Amidst standardization and testing pressure, don’t forget to set aside time for what matters!

Take time to value students as individuals and remind them that they matter. Students could be coming into school with a million worries on their mind; they won’t be able to learn if they don’t feel valued and important. One way to address this is to build “You Matter” time into the day or week—structured time where you listen to their concerns and stories and lend support.

From The Passion-Driven Classroom: A Framework for Teaching and Learning, Second Edition by Angela Maiers and Amy Sandvold

Give students more ownership over their learning.

This involves more than giving students project choices. Think about how you can involve them in all stages of creating a learning experience. For example, if you’re a reading teacher, go beyond the initial reading habits survey. Plan a conference to get to know students as readers, allow them to explore their reading identity, and help them set individual reading goals. Give them a say in your classroom decisions—what should independent reading time look like? What should book displays look like?

From Passionate Readers: The Art of Reaching and Engaging Every Child by Pernille Ripp

Create an environment that values risk taking and intentional innovation.

We know that we want to innovate and prepare students for their future, but how? The key is classroom culture. Instead of throwing the latest tech tool at students or showing off our knowledge, we can position ourselves as expert learners. We can share the way we learn with students and model how to be good learners. We can help students reach out to mentors, and we can build learning communities that share failures and success. Failures should not be hidden or lead to penalty in the classroom. Instead, use each opportunity to help students become resilient and grow.

From Intentional Innovation: How to Guide Risk-Taking, Build Creative Capacity, and Lead Change by AJ Juliani
Use authentic stories to inspire change.

First, identify a barrier to success or area for improvement within your organization. Set up a committee to dig deeply into the problem, drawing on real stories captured from students, parents, teachers, school staff, and community members. These narratives will shed new light, provide powerful insights for tackling new challenges, and ignite change. Finally, enact an action plan for change. Remember: stories should be open and honest, contextualized, given with permission, anonymous, and most importantly, filled with purpose and passion.

From Igniting Wonder, Reflection, and Change in Our Schools: An Educator’s Guide to Using Authentic Stories by Rick Jetter

And finally, think beyond the school doors—how can you make the most of social media to spread the word about your school in your community?

Do you email newsletters to families, or even send information home with students in a take-home folder? It’s time to take advantage of social media! It’s free, can be used on a daily basis, reaches hundreds of followers at any time of the day, and is accessible from your handheld device, whether you’re on the go or in your office. Using simple and modern tools, you can strategically communicate a consistent message to parents and guardians, celebrate your successes, disseminate information, model digital citizenship, and share your school’s story in meaningful, reciprocal, and mutually beneficial ways.

From 7 Steps to Sharing Your School’s Story on Social Media by Jason Kotch and Edward Cosentino

Best wishes for a wonderful school year!