

# Gratitude for Pandemic Principals



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By Carin L. Reeve

Since March 2020, schools have been turned upside down and inside out to adhere to the safety guidelines of the COVID-19 pandemic. While there has been much said about the pressure that teachers, students, and families are under with all of these changes, school leaders have been expected to make everything work and keep everyone happy. But everyone is not happy. TikTok and other social media platforms are full of videos made by teachers who are unhappy with their school leaders and district policies. Parents have also joined in, using social media to complain about masking and quarantines and create divisiveness within communities.



Education has become a political battleground and school leaders are trying to keep the peace during this conflict.

Being a pandemic principal can feel like juggling a chain saw, a bowling ball, and a flaming torch at the same time.

In all of the noise and politically charged arguing, school leaders are showing up every day to do what is best for our students, staff, and families. We are often the first ones in the building in the morning and the last ones to leave at night. We are trying to find sub coverage at 6 a.m., and are responding to emails from parents at 9 p.m. We know how many absences kids have, who has just learned to read, who is struggling at home, and who needs to hear that we are so glad they came to school today.

Haim Ginott says in his book *Teacher and Child: A Book for Teachers and Parents*:

"I have come to the frightening conclusion that I am the decisive element. It is my personal approach that creates the climate. It is my daily mood that makes

the weather. I possess tremendous power to make life miserable or joyous. I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration, I can humiliate or humor, hurt or heal. In all situations, it is my response that decides whether a crisis is escalated or de-escalated, and a person is humanized or de-humanized. If we treat people as they are, we make them worse. If we treat people as they ought to be, we help them become what they are capable of becoming."

Ginott reminds us that as leaders, we are the decisive element; we make the weather in our school buildings every day. That is a tremendous responsibility, and one that requires high levels of emotional intelligence. We have to put our own fears and concerns aside in order to focus on being fully present for our students, staff, and families — even to hear them complain about mask mandates.

Several years ago, I read an article called "The Irreplaceables," published by TNT. The article talked about the retention crisis in urban schools and the cost of hiring, training, losing, re-hiring, and retraining staff. We are now

staring into a retention crisis that is reaching much further than our urban centers: rural and suburban schools are now starting to feel the pressure of staff turnover and the value of our irreplaceable teachers and leaders.

Now is the time for districts and communities to show genuine appreciation for teachers and leaders who have put everything that they have into educating our kids during this pandemic. It is time for listening to and supporting one another. It is time to consider how we will all move forward together in a more civil, respectful, and compassionate way.

If you are a pandemic principal, thank you. What you do is important and is making a difference in the lives of our children. Thank you.

CARIN L. REEVE is the director of school improvement at Peaceful Schools in Syracuse, NY. She has 27 years in education committed to improving outcomes for students and developing excellence in teachers. Reeve spent ten years in school leadership, including four years as a successful turnaround principal. As a part of the team at Peaceful Schools, Reeve shares her expertise with schools, districts, and leaders who are looking to build systems of social, emotional, and academic support for children.

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