

# Everyday resilience – what works best in practice

A practical guide to academic buoyancy for schools





#### Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation

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# Everyday resilience - what works best in practice

#### About the resource

This resource is a practical guide for school leaders and teachers on how to support students' everyday resilience – or 'academic buoyancy'. It synthesises the research on everyday resilience, including a new study from NSW high schools using Tell Them From Me data. It explains why this type of resilience is important, and provides strategies on how it can be supported by implementing What works best classroom practices.

#### This resource has been aligned to the following 4 key drivers of What works best:

- **High expectations** can boost students' confidence by contributing to feelings of self-efficacy and aspiration.
- Effective feedback can increase students' sense of control and self-efficacy.
- Good **classroom management** makes students feel comfortable taking risks, making mistakes and asking questions.
- A school focus on **wellbeing** allows students to feel safe and supported, and thus better composed in order to navigate any setbacks or challenges they encounter.

#### How to use this resource

School leaders and teachers can read, reflect on, discuss and implement principles and strategies highlighted in this practical guide as part of school-developed <u>High Impact Professional Learning (HIPL)</u>. The appropriate time to use this resource may differ for each school, leader and teacher.

#### School leaders can:

- unpack the guide as part of whole-school professional development and/or stage team meetings
- encourage teachers to share and reflect on classroom implementation, using the accompanying reflection guide
- reflect on how teachers currently support students' everyday resilience
- facilitate discussions with staff about areas for improvement
- access <u>Tell Them From Me data</u> to support improvement strategies and monitor progress
- support staff to find connections between What works best, the School Excellence Framework and everyday resilience.

#### Teachers can:

- read the guide and reflect on current practice using the accompanying reflection guide
- determine which strategies to implement in the classroom to bolster everyday resilience
- reflect on the impact of implementation.

#### Contact



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Alignment to system priorities and/or needs: School Excellence Policy (nsw.gov.au)

Alignment to School Excellence Framework: Learning domain – wellbeing, learning culture

**Alignment to other existing frameworks:** What works best – high expectations, effective feedback, classroom management, wellbeing

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# Introduction

Students with everyday resilience at school – or 'academic buoyancy' – are able to overcome setbacks and challenges that are typical of day-to-day school life, such as receiving isolated poor grades or negative feedback. These students are more likely to remain emotionally, cognitively and behaviourally engaged. This practical guide synthesises the research on everyday resilience, including a new study from NSW high schools using Tell Them From Me data. It explains why this type of resilience is important and shows how it can be supported by implementing What works best classroom practices.

## **Key findings**

- Research shows that everyday resilience is associated with higher engagement at school.
- Students who have everyday resilience are better protected against school stress and anxiety.
- Everyday resilience and sense of belonging to school are attributes that reinforce each other over time.
- Everyday resilience thrives in a school climate of belonging and effective classroom management.
- Everyday resilience is related to the '5Cs' of student thinking: confidence, composure, coordination, control and commitment.

#### Student everyday resilience in NSW public schools

Students report on their everyday resilience in questions on academic buoyancy in the student survey offered to NSW public schools – Tell Them From Me (TTFM)\*. TTFM reports on student, parent and teacher perspectives of school life, and provides data on students' wellbeing and engagement, as well as the teaching practices they encounter in the classroom. This practical guide presents findings on how to support students' everyday resilience, drawn from a literature review and longitudinal modelling of TTFM data in a collaborative study by the CESE and the University of New South Wales (UNSW). This study was published in 2022 in the *Journal of Educational Psychology*, doi.org/10.1037/edu0000753.

\*Tell Them From Me is provided by, and is the intellectual property of The Learning Bar.

# Everyday resilience and current trends in students' mental health

Everyday resilience at school is particularly important in light of recent reported declines in sense of belonging at school and increases in mental health issues. School- and study-related problems and coping with stress are consistently in the top 3 issues of concern among young people in NSW. In 2020, 34.4% of young people reported that they were extremely or very concerned about school or study problems (Tiller et al. 2020). In 2021, this increased to 39.7%, likely due to the challenges of learning from home during COVID-19 lockdowns (Tiller et al. 2021).

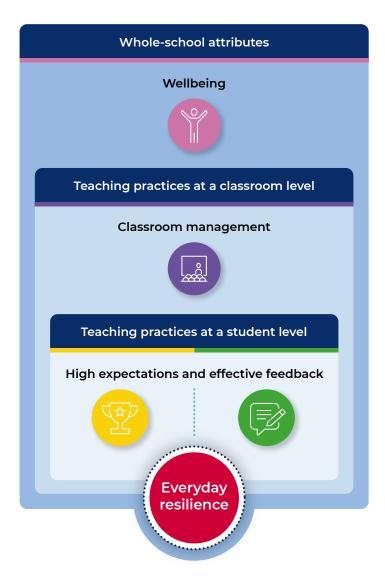
#### What works best and everyday resilience

In What works best: 2020 update (CESE 2020),¹ we outline 8 quality teaching practices that are known to support school improvement and enhance the learning outcomes of our students. In this practical guide, we highlight how 4 of the What works best practices can also support students' everyday resilience (Figure 1). Our synthesis of research shows that:

- 1. **High expectations** can boost students' confidence by contributing to feelings of self-efficacy and aspiration.
- 2. **Effective feedback** can increase students' sense of control and self-efficacy.
- 3. Good **classroom management** makes students feel comfortable taking risks, making mistakes and asking questions.
- 4. A school focus on **wellbeing** allows students to feel safe and supported, and thus better composed in order to navigate any setbacks or challenges they encounter.

Figure 1

Everyday resilience and What works best practices



1 For more information on What works best, refer to What works best: 2020 update.

# What is everyday resilience?

Everyday resilience at school relates to a student's ability to overcome setbacks and challenges that are typical of day-to-day school life, such as receiving isolated poor grades or negative feedback. In the literature, everyday resilience is called academic buoyancy (Martin and Marsh 2008).<sup>2</sup> It emphasises proactive and adaptive approaches to overcoming academic adversity.

### Why is everyday resilience important at school?

#### Developing social-emotional skills

Everyday resilience is an important outcome for students in itself. Learning how to effectively navigate adversity and setbacks in school can help students to develop the skills needed to navigate adversity and challenges in other parts of life, including self-management and responsible decision-making (Collie et al. 2015; Tarbetsky et al. 2017).

#### Supporting engagement

Everyday resilience can also support school engagement more generally. Research over the past decade has identified many positive associations of everyday resilience, suggesting that it acts with other positive constructs in an upward spiral (Figure 2).

Social-emotional engagement: everyday resilience is positively associated with sense of belonging to school (Bostwick et al. 2022). For students who are uncertain about their belonging, everyday challenges can seem to further threaten it (Healy and Stroman 2021). When students have everyday resilience, they are more likely to get through that uncertainty and to feel they belong. Research suggests that indicators of social-emotional engagement, particularly sense of belonging, are declining among students nationally and internationally (De Bortoli 2018), highlighting the importance of fostering protective factors, such as everyday resilience.

Cognitive engagement: students with everyday resilience also tend to have higher self-efficacy, to value and enjoy school more and to be more motivated (Martin and Marsh 2006, 2008; Colmar et al. 2019; Datu and Yang 2021). Students who are able to deal with setbacks are less likely to enter downward trajectories of dwindling interest and motivation (Martin and Marsh 2020).

**Behavioural engagement:** everyday resilience is associated with greater use of effective learning strategies such as task planning and growth goal setting (Martin et al. 2010; Collie et al. 2020) and with higher levels of engagement such as class participation and persistence (Martin and Marsh 2008; Martin et al. 2010).<sup>3</sup> When students have everyday resilience, they may have a greater sense of control and agency (Collie et al. 2015), which better enables them to deal with academic setbacks.

<sup>2</sup> The literature uses the term academic buoyancy instead of everyday resilience to delineate it from the wider concept of resilience. While related, academic buoyancy differs from general resilience in that it focuses on how students deal with everyday academic challenges, such as isolated poor grades or negative feedback, rather than on the acute, chronic, intense and sustained adversity of resilience. At the same time, developing academic buoyancy may also foster resilience (Martin and Marsh 2008).

<sup>3</sup> For more information on growth goal setting, refer to CESE's publication <u>Growth goal setting – what works best in practice</u> (CESE 2021).

Through these positive associations, everyday resilience can contribute to students' academic success. Research has found statistically significant and positive links between everyday resilience and achievement, with effect sizes ranging from small to moderate (Collie et al. 2015; Putwain et al. 2015; Colmar et al. 2019).

#### Protecting against stress and anxiety

Much of the association between everyday resilience and engagement is likely due to its protective effects against stress and anxiety (for example, Martin and Marsh 2008; Putwain et al. 2016; af Ursin et al. 2021). Research has shown that resilient students have lower levels of school stress (Hirvonen et al. 2019; Hoferichter et al. 2021) as well as lower levels of academic anxiety and worry (Putwain et al. 2015).

Having everyday resilience also helps students to perceive challenges as challenges, rather than as threats (Putwain et al. 2015; Symes et al. 2015), and may lead to more positive perceptions of school support generally. Everyday resilience may also reduce stress and anxiety by protecting against low self-efficacy and boosting a sense of control and agency. In doing so, it protects against additional extraneous cognitive load and its potential negative effects on achievement (Hawthorne et al. 2019). For more information about the importance of cognitive load for learning, refer to CESE's publication Cognitive load theory: research that teachers really need to understand (CESE 2017).

# CESE and UNSW collaboration on -everyday resilience in NSW

CESE and UNSW jointly examined the links between everyday resilience – as academic buoyancy – and student engagement, motivation and perceived school support among NSW secondary school students (Bostwick et al. 2022).<sup>4</sup>

#### We found that:

#### 1. Everyday resilience is self-reinforcing

Students are more likely to be resilient if they have been resilient in the past. This suggests that a continued focus on everyday resilience starting from the early years is important to ensure high levels of resilience when the stakes of schooling increase.

#### 2. Everyday resilience helps foster positive self-beliefs

Everyday resilience predicts positive academic self-concept and valuing of school.

# 3. Everyday resilience and belonging to school reinforce each other over time

More resilient students may seek more connections or interpret school activities as more inclusive than less resilient students. This in turn may bolster their belief in their capacity to navigate challenges at school (Figure 2, left).

# 4. Sense of belonging to school and classroom management predict everyday resilience

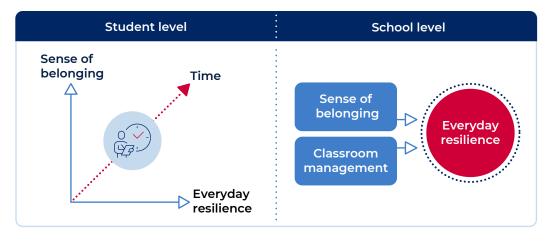
When students face academic challenges, their schools' behavioural expectations and sense of community may protect them from engaging in self-sabotaging beliefs and behaviours that often follow academic difficulty. This suggests a whole-school approach to fostering everyday resilience: if we want a school climate of resilience, we need to build a school climate of belonging and classroom management (Figure 2, right).

#### 5. These relationships hold across school types

The patterns in these associations were similar across a range of schools, such as small and large schools and, comprehensive and selective schools. Strategies to address everyday resilience can be implemented broadly.

#### Figure 2

The relationship between everyday resilience and belonging at the student and the school level



4 The study is open access and available online under doi: doi.org/10.1037/edu0000753.

# How to help foster everyday resilience

Schools can foster everyday resilience directly by working with students, or indirectly by developing fair and supportive classroom and school climates which promote sense of belonging. Recent randomised controlled trials demonstrate that everyday resilience can be increased through interventions, with positive effects for student wellbeing (Puolakanaho et al. 2019; Putwain et al. 2019).

At the student level, everyday resilience is related to the '5Cs' of student thinking (Martin and Marsh 2006; Martin et al. 2010; Figure 3): **confidence**, **composure** in the face of negative emotions, **coordination** and planning, **control** in learning, and **commitment** and persistence.

Figure 3
The 5Cs that boost students' everyday resilience



These 5 components can be addressed and developed in the classroom through the following strategies (Anderson et al. 2020; CESE 2020; Martin and Burns 2014).

# Addressing fear of failure

Everyday resilience is strongly linked to experiences of anxiety. Students need support in addressing fear of failure to prevent counterproductive strategies like unrealistically low self-expectations or self-sabotage. Teachers can help students develop effective coping strategies in the classroom, such as identifying negative emotions, engaging in positive self-talk and relaxation techniques, and scaffolding preparation for high-pressure situations.



# Developing courageous and constructive responses to failure

Students need support to develop skills in overcoming setbacks and challenges in order to be able to grow and to prevent potential negative chain reactions. Teachers can support students by reconceptualising failure as part of the learning process. They can also provide opportunities to learn how to respond proactively to failure, such as identifying what went wrong, taking responsibility for mistakes and trying again.



#### **Emphasising growth**

Effective responses to academic adversity are also grounded in a growth orientation. Teachers can promote growth orientation in the classroom by adopting learning strategies focused on growth, such as encouraging students to set effective growth goals and teaching them the steps involved in working towards these goals. Setting and attaining goals can boost effort and persistence, maximise opportunities for success and enhance sense of control and self-efficacy. For practical suggestions on goal setting, refer to CESE's publication <u>Growth goal setting – what works best in practice</u> (CESE 2021).



## Communicating high expectations

High teacher expectations can boost self-efficacy and student aspirations, particularly for marginalised students. Teachers can communicate high expectations by providing achievable but challenging learning activities and resources targeted to students' specific learning needs, by encouraging participation and by emphasising how a student's effort has contributed to previous improvement.



## Providing specific and consistent feedback

Teachers can increase students' sense of control and self-efficacy by providing specific and consistent feedback that is focused on students' effort or process and by emphasising opportunities to learn and improve. Dedicated time in class after feedback can allow students to formulate a plan for improvement.



## **Providing relevant learning activities**

Another way teachers can foster students' sense of control is by ensuring that they know the purpose of what they are learning, using learning activities and resources that are structured around student interests, offering choices or providing meaningful rationales for pre-selected activities, and being open and responsive to students' questions and perspectives.



# Creating a conducive classroom climate

In the classroom, teachers can support everyday resilience by creating a classroom climate that emphasises cooperation over competition and where all students feel comfortable taking risks, making mistakes and asking questions. This can be done by facilitating and modelling clear and consistent classroom expectations about how to be a respectful and collaborative class member.



# Fostering sense of belonging to school

At the school level, everyday resilience is supported by a school climate which emphasises inclusion in learning and activities and which makes students feel safe and welcomed. When students feel safe and encouraged at school, they may be better able to navigate any setbacks or challenges they encounter. School leaders and teachers can promote a sense of belonging by facilitating teacher and peer connections, minimising bullying and leading by example in the classroom.



# How do we measure everyday resilience?

NSW public secondary schools can assess the everyday resilience of their students using the academic buoyancy scale in the TTFM student survey. Students are asked to what extent they agree or disagree with the following sentences, drawn from research by Martin and Marsh (2006, 2008):

- "I don't let study stress get on top of me."
- "I think I'm good at dealing with schoolwork pressures."
- "I don't let a bad mark affect my confidence."
- "I'm good at dealing with setbacks at school (e.g. negative feedback on my work, poor results)."

For each question, students rate themselves on a scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

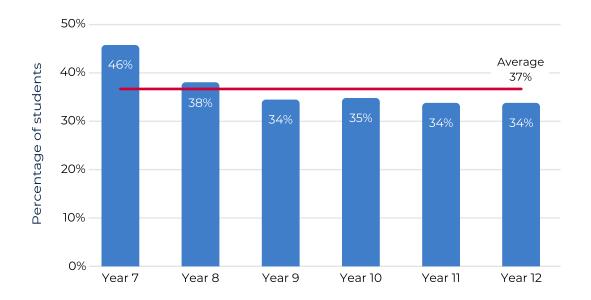
For information about how to assess students' everyday resilience at your school, refer to CESE's resources for <u>Accessing and using TTFM data</u>.

# What is happening in NSW?

TTFM survey data shows that a minority of students have everyday resilience. In 2021, 37% of secondary school students reported that they are good at dealing with everyday challenges at school. Split by scholastic year, everyday resilience is relatively high in Year 7 but decreases considerably in Year 8 and again in Year 9 to a relatively stable 34% (Figure 4).

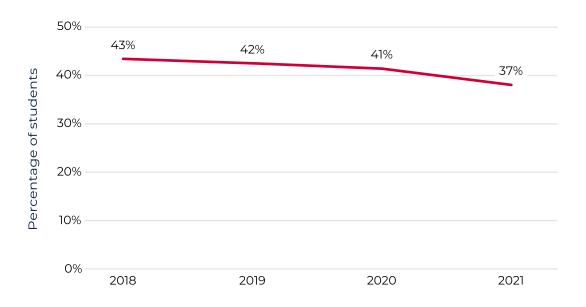
Figure 4

Percentage of secondary students with everyday resilience per scholastic year, 2021



The share of students reporting everyday resilience has decreased over time. In 2018, this share was 6 percentage points higher than in 2021 (Figure 5). At least part of the decrease is likely due to the challenges of learning from home during COVID-19 lockdowns.

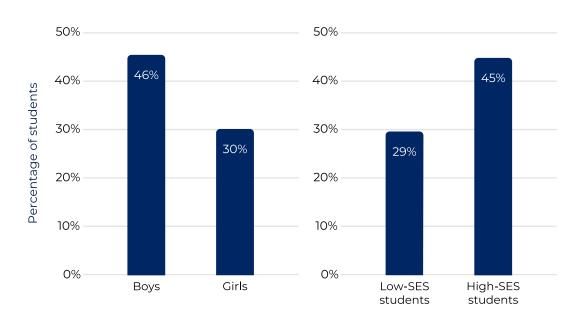
Figure 5
Percentage of secondary students with everyday resilience over time, 2018 to 2021



TTFM data also shows that everyday resilience is not evenly distributed across student groups. Considerably more boys than girls and more students from high- than low-socioeconomic backgrounds report being resilient (Figure 6).

Figure 6

Percentage of secondary students with everyday resilience, by gender and socioeconomic status (SES)



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