



Winter Break is a Perfect Time to Make a Long-Term Self-Care Plan

By Educator Barnes - December 21, 2021

It can be hard for school staff to make it through until winter break. Some staff crossed the finish line with burn marks. Many times, school leaders will tell school staff to focus on themselves and relax during the two-week break. Even if they follow this advice, it is a short-term fix to long-term issues. Winter break is a perfect time for school staff to take care of themselves enough to make a plan of sustainability for the second half of the school year.

The first act educators should take is to evaluate how much time they spend outside of contract hours doing their job. I will not lie to you. Most teachers have to do some work outside of contract hours, but sometimes educators do not know when to stop. I was an English teacher for years. Let me tell you. When you have 120 middle school students and 120 multiple-page essays to grade, you will have to grade outside of work. However, I am also a daughter, wife, and mother. I do have a few friends, too. It is important for educators to determine how much time outside of work they will spend and then stick to it. This could mean choosing only to stay one hour after work or going to work an hour early. This could be daily or a few times a week. If that is not feasible, it could be one hour of work at home after the kids are in bed. There will always be work, and there will always not be enough time. Your personal life should not be consumed with school work.

Next, educators should evaluate extra commitments they have made at school. Being a coach, club sponsor, or committee member is important, but educators should not feel like they can't say no or take some years off. Each person has different stages in life such as becoming a parent or becoming a caregiver of their parents. Personal commitments along with extra commitments at school can lead to burnout. Let me just throw this in here. Childless educators and single educators have the right to say no, too. It is not okay for these educators to feel pressured because of the perception of them not having many commitments. Even if this means educators need to remove themselves from extra commitments after returning from break, they should be able to do so without feeling guilty.

Educators should also implement boundaries for work. This could mean not checking email at home. Unless it is an emergency, educators could also choose not to answer phone calls and text messages at home about work. The best way to thwart that is for educators to not give out their cell phone numbers at work. Schools were still able to operate before educators had their colleagues' cell phone numbers.

Last and most importantly, educators should figure out what activities help refuel and sustain them. I enjoy gardening and reading YA books. I also love teaching my twin sons how to cook. Whatever it is that brings an educator joy should be added to the list. It should be scheduled. Educators live by calendars, and self-care should be on the calendar whether that is for a date night or for alone time.

Self-care is crucial to the sustainability of the teaching profession. If educators do not find a way to take care of themselves, more will flee the profession.