



## Building teacher resilience

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*Last month, we brought you news of an Australian research study suggesting that resilience could be the key to understanding why teachers choose to quit the profession. As a follow-up, we find out how Northern Beaches Secondary College in New South Wales is supporting its staff in the areas of resilience and wellbeing.*

*Renata Grudic – College Head Teacher, Teaching and Learning – spoke about the school's approach at this year's Excellence in Professional Practice Conference. In the first of a two-part Q&A, she tells Teacher Editor Jo Earp what prompted the focus on teacher welfare and how the school is delivering evidence-based professional development.*

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**Northern Beaches Secondary College (NBSC) is a large government school in Sydney. Can you tell us a bit about the school and your role?**

NBSC has five campuses: Balgowlah Boys Campus (Years 7-12), Cromer Campus (Comprehensive, Years 7-12), Mackellar Girls Campus (Years 7-12), Freshwater Senior Campus (co-educational, Years 11-12) and Manly Campus (selective, Years 7-12). In total, there are approximately 350 staff and 4000 students. The College has six Principals, one for each campus, and the College Principal (referred to as the College Management Team – CMT). My role involves working with the students and staff across all the campuses.

**What prompted the focus on teacher resilience and wellbeing?**

Three years ago, staff indicated a desire for professional learning to focus on student wellbeing. This was identified through surveys, meetings and the CMT. And, that's where our journey commenced – learning about student resilience and wellbeing.

To achieve this, we invited a variety of expert speakers [to present to staff], including Dr Helen McGrath, Dr Suzy Green, Dr Helen Street and Dr Toni Noble. At that time it was also determined that, as an organisation, we would start moving towards aligning our school with positive psychology and embedding positive psychology interventions and strategies into the classroom and workplace. ... We wanted to move beyond [identifying weaknesses and what the problems are] and we became more focused on 'how do we get our students to flourish?'

Annually we have a College Professional Development Day, where all 350 staff gather on one site to undertake

professional learning. That's usually held on the first day of Term 2. Managing and organising the event is a key role of my position. Two years ago the whole day focused on resilience and wellbeing, [where] I organised approximately 30 psychologists and practitioners to deliver workshops that were aligned to positive psychology. Last year the focus was on developing a common language that supports solution-focused thinking and mindsets; 35 teachers were trained as facilitators for the event and all staff were trained in the use of three Solution Focus approaches, which are strengths-based, use of scaling, and future orientated.

As NBSC's journey progressed, we felt it was important to look at our teachers' wellbeing. Interestingly, the focus on teacher wellbeing didn't emerge through surveys, rather it came through conversations and statistics provided by organisations (about levels of stress in the profession).

We are aware that if a teacher's wellbeing is at its peak – its optimal – teachers are going to walk into a classroom with a particular feel about them; if they're rested, if they have a growth mindset, if they have an optimistic outlook on life, that's going to be evident in the classroom and the students will pick up on that. If teachers have the knowledge, skills and strategies to model to students – if they know how to create experiences that enhance resilience and wellbeing, or if they can identify it within themselves, they're certainly going to be able to assist their students to identify or develop their own strengths and resources to build their personal resilience and wellbeing. Building teacher capabilities and wellbeing through a 'learn it, live it, teach it, embed it' model is a philosophy the college has embraced.

## How do you go about selecting people to deliver professional learning?

A key requirement for professional development is it needs to be evidence-based. We identify experts and organisations that are specifically aligned and known to be using positive psychology interventions and strategies. As such, they know and understand where we are heading and are able to provide professional learning targeted to the outcomes we hope to achieve.

The vision is led by the College Principal, Neil Worsley, and supported by the CMT. Mr Worsley has been involved in implementing Solution Focus strategies for quite some time in the varied roles he has held. As College Head Teachers, my colleague Ben Pimentel and I have completed the Postgraduate Certificate in Education (Positive Education) from the University of Melbourne. This provided us with a really good understanding of where and how we needed to head in terms of introducing and implementing positive psychology into the school environment.

We continue to build our own understanding by completing other courses which focus on specific aspects of positive psychology, such as resilience and character strengths (through the VIA Institute). We have also visited St Peter's College (South Australia), where positive education is led by Dr Matthew White who is working closely with Dr Peggy Kern (University of Melbourne).

Keeping ourselves up to date with scientific, evidence-based approaches is important. It enables us to guide and provide appropriate professional development.

*Stay tuned: In part two of our Q&A, Renata Grudic discusses the tools and strategies being used to help teachers monitor their own resilience and wellbeing and inform future interventions, and a key collaborative partnership with a local university.*

Renata Grudic was one of the presenters at this year's Excellence in Professional Practice Conference (EPPC). To read more articles on EPPC visit the [Teacher archive](#).

Does your school have a student wellbeing strategy?  
What about a staff wellbeing strategy?

What support networks do you have in place for students and teachers?