



# FIRST DAY FIRST WEEK : RESEARCH

TIMETABLING FOR RELEVANCE AND RELATIONSHIPS

**“...there are systems to put in place and strategies to use that can help you prepare a positive structure for the year. The systems and strategies that you implement during the first week of school—and continue to review and reinforce daily over the next month—will allow your students to feel comfortable with your expectations and will assist you in becoming a better educator.”<sup>1</sup>**

## RESEARCH INSIGHTS

Most schools dive straight into the academics at the beginning of a new term - without emphasising on creating a sense of comfort and community among students and teachers. We all remember the trepidation and uncertainty stepping into a new space can cause - whether it is at the start of a new school year, or moving to a new grade. “For a number of students, school transitions are difficult to negotiate. These transitions are found to be associated with a variety of negative effects on adolescents including declines in achievement, decreased motivation, lowered self-esteem, an increased psychological distress.”<sup>2</sup>

Consider the age old adage 'well begun is half done' applied to the start of schools. The first few days of a new school year should intentionally be planned by teachers and administrators for students (and parents). Higher-performing schools developed students' sense of self-efficacy and engaged them in doing challenging work. Students described adults as caring because they had visible presence, encouraging students to participate in school activities.<sup>3</sup>

First Day First Week is a school-wide process of 'people acting coordinatively on shared belief, not a disembodied group mind that is doing the cognizing, aspiring, motivating, and regulating'.<sup>4</sup> First Day First Week becomes a process that sets the tone for the entire academic year for students and teachers, principally providing for 1) integration, 2) exploration, 3) guidance, 4) differentiation, 5) socialization, and 6) articulation.<sup>5</sup> In short, school curriculum must organise itself in ways that take the needs of students seriously.<sup>6</sup>

Unpacking of the year through special assemblies, school songs, 'pep' routines, and a school dance held yearly in the academic year are designed to welcome new students and make them feel that they 'belong'<sup>7</sup>, giving students a sense of comfort and community to engage in learning.

## FIRST DAY FIRST WEEK : IN A NUTSHELL

Students new to an academic year or school 'elicited expressions of concern about not knowing their way around, not knowing people, academic work, personal growth, and financial problems' <sup>8</sup> - leading to lower academic performance and socio-emotional wellbeing.

Numerous studies provide evidence for the positive relationships between healthy school climates and student self concept, self-esteem, attachment to school, and flourishing across multiple domains. <sup>9</sup>

First Day First Week of 'schools aim to improve the ethos and culture of learning milieu as part of their school improvement plan, students will experience being cared for, respected and valued. When students experience these positive emotions, they tend to be happier and more engaged learners'. <sup>10</sup>

## REFERENCES

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- <sup>2</sup>Akos, P., & Galassi, J. (2004). Middle and High School Transitions as Viewed by Students, Parents, and Teachers. *Professional School Counseling*, 7(4), 212-221.
- <sup>3</sup>Rutledge, S., & Cannata, M. (2016). Identifying and understanding effective high school practices. *The Phi Delta Kappan*, 97(6), 60-64.
- <sup>4</sup>Bandura, A. (2000). Exercise of Human Agency through Collective Efficacy. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 9(3), 75-78.
- <sup>5</sup>Weilbacher, G.(2019). Rediscovering the middle school mission (Noar, 1953, 4)
- <sup>6</sup>Weilbacher, G. (2019). Rediscovering the middle school mission. *The Phi Delta Kappan*, 100(6), 34-38.
- <sup>7</sup>Mennes, A. (1956). Orientation of New Students to High School. *The School Review*, 64(2), 64-66.
- <sup>8</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>9</sup>Cleveland, R., & Sink, C. (2017). Student Happiness, School Climate, and School Improvement Plans: Implications for School Counseling Practice. *Professional School Counseling*, 21(1), 1-10.
- <sup>10</sup>Ibid