



Reducing Stress in Schools
A guide for recognizing and addressing stress
Graduate Course

Teacher Education Institute ©

Course Description:

Today's students and educators are experiencing unprecedented levels of stress. Academic pressures, social challenges, community stressors, and post-pandemic impacts are affecting student behavior, mental health, and academic performance. Schools need practical, research-based approaches that address the root causes of stress while strengthening learning environments.

Reducing Stress in Schools is a professional development course grounded in the research and practices outlined in *Reducing Stress in Schools: Restoring Connection and Community* by Mathew Portell, Ingrid L. Cockhren, Tyisha J. Noise, Julie Kurtz, and Julie Nicholson. The course translates neuroscience, trauma-responsive practices, and relationship-centered strategies into actionable classroom and schoolwide systems.

Objectives:

- Understand the neurobiology of stress and its impact on behavior and learning
- Recognize how stress affects memory, executive functioning, and emotional regulation
- Distinguish between willful misbehavior and stress-based dysregulation
- Implement classroom management strategies that promote co-regulation and psychological safety
- Apply discipline practices that reduce shame and increase skill-building
- Design learning environments that lower stress and increase belonging
- Teach students to identify stress signals and use practical regulation tools
- Balance rigor and accountability with emotional safety.

Curriculum Design:

Reducing Stress in Schools is a 3 credit graduate level or forty-five hour professional development course taught on weekends or over five full days

Course Materials

Reducing Stress in Schools: Restoring Connection and Community by Mathew Portell, Ingrid L. Cockhren, Tyisha J. Noise, Julie Kurtz, and Julie Nicholson. ISBN 9781682539552

Session Outline

Session One: Why Schools Need Stress Reduction

Content:

1. Identify primary stressors affecting students and educators
2. Recognize systemic vs. individual sources of stress
3. Reflect on stress within participants' own school environments

Session Two: Neurobiology of Stress

Content:

1. Explain how stress affects brain function
2. Understand why stressed students struggle with reasoning and self-control
3. Connect neuroscience to classroom practice

Session Three: Impact of Stress on Behavior

Content:

1. Recognize signs of stress in students and staff
2. Differentiate between behavioral problems and stress responses
3. Understand cumulative impact of chronic stress

Session Four: School Environments That Support Regulation

Content:

1. Connect stress to common classroom behaviors
2. Understand why stressed brains cannot access higher-order thinking
3. Reframe "misbehavior" as dysregulation

Session Five: Rethinking Discipline

Content:

1. Distinguish helpful stress from harmful stress
2. Learn how to create optimal challenge in learning
3. Balance rigor with regulation

Session Six: Relationship Building

Content:

1. Evaluate school climate through a stress-reduction lens
2. Design predictable, safe learning spaces
3. Understand how belonging reduces stress

Session Seven: Stress and Academic Performance

Content:

1. Implement regulation-centered classroom management
2. Replace power struggles with supportive structures
3. Use preventative strategies to reduce dysregulation

Session Eight: Teaching Students Stress Identification

Content:

1. Apply discipline that preserves dignity
2. Reduce re-traumatization through restorative approaches
3. Teach skills rather than impose punishments

Session Nine: Classroom Management Strategies

Content:

1. Understand relationships as a protective factor
2. Use connection as a preventative tool
3. Strengthen relational capacity in classrooms

Session Ten: Tying It All Together: Capstone Project: Stress-Reduction Action

Plan

Content:

Final Integration Project:

Write a 500 word reflective essay addressing:

- The importance of life skills in education
- The role of teachers in fostering these skills
- How these skills will impact students’ future success

Student Requirements

1. Participation: Actively participate in all activities.
2. Reading assignments: Complete all reading assignments including online Session content and linked web resources.
3. Written reflections for each session during the course are required. Each reflection must conform to APA style. Written reflections will be due as follows:
4. Reflection questions and Talking Points are due at the end of each Session.
5. Final Reflections will be due at the end of the course.
6. Final project: Due by the end of Session 10.

Course Evaluation

Assignment	Points	Grading Scale	
Class Participation	9	72-77	A
Class Assignments	30	66-71	B
Final Project	20	60-65	C
Reading	18		
Total Points	77		

Student Academic Integrity

Participants guarantee that all academic class work is original. Any academic dishonesty or plagiarism (to take ideas, writings, etc. from another and offer them as one’s own), is a violation of student academic behavior standards as outlined by our partnering colleges and universities and is subject to academic disciplinary action.