



BECOMING A MORE RESILIENT LEADER

Prepared for AASA, The School Superintendents Association

July 27, 2023



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Overview

The School Superintendents Association (AASA) aims to support leadership development through the establishment of a resonant, resilient, and nimble leadership framework. The demands of educational leadership in 2023 call for district leaders who are *resonant*, i.e., they need to be in constant tune with their staff, community, and students; *resilient*, i.e., they need to have inner strength and health and project strength and optimism in order to meet challenges; and *nimble*, i.e., their skills, knowledge, and dispositions need to be honed to solve any problem and address any crisis – whether those challenges are educational, economic, or political. To guide superintendents in how they can become resilient, nimble, resonant leaders AASA aims to provide a series of toolkits that review these attributes and offer tools and strategies for how to develop the capacities of a resilient, nimble, resonant leader.

To support this work, AASA partnered with Hanover Research (Hanover) to develop a series of leadership toolkits. This toolkit focuses on the skills and traits of resilient leaders and is designed to support district leaders in building resilience.

Audience

This toolkit is designed to support superintendents as they implement practices to become a more resilient leader.

How to Use This Toolkit

This toolkit is designed to support district leaders in increasing their understanding of resilient leadership and becoming a more resilient leader. Each section addresses one practice via the following content:

- Understand Resilient Leadership
- Develop Capacity for Resilient Leadership

How to Navigate This Toolkit

The different sections of this toolkit (and their respective sub-sections and tools as described above) can be accessed by clicking on in the [Table of Contents](#) beginning on the next page. You may click on the section's, sub-section's, or tool's name or page number to be taken to the corresponding content.

A listing of endnotes cited throughout the toolkit is also accessible through the Table of Contents. You may access individual endnotes by clicking the endnote number presented. You can return to the content corresponding to each endnote by clicking the endnote number presented before the endnote information.

You can return to the Table of Contents at any time using the *Return to TOC* button at the bottom of any page in the practice sections and endnotes.

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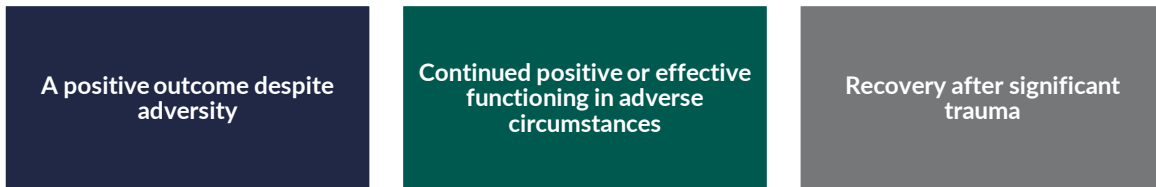
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UNDERSTAND RESILIENT LEADERSHIP



Defining Resilient Leadership

Researchers generally define resilience as overcoming and experiencing positive functioning and mental health despite experiences of adversity, trauma, or extreme stress.¹ Definitions of resilience include both exposure to adversity or trauma, and a positive outcome or adaptation.² Most resilience definitions focus on adaptation, while some also include growth, as following the experience of adversity, individuals may adapt by “bouncing back” to their pre-adversity “normal” state or by developing and growing to a better state.³ Key assumptions in resilience research include:⁴



Effectively leading an organization, including educational organizations, requires leaders to handle numerous challenges in an unpredictable environment.⁵





Types of Resilience

Resilience is a complex concept that represents the relationship between how an individual experiences adversity and overcomes it, and there are multiple types of resilience within the broader concept. Different types of resilience reflect various forms of adversity and the myriad ways in which an individual or group may experience and recover from the adversity.⁶ Sample types of resilience, which all relate to how an individual responds to major life stressors, are presented below. Notably, this list is not exhaustive of all types of resilience but presents those most relevant to the field of education.

SAMPLE TYPES OF RESILIENCE

TYPE OF RESILIENCE	DEFINITION
<p>Psychological/Mental Resilience</p>	An individual’s ability to psychologically recover and mentally cope with a mental health disturbance stemming from adversity. ⁷
<p>Emotional Resilience</p>	The ability to “generate positive emotions and recover quickly from negative emotional experiences.” Notably, emotional resilience can be a component of psychological resilience. ⁸
<p>Social Resilience</p>	The ability of individuals, organizations, or communities to “tolerate, absorb, cope with, and adjust to environmental and social threats of various kinds.” ⁹
<p>Academic/Educational Resilience</p>	A student’s ability to maintain high levels of academic performance and motivation despite experiencing adversity within an academic setting that could negatively impact their academic success. ¹⁰

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TYPE OF RESILIENCE	DEFINITION
 Physical/Health Resilience	The ability of an individual to “respond to stressors that acutely disrupt normal physiological homeostasis” and adapt and recover. ¹¹
 Leadership Resilience	The ability to help “organizations bounce forward into new realities in the face of adversity and change.” ¹²
 Career Resilience	An individual’s “resistance to career disruption in a less than optimal environment and the ability to handle poor working conditions while one is aware that these conditions exist.” ¹³
 Organizational Resilience	The ability of an organization “to create an environment that enhances career resiliency of their employees.” ¹⁴

Source: Multiple, cited in figure



Tools Overview

The tools in this section will help district leaders deepen their understanding of the resilient leadership and consider how it applies to their practice.

TOOLS FOR UNDERSTANDING RESILIENT LEADERSHIP

Tool Name	Description
Self-Reflection: Resilient Leadership	The questions presented in this guide are designed to facilitate reflection on whether your leadership style reflects resilience and the role of resilience in leadership.
Activity: Types of Resilience	This activity promotes unsteading and self-reflection on types of resilience.
Activity: Identifying Protective Factors: What Makes You Resilient?	This activity prompts reflection on the factors within yourself and your community that protect you and keep you resilient in times of challenge and adversity.
Self-Reflection: Learning from Past Experiences of Adversity	The questions presented in this guide are designed to facilitate reflection on times you have experienced adversity, and how those experiences impacted your leadership at the time and overall.



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Self-Reflection: Resilient Leadership

Directions: Use the questions presented below to reflect on whether your leadership style reflects resilience and the role of resilience in leadership. Space is provided below each question to record notes.

What does being resilient, in general, mean to you?

Notes

What does being a resilient leader mean to you?

Notes

What role does resilience play in being an effective leader? Can leaders be effective without resilience? Why or why not?

Notes

Do you think experiencing adversity is required for developing professional resilience? Why or why not?

Notes



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How well do you prioritize your own wellbeing?

Notes

How well do you recognize signs of overload and burnout in those you lead? How do you respond?

Notes

How well do you develop systems and training to support resilience in your team and organization?
How well do you create an environment where it is okay, and even expected, to ask for help?

Notes

How do you assist the team in dealing with negativity?

Notes









Source: Hanover Research and Psychology Today¹⁵



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Activity: Types of Resilience

Directions: Review the figure on types on resilience on page 4. Then, think of a time when either you yourself experienced or witnessed each type of resilience. Were any strategies you used to respond effective? What can you learn from these experiences? Space is provided alongside each resiliency type to record notes.

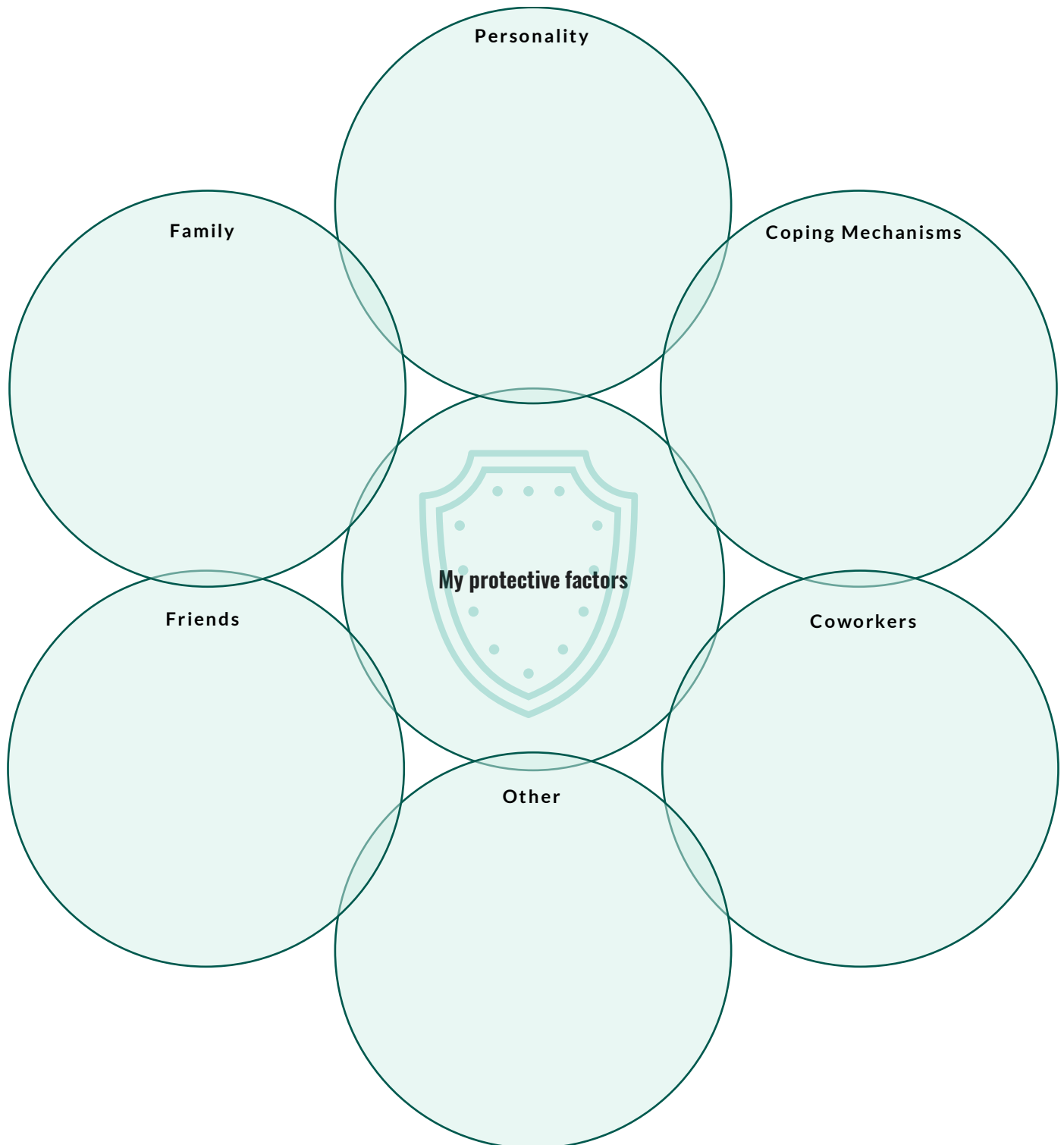
TYPE OF RESILIENCE	EXPERIENCE
 Psychological/Mental Resilience	
 Emotional Resilience	
 Social Resilience	
 Academic/Educational Resilience	
 Physical/Health Resilience	
 Leadership Resilience	
 Career Resilience	
 Organizational Resilience	

Source: Hanover Research



Activity: Identifying Protective Factors: What Makes You Resilient?

Directions: Resilience builds on a foundation of an individual’s protective factors, such as their individual factors (e.g., personality) and social network (e.g., friends, colleagues), and interact in different ways to build resiliency and protect an individual against adverse experiences.¹⁶ Use the worksheet below to identify and write down the factors within yourself and your community that protect you and keep you resilient in times of challenge and adversity.



Source: Hanover Research

UNDERSTAND RESILIENT LEADERSHIP

Self-Reflection: Learning from Past Experiences of Adversity

Directions: Use the questions presented below to reflect on times you have experienced adversity, and how those experiences impacted your leadership at the time and overall. Space is provided below each question to record notes.

Consider a time you experienced adversity within your professional career.

Notes

How did you feel when encountering this situation? Did your emotions and/or cognitive reactions impact your management of the situation?

Notes

What resources and information did you rely on to manage the situation?

Notes

What did you learn about yourself, your leadership style, and your strengths from this experience?

Notes

Did this experience change your leadership style, in general and in crisis situation at all? If so, how? If not, why not?

Notes

Source: Hanover Research



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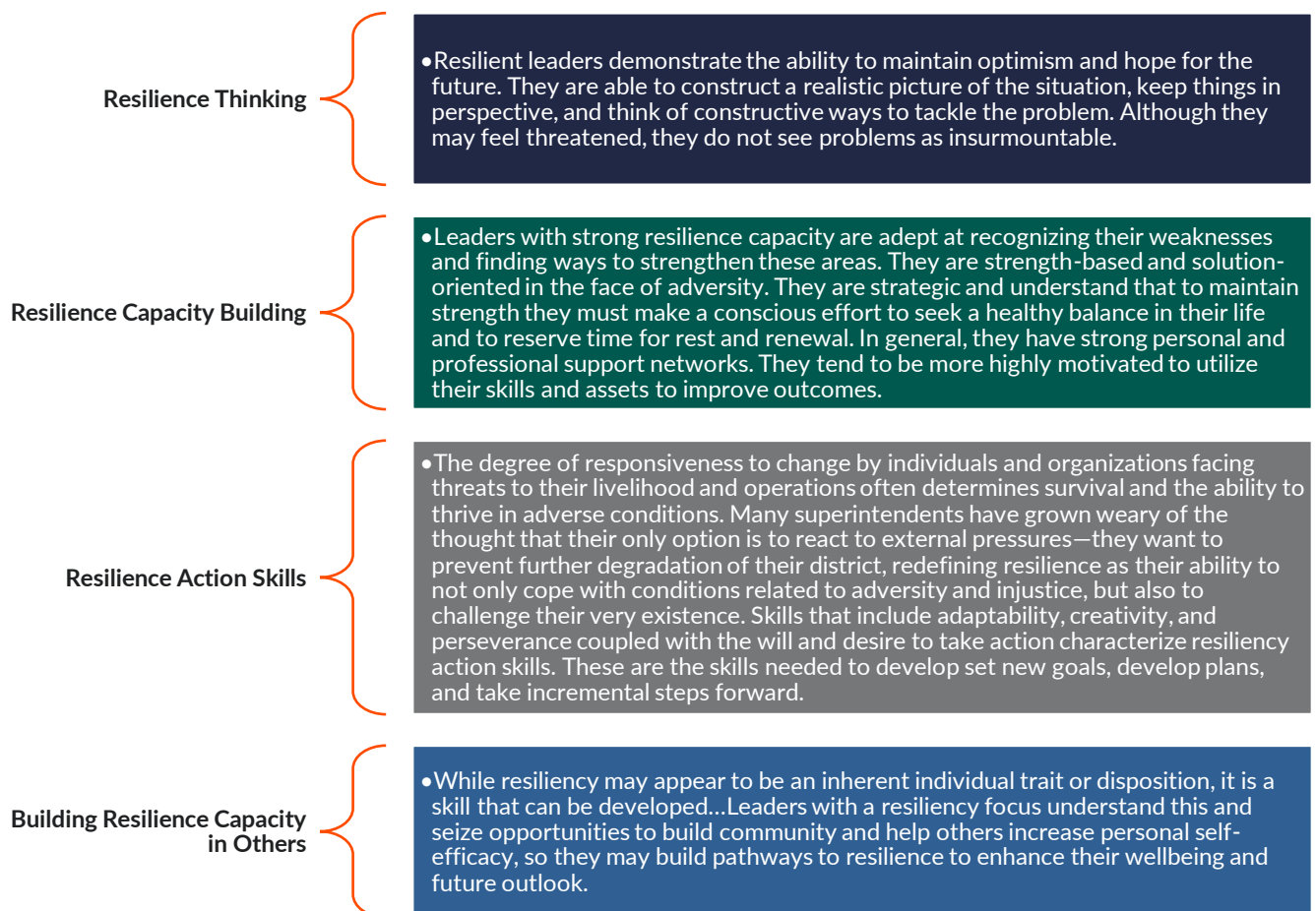


Effective Leadership Requires Resilience

Leaders who possess resilience overcome these challenges and greater adversity to maintain their own wellbeing and the wellbeing of their organization. Resilience helps determine why “leaders and organizations not only survive, but also thrive in these situations while others falter or collapse under the stress of change.”¹⁷ Indeed, resilient educational leaders possess both psychological and career resilience, as they have the ability to bounce back both personally from adversity as well as handle challenging work conditions and avoid disruption to their career.¹⁸ Resilient educational leaders may also develop resilient leadership and help their school districts overcome challenges and adverse experiences.¹⁹ Accordingly, resilient leaders not only possess individual resilience, but work to build the resilience of their organization and employees.²⁰

Additionally, resilient leaders display four key resilience skills that enable them to lead through adversity: thinking resilience, resilience capacity building, resilience action skills, and building resiliency capacity in others.²¹

RESILIENCE LEADERSHIP SKILLS FRAMEWORK



Source: *Journal of Social Sciences Research*²²

Resilient educational leaders model resilience and have a responsibility to foster it in others, including teachers and students, and the school community.²³ Enabling resilience among teachers is paramount to promoting effective teachers, supporting teacher retention, and contributing to educational success, while resilience can protect students from the negative

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developmental and psychological impacts of trauma and positively impact students' academic achievement, participation, and self-esteem. Resilient leaders also impact school climate by contributing to positive school environments and building strong relationships with staff and students.²⁴



Tools Overview

The tools in this section will help district leaders deepen their practice of resilient leadership.

TOOLS FOR DEEPENING RESILIENT LEADERSHIP SKILLS

Tool Name	Description
Activity: Assessing Negative Self Talk	This activity guides the user through assessing and re-framing their negative self-talk.
Activity: Scenario Plan	This activity is designed to increase preparation for potential pressure situations so that you can encounter them with increased confidence and lower stress levels.
Reflection Questions: Overcoming Adversity	These questions are designed to offer guidance during times of adversity.
Forward Planning: Strengths, Development Areas, and Goals	This activity asks you to reflect on your strengths, areas for improvement, and goals for moving forward.
Organizational Goal Setting and Logic Model: Embedding Organizational Resilience and Building Resilience in Others	This worksheet guides users to create a goal, establish an action step, and think through a logic model to promote building resilience at the organizational level and in those within the district (e.g., building leaders, teachers).
Resource Guide: Tools for Building Resiliency in Oneself and Others	This resource provides additional tools for building resilience among yourself and others, including teachers and students.



 **Activity: Assessing Negative Self Talk**

Directions: Negative self-talk can serve as a source of friction in developing resilient leadership, while positive self-talk can facilitate clarity of thought, rational decision-making, and resilience. This activity guides the user through assessing and re-framing their negative self-talk.

Next time you have a negative self-belief or engage in negative self-talk, record it in the space below. Look for themes in what triggers these thoughts and in their content.

Now, reflect on the belief and interrogate its origins and accuracy:

Where does this belief likely come from? Negative self-talk often has roots in our personal and professional history.

Notes

Is the information in this belief based on fact or opinion? Is it rational?

Notes

Why do I believe this?

Notes

How accurate is it?

Notes

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Next, reflect and list all the times, situations, and examples that may serve as evidence this negative belief or self-talk statement may be irrational or inaccurate:

•	•
•	•
•	•
•	•
•	•
•	•
•	•

Now, reframe the original sentence as positive self-talk:

Source: Positive Psychology Program²⁵

 **Activity: Scenario Plan**

Directions: Think about the pressure situations you face in your professional role (e.g., Board meetings, public meetings, staff performance reviews and conversations, budget decisions – what feels like a crisis in the moment?) and the “what if” scenarios for which you need to prepare. Choose one, record it below, and then answer the following questions. This activity is designed to increase preparation for potential pressure situations so you may encounter them with increased confidence and lower stress levels. Practicing these skills and strategies is recommended over time in lower stakes situations to grow capacity. Space is provided below to record responses.

Below, identify and record a pressure situation you might face in your professional role.

Next, answer the following questions.

What could happen? Articulate positive and negative outcomes.

Notes

What is your environment? Provide details about the setting.

Notes

Who might be with you or should be with you? What are their roles?

Notes

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What is your **most likely** reaction under pressure? Consider internal reactions and outward manifestations.

Notes

What is your **preferred** reaction under pressure?

Notes

What is the best way to handle the situation? What practical preemptive measures can be taken? What strategies or practices support your idealized reaction?

Notes

What strengths can you draw on? Where might you need to develop skills and strategies?

Notes

Source: Beyond the Barriers²⁶



Reflection Questions: Overcoming Adversity

Directions: When encountering adversity, reflect on the following questions. Questions are designed to provide introspective reflection during challenging times.

- What is the root cause of my current struggles?
- Am I focusing on the problem or the solution?
- What are the benefits of this challenge?
- How can I reframe this situation in a positive light?
- What are my options for addressing this issue?
- What resources do I have at my disposal to help me overcome this challenge?
- Who can I turn to for support or advice?
- What is the worst-case scenario and how can I prepare for it?
- What is the best-case scenario and how can I work towards it?
- What have I learned from similar challenges in the past?
- How can I apply these lessons to my current situation?
- What small steps can I take to make progress?
- Am I being realistic in my expectations for myself and others?
- How can I stay positive and motivated during this difficult time?
- What are my values and how can I align my actions with them?
- What self-care practices can I implement to help me cope?
- How can I practice gratitude during this time?
- What are my long-term goals and how can I use this challenge as an opportunity to work towards them?
- What are my strengths and how can I leverage them to overcome this challenge?
- How can I use my creativity to find a unique solution to this problem?
- Am I being too hard on myself?
- What self-limiting beliefs do I need to challenge?
- How can I develop a growth mindset?
- What opportunities for personal growth and development are presented by this challenge?
- How can I learn from this experience?
- What can I do to take control of my circumstances?
- Am I seeking out the right people for guidance and support?
- How can I set boundaries to protect my energy and wellbeing?
- What changes do I need to make in order to move forward?
- How can I forgive myself and others for any mistakes or missteps?
- What actions can I take to let go of any resentment or anger?
- How can I find peace and acceptance in this situation?
- What positive affirmations can I repeat to myself?
- How can I stay present and focused on the present moment?
- What hobbies or activities bring me joy and how can I make time for them?
- How can I stay connected to my loved ones and support system during this time?
- Am I allowing myself time to rest and recharge?
- How can I prioritize self-care and prioritize my wellbeing?
- What can I do to reduce stress and manage my emotions?



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- How can I practice mindfulness and stay grounded?
- What healthy coping mechanisms can I use to deal with negative emotions?
- How can I practice self-compassion and be kind to myself?
- How can I set achievable goals and take small steps towards them?
- How can I celebrate my wins, no matter how small they may be?
- How can I find humor and joy in the midst of this difficulty?
- What is the lesson I am meant to learn from this challenge?
- How can I use this experience to become a better person?
- How can I make a positive impact on others who are facing similar struggles?
- How can I give back and pay it forward?
- What positive memories and experiences can I draw upon for strength?
- How can I practice forgiveness and move on from this challenge?
- What steps can I take to create a positive future for myself?

Source: Medium²⁷



Organizational Goal Setting and Logic Model: Embedding Organizational Resilience and Building Resilience in Others

Directions: Use this worksheet to outline a plan for embedding resilience throughout your district. The worksheet guides users to create a goal (that follows the SMARTIE Goals Framework presented below), establish an action step, and think through a logic model. The purpose of this activity is to promote building resilience at the organizational level and in those within the district (e.g., building leaders, teachers).

SMARTIE Goals Framework

S	•Goals are <u>specific</u> to the desired outcome and <u>strategic</u> in that they reflect an important dimension of organizational priorities.
M	•Goals are <u>measurable</u> , using one or more applicable metric or assessment tool relative to an established threshold of success.
A	•Goals are <u>attainable</u> and <u>ambitious</u> . They are reachable given current performance but also challenging enough to signify progress.
R	•Goals are <u>relevant</u> to the needs of the broader population of students, as well as the needs of historically disadvantaged groups.
T	•Goals are <u>time-bound</u> , having clear checkpoints for stakeholders to track progress and a deadline for goal achievement.
I	•Goals are <u>inclusive</u> of all stakeholders—particularly those impacted by inequities—in decision-making processes and planned actions.
E	•Goals are <u>equitable</u> and have explicit language that addresses systemic injustice, inequity, bias, and oppression.

1. Write your first SMARTIE goal for building resilience among others in your district here.

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2. Describe one action step that will help achieve this goal.

Source: Hanover Research

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Use this template to draft a logic model visualizing the inputs, activities, and outcomes for each goal.

LOGIC MODEL TEMPLATE

➔					
INPUTS	ACTIVITIES	OUTPUTS	OUTCOMES		
(Resources)		(Deliverables)	(Short Term)	(Medium Term)	(Long Term)
<i>What do we need?</i>	<i>What do we do?</i>	<i>What are the immediate results?</i>	<i>What are expected or desired outcomes related to initial implementation?</i>	<i>What are expected or desired outcomes related to ongoing changes?</i>	<i>What are expected or desired outcomes related to overarching program goals?</i>
▪					

Source: North Orange County Community College District School of Continuing Education²⁸







DEVELOP CAPACITY FOR RESILIENT LEADERSHIP



Resource Guide: Tools for Building Resiliency in Oneself and Others

Directions: The following resources provide additional tools for building resilience among yourself and others, including teachers and students.

Resource Title	Description
 Resilience Building Activities & Exercises for Adults	This article contains a variety of activities aimed at building resilience.
 Building Student Resilience Lesson Plans	These lesson plans from the American Psychological Association are designed to develop students' resilience and promote their social, emotional, and academic growth.
 Five Steps for Doing a Self-Care Audit	This Forbes article walks the reader through conducting a self-care audit and finding time to invest in yourself.
 Toolkit: Building Resilience in the Classroom	This toolkit, from the U.S. Department of Education's National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments "is designed for middle school and junior high school educators as a tool to strengthen their skills for nurturing student resilience during this key developmental stage." ²⁹



ENDNOTES

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³ [1] Harms, P.D. et al. "Resilience and Well-Being." In *Handbook of Well-Being*, Salt Lake City, UT: DEF publishers, 2018. p. 3. <https://www.nobascholar.com/chapters/4/download.pdf> [2] Frydenberg, Op. cit., p. 2.

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⁵ Southwick, F. et al. "Leadership and Resilience." In *Leadership Today*, Springer, 2017. p. 316.

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⁶ Frydenberg, Op. cit., p. 124.

⁷ [1] Rutten, B.P.F. et al. "Resilience in Mental Health: Linking Psychological and Neurobiological Perspectives." *Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica*, 128:1, 2013. p. 4. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/acps.12095> [2] Afek, A. et al. "Psychological Resilience, Mental Health, and Inhibitory Control Among Youth and Young Adults Under Stress." *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 11, 2021. file:///C:/Users/jgitter/Downloads/fpsyt-11-608588.pdf

⁸ Zhang, Q., L. Zhou, and J. Xia. "Impact of COVID-19 on Emotional Resilience and Learning Management of Middle School Students." *Medical Science Monitor : International Medical Journal of Experimental and Clinical Research*, 26, September 1, 2020. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7485285/>

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¹⁷ Southwick et al., Op. cit., p. 316.

¹⁸ Ledesma, Op. cit., p. 5.

¹⁹ Allison-Napolitano, Op. cit., p. xv.

²⁰ Kirby, E.A. and B.A. Klocko. "Resiliency: Essential for Superintendents and Communities during Challenging Economic Times." *Journal of Social Sciences Research*, 58–76, 2014. p. 62.

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²¹ Ibid., p. 63.

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²² Figure contents quoted verbatim with minor modification from: [1] Kirby and Klocko, Op. cit., p. 63.

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²³ [1] Kirby and Klocko, Op. cit., p. 63. [2] Mullen, C.A., L.B. Shields, and C.H. Tienken. "Developing Teacher Resilience and Resilient School Cultures." *AASA Journal of Scholarship & Practice*, 18:1, Spring 2021. p. 9.

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²⁴ [1] Taylor, J.L. "The Power of Resilience: A Theoretical Model to Empower, Encourage and Retain Teachers." *Qualitative Report*, 18, 2013. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1043493.pdf> [2] Reyes, J. "What Matters Most for Education Resilience: A Framework Paper." The World Bank, World Bank, Washington, DC, 2013. p. 34.

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