bradow:

And it's interesting that, quite a few of the conditions that you just mentioned, really relate to the inherent intention of a School Responder Model. So, a School Responder Model is an alternative approach to addressing student behavior in schools. One that focuses on keeping the student in schools and out of the juvenile justice system. So, you mentioning the higher incidences of maybe, challenging behaviors in the classroom that really relates to School Responder Models. And how to learn to navigate that environment with those students. And how to work with students there. And really, get to the root of what's going on, whether that's through encouraging schools to do screening, which is a key piece of the School Responder Model. Having conversations with students and their families to really understand, if that challenging behavior is related to maybe, a mental health condition, substance use disorder, trauma history, or so on. How can those behaviors be instances that can help get that child into some supports that they might need, rather than just seen as something challenging that's happening in the classroom and then left alone.

I Lauren Kazez:

Yeah, that's a great point. And I love the School Responder Model in the sense that, in addition to the things that you said, that it also helps to equip teachers with what is normal adolescent development. What are challenging behaviors that they see and maybe what are the roots to that? So, it helps to bring awareness to the educator, so that it isn't just, "Oh, this kid is trying to make things difficult in class or be disruptive." But that there may be a legitimate reason why that behavior is there. And so, I think it helps to increase awareness. And then, come up with a referral process to be able to support that youth, so that they can get the help that they need. So, it takes some pressure off of the teachers in class, because they have a referral pathway in order to tap into, to be able to support the student.

| Crystal Bradow:

Yeah. Thank you for adding that. And it's not uncommon. We know from the research that's out there, that teachers may experience things like burnout from just the daily demands of the work that they're doing. And it's not just working with students in the classroom, there are so many expectations on teachers of things they have to get done in a day. And you mentioned previously, when we started off this conversation, burnout, compassion, fatigue, secondary stress. Can you explain a little bit more about what these terms mean, maybe what the differences are and how they relate to self-care for educators?

| Lauren Kazez:

Sure. So, there is confusion. I think people use these terms interchangeably, and there's a lot of overlap between them. But burnout is really, more about the person having lack of energy. They're feeling exhausted and it's more related to their Workday. So, a lack of motivation, maybe feeling like they don't want to come to work. Having a shorter fuse when it comes to dealing with behaviors in the classroom.

| Lauren Kazez:

Compassion fatigue, is a little bit broader than that. And it's something that obviously can affect you in your workday, but it's outside of your workday. And so, not only do you not have compassion or patience for your students, but it also, will trickle then into your personal life. So maybe, you're snapping at your kids more, or you have less patience with your partners, significant other, family members. So, it's not just while you're at work in the workday, where you come into a school and you're feeling burdened and lack motivation, which would just be burnout. But compassion fatigue is really across the spectrum and impacts your life.

| Lauren Kazez:

Secondary traumatic stress is even a little bit more severe than that. And that is when a person would exhibit signs of post traumatic stress disorder. So, we see that not only with, typically we used to see that with social workers and social service agency employees who were addressing needs in a counseling situation, or in foster care situations, but now we're seeing it in a classroom and in a school setting. And it's really, when the adult has been exposed to somebody who's experienced trauma. And so, those symptoms are becoming more apparent to them. So, they are triggered by different experiences. Maybe they have heard stories of students and their challenges at home or something that's an abuse that has happened to a kid. And then, that would impact them in more of a post traumatic stress disorder kind of way. So it's really, that indirect exposure to trauma that influences you personally, even if you haven't experienced that same trauma.

| Crystal Bradow:

And that's something that's really important, I think for educators. And those supporting educators seem mindful, who may not be familiar with these terms, to really understand the difference and that can help folks better take care of themselves, if they understand more of what they might be navigating.

| Lauren Kazez:

Yes, for sure.

| Crystal Bradow:

So with that in mind, why, in your opinion... And again, Lauren is the founder of Living Slow, which specializes and focuses on self-care and wellness principles. So, and from your opinion and the work that you do, as well as the work that you've done throughout the state of Michigan, working with schools and with educators, why is self-care so important for this population?

| Lauren Kazez:

So, thank you for asking that. And I have spent a long time, my career primarily, focused on student mental health. And what I noticed as I was working with schools, especially in Michigan, but in other States, is that we were really neglecting the adults. And I used the term, if mama ain't happy, ain't nobody happy. We're all pretty familiar with that. And I think, it really does relate to schools as well, that teachers have to be whole and healthy to be able to pour themselves into students. And because we know, that the students that are coming into our classrooms are carrying so many more issues and all of this baggage and trauma and mental health difficulties, teachers really do have so much more to attend with. And so I think, being able to address their mental health, educators mental health, and making sure that they're healthy, it can impact their own mental wellbeing. And so, if they're doing well, then they're able to then meet the needs of kids in a more productive way.

I Lauren Kazez:

So, there's research that talks about the benefits of self-care for educators. And some of the different activities that I would recommend among many, many others are to think about ways to reduce stress, which is funny, because it's almost near impossible to think about how to do that. But if there are things that we can lay attend to, to help to alleviate some of that. So we know, that there are some of the benefits of participating in self-care, do help us to reduce stress. They help us to increase our productivity. They improve our health. I know, when I have times of unusual stress or more stress than normal, I can feel like my immune system gets weak. Or I may get sick after a very stressful time. So I know, that when we really attend to our own wellness and our own self-care, that that can improve our physical health. In addition to our mental health, we can achieve more of a healthier work life balance. And then, prevent some of that compassion fatigue that we talked about before.

I Lauren Kazez:

We also know that, when we focus on self-care, it impacts morale and the climate in schools, which makes us want to be where we are, right? It's hard to come to work and feel like you don't want to be there. So, if you can come to a place that feels positive and supportive and happy, it makes life so much better for you and your students and for the people that you work around. And we know, that school climate conditions really do improve academic achievement for students.

I Lauren Kazez:

And finally, I think a fact that's been very interesting for me to be aware of, is that the turnover rate for schools is 7.3 billion, billion with a b, dollars on an annual basis. So, thinking about the financial benefits of addressing educator self-care could also be a good motivator.

I Crystal Brandow:

Well, thank you so much for that. Self-care is definitely important. And I want to get into it a little bit, some of the actual tips and tools you think educators can do themselves to focus on self-care. But before going there, I wanted to ask you what you think administrators can do. So, like our Policy Research Associates, we have a portfolio workplace, wellness and mentally healthy workplaces. And a huge piece of that, is not what an individual can do for themselves at work, but what the employer can do or the organization can do to create supportive environments that can promote mental health wellness, self-care, and so on, in a variety of workplaces. So, specific to education, what are some things that you think that administrators can do to help support their staff?

I Lauren Kazez:

That's a great question, Crystal. I think, as I've worked with teachers around the State of Michigan on this issue of self-care that I've heard frequently, that they feel like, they don't get a say in how things go. Sometimes administrators will make for them like, "You're going to teach this curriculum." Or, "You're going to teach these classes." Or, "Here's the kids." And they don't feel like they're really pulled into the conversation. It's like decisions are made about them or for them without them. And so, I think giving teachers an opportunity to say what they are feeling or what they need, letting them be heard and validating their feelings makes a huge difference.

I Lauren Kazez:

I think, if administrators can also give teachers permission to speak their mind, to say their truth, to address their own self-care needs. I think being able to feel the freedom to say to a principal, "I'm having a rough day today, I need to take this second half of the day off." Or, "I need somebody to come in and check on these kids for me." Or, "I need 10 minutes to just go collect myself. Can somebody watch my class?" To feel like they have the freedom and the permission and the support to say, "You know what? I need to go sit down and have some coffee for a minute here." Or, "I can stay after school today for this." So, I think being able to feel like they have the support to say what they need. And have those needs addressed without feeling like, there'll be some punitive reaction because of that.

I Lauren Kazez:

The other thing that I would encourage administrators to do, is really acknowledge the things that they see teachers doing that are working well. So, being able to provide accolades or positivity, support. I know, other teachers in schools have done support groups, where they work together and give each other tips on different strategies in the classroom. And that

has helped to have those collegial moments together. And I know that, administrative support has been found to really increase teacher job satisfaction. So again, being able to provide safe spaces for teachers, support positivity. We know that helps teachers to feel the morale is high and that they really want to be invested in the building.

I Crystal Bradow:

So, getting to what I imagine, some folks listening may really want to hear about, are those things that the educators can take upon themselves to do, to focus on self-care and maybe try to reduce some of the experiences or negative outcomes associated with things like burnout and things like that. So, what are some recommendations that you have for educators for taking care of themselves?

I Lauren Kazez:

So, this is my most favorite thing to talk about. And I know, having worked in a school for a long time and worked with teachers for many, many years that often, teachers do not have time to even go to the restroom during the day because things are so stressful and so rushed. So, I really have tried to fashion my philosophy around things that can be easily integrated throughout the day, just because I know nobody has extra time. I think one of the main things that I find that help teachers, is to really just think about more of, to be more aware and self-aware. To notice what you're feeling when you're feeling it. To think about what you need in that moment. I've already mentioned that there are some times that kids can come in from recess or maybe right before a holiday or right after a holiday and behaviors are ramped up. Sometimes the teacher may just need a minute or two to regroup and catch their breath. And I think it's okay to be able to say, "I just need a minute here."

I Lauren Kazez:

I think also, the thing that I like to talk to teachers about, is thinking about boundaries and how to establish those. Sometimes being able to say, no, it's super hard to do. It's something that I have to practice from time to time in my own life. But to think about what are limits and what are you okay to take on and what are you not okay. What are your things that you value? And to not take away from your own quiet time or time with family or friends or things that you value. So, being able to think about, what can you take on realistically? And not just going an automatic pilot and doing it, because that's just who you are. And I know, teachers tend to also be caregivers. I call it the caregiver curse, where we just automatically think, "Oh, I've got to take care of this and take care of this and take care of this," Without really thinking. And we get into our default mode. So, being more self aware and thinking about boundaries and being okay to say, no.

I Lauren Kazez:

The other thing I like to encourage educators to do, in that same vein, is to be honest. So, if you're feeling overwhelmed, it's okay to say that, or, "I'm stressed" or, "This class is really rubbing me the wrong way today." I think it's okay to have confidence that you work with colleagues that are safe for you to be able to be honest and say, how you're feeling in the day and get the support that you need. I also encourage teachers to take mental health days. I know sometimes it's hard to not be in the class and to set up lesson plans for a sub, and to trust a sub to take over your class, and what will you come back to the next day. But being able to take some time for yourself and take a day off from time to time is super helpful.

I Lauren Kazez:

Another idea is to be proactive instead of reactive. I was talking to a superintendent about this yesterday on the phone. We were talking about, just self-care for his teachers. And for them to think ahead like, what are times when things could be very stressful and to set up plans in place, so that you can be proactive and preemptive before things could get out of hand. So then, you don't have to be reactive. I also try to encourage people to make the most of opportunities when they present themselves. So, if your students have gone to a special or they're going to recess, or to make sure that you're even taking time for yourself at lunch. Sometimes it's helpful to even just put your head down on your desk and set the alarm on your phone for two or five minutes, to just close your eyes and regroup and have a breather. Maybe you drive to work without the radio on, or maybe you go home from work without the radio on, just to be able to sit in silence and to regroup and to take a few moments for yourself.

I Lauren Kazez:

And there, of course, are teacher retreats and self-care conferences and different workshops that teachers can take. And all of that is great. And I think, if you have the availability to do that, financially or with time, I support those two. But I

think, being able to even incorporate small little quick things like this throughout your day could be helpful.

I Crystal Bradow:

Yeah. And a lot of that, like you're mentioning Lauren, the small little things, the mindfulness piece. There's, like you're saying, driving. And drive, be present in that driving, maybe instead of talking on the phone or planning what you have to do next. And those things can really make a big difference. Policy Research Associates has, as part of our wellbeing podcast collection, a podcast on mindfulness, that I actually think would be a really nice supplement to this, if anyone wants to check that out and take a listen. So, before we wrap up today's discussion, Lauren, is there anything else that you just think it's important to add for educators about self-care?

I Lauren Kazez:

So yeah, I just had a few other resources that came to mind that I think would be helpful. There are different book clubs that are available and I think maybe, we could put the link to some of those resources here, for those of you who are listening. I know, some schools have started walking clubs, so that maybe during lunch or after school teachers get together and walk and talk. And just, if you live in a place where you can go outside around. Here in Michigan, that isn't always possible around in the school year. But maybe, you walk in the halls during lunch at school.

I Lauren Kazez:

There are a numerous different websites. And again, maybe we can put those links up. I know for my website, I post a self-care blog on the first of every month. And you're welcome to visit livingslow.org and check out that blog. There's Zen Teacher. There's Happy Teacher Revolution. There are teacher self-care podcasts that we can again, provide the link for you. Like I mentioned before, there's a self-care conference that happens a few times a year. And they have a website that you can visit or you can just Google, Teacher Self-care Conference and find that.

I Lauren Kazez:

And I have also seen through that website, that there are self-care calendars. So, there are monthly calendars that have daily activities of self-care and suggestions. I have several of those resources myself, through my LLC, "If you have five minutes, here's some suggestions. If you have 10 minutes, here are some suggestions. If you have 30 minutes..." So, I am happy for people to email me and follow up and I can send those resources as well. There are, again, it's a new field, it's a new focus, so there are a few things out there, but I'm sure with time there'll be more to come.

I Crystal Bradow:

Great. It's been a pleasure having you here and talking about self-care, which is really important for all educators, all those involved with schools. And especially, in the context of the School Responder Model, which is the goal of this new podcast series, to emphasize how these different pieces can come together. And we can be a resource for those schools implementing their School Responder Models. So, thank you so much.

I Lauren Kazez:

Yeah. Thank you for having me. It's been a pleasure to work with you. And I really appreciate your focus at PRA, on all of the aspects of school and including teacher wellness as part of that.

I Crystal Bradow:

Thank you.

I Lauren Kazez:

Thank you.

CONCLUSION

To learn more about self-care for educators, visit the NCYOJ School Responder Model virtual toolbox, srm.policyresearchinc.org. Additional information about Living Slow, can be found on Lauren's website, livingslow.org. Thank you for listening.