

Ep #356: School Scores



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Angela Kelly

Ep #356: School Scores

Hello empowered principals. Welcome to episode 356.

Welcome to *The Empowered Principal® Podcast*, a not so typical educational resource that will teach you how to gain control of your career and get emotionally fit to lead your school and your life with joy by refining your most powerful tool, your mind. Here's your host certified life coach Angela Kelly Robeck.

Well, hello, my empowered principals. Happy Tuesday. Welcome to the podcast. The podcast is one of my favorite things to do with my work day. I love it so much. I just really enjoy being here with you. So thank you. Thank you for being here with me.

I want to take a moment and just share with you how much fun and how much amazement is being created in EPC this fall. There is a knockout group of school leaders who are so passionate. They have such amazing vision. They have such incredible insight. They're just like you. They are struggling mentally, emotionally. They're fatigued. They feel overworked. They're feeling a little bit insufficient. Then they have a great day. Then they have a hard day. It's all of it. It's the full package.

EPC has just been such a wonderful container, a wonderful place for people to come and feel seen and feel heard and express how they're feeling. We can laugh about it. We can cry about it. We are having the best time. It's magical. I'm so honored to be in this group with all of these women who are truly masterminding.

What I mean by that is it's not just me teaching. Yes, I do teaching. I do coaching. But we're sharing ideas, strategies, tools, what worked, what didn't, resources, just experience with one another. It's phenomenal. I am blown away at the capacity and the potentiality of these leaders. They are phenomenal. So a shout out to all of them who are in EPC. It is truly a pleasure to be working with them.

Ep #356: School Scores

All right. On to today's topic. I'm going to dive right in because this came up today in a coaching session. If one principal is feeling it, my guess is that many, many more are out there feeling it as well. So there are states that score schools. You might get a numeric score, a number score. You might get a letter grade score. You might get stars, a star system. There's many kinds of rating systems that are out there by usually by state or maybe by county where your school gets some kind of public score. That score is supposedly a representation of the performance of your school.

I want to break this down. One of my clients was feeling very discouraged and distraught because she didn't get a score that she wanted for her school. It didn't feel good. It was a letter score. It was below average, and it felt terrible. I have coached so many people on this. So, I want to provide some perspective here because this can really take a principal down, these scores.

I want to first tell you that the score is designed for you to feel either really, really good or really, really bad. There isn't a whole lot of sufficiency that feels good. It lands. We're good. Let's keep going. It's like yay, we made it. We got the A, or we're above. That's great. Woo, woo, woo. We make it mean all these wonderful things about our school. Or we get the D or the F or however they grade you or the one star or the low numeric score. Oh, terrible. We're failures. We didn't do our job. Everything's going in the handbasket to you know where. It's all terrible.

It's either like, yay. It's all great. Or, boo, sadness. It's all terrible. But we take it very personally as the leader because we feel like it's our burden to bear. If we're the leader and the school does great, we're doing a good job. If we're the leader and the school doesn't get the grade, then we're not doing a good job. It's something on us.

Couple things I want to say about this. Number one, it is a team effort. It's not just you. It's the team. So you want to consider that when you're

Ep #356: School Scores

thinking about any kind of approach adjustment that you're going to make. Keep in mind that you alone are not doing all the teaching. You alone are not doing all the behavior management. You alone are not running the school. It's not just you. It's a huge team.

But even more importantly than that, there is a difference between insufficiency and failure. So you can set a goal, and let's say you aimed for a certain score or you aimed for a certain number or certain number of stars and you missed the goal. So somebody might say to you, you failed to hit the goal. That does not mean that you're insufficient as a leader. They're two separate things.

Insufficiency is built into the system by design. What I mean by that is that this testing system is designed and the grading system that they're giving schools right now, it's designed for you to feel insufficient. Literally, you're either doing perfection, or you're insufficient somewhere, right?

Here's the example that I used with my client. Number one, there will always be a gap of some kind in a school. There's where you're at and where you want to be because as humans in the business of developing humans, that's what education is. There will always be a gap of here's where we're at and here's where we're going and here's where we're growing, right?

So there's where you're at in this moment, but if you think where you're at right now isn't good enough, it doesn't matter if you get to the next level, because then there will be a next level and then you'll think you're insufficient there.

There's always a gap because we are wired to evolve and grow. Okay, so there's always where you're at and there's always a where you want to be. It is the process of evolution. It's not that we're chasing perfectionism.

Ep #356: School Scores

It's like saying this, I live in a house. I love my house. My house is great. I love the fireplace. I love the windows. You know what? There are some quirks to this house. The upstairs faucet's a little leaky. The washing machine is older, and it kind of bangs around sometimes. There's a crack, a chip over here in the paint, a crack over here. We've got to repair. Always something that is in need of repair. There's a little project, a house project.

So you can love your house. You can be sufficient in your house. It's a great house. It has a roof. It has four walls. It has windows. It has comfortable beds. It's got bathrooms. It's got running water, electricity. Oh my goodness, internet. It has so many creature comforts. I love my house, and I desire a newer home or a bigger home or a different location home. You can love what you have and be in it and desire. You can have a gap in where you're at now and a desire that you have.

But when you live in your home and you love it, your experience of that moment is I love this, and I'll love that too. I'll love where I'm at right here, and I will love where we're going to the next house. The same is true for your school. Your school is your home. You can love your school. Yes, it has projects because it isn't perfect.

Guess what? You could build the best home, custom made super design mansion on the best land, on the best views and the best property. It's still going to have a punch list. It will still have imperfections. You can focus on the imperfections, or you can focus on the sufficiency of loving your home as is.

Same with our schools. You can love your school, and it can have a punch list. You can have worked on this project last year, and in the house context, maybe you put new windows in last year and this year you're going to replace the floors, or you're going to upgrade the kitchen or one of the bathrooms. You don't do it all at once typically. Even if you did, there would still be a punch list. There would still be things that weren't quite perfect.

Ep #356: School Scores

We're not going for perfection, but the system of education has set us up for perfection, which means it set us up to feel insufficient. It set us up for failing. If you were to go from a D to a C and then a C to a B, you're going to feel amazing, but someone's going to say but you're not at an A. Then let's say you get to the A.

What's going to happen if your school is at an A and it performs consistently? Let's say 80 or 90% of kids are performing on grade level or above. The culture is great. Parents love it. Students, everybody's happy. It's this little pretty school and pretty scores and pretty, then they're going to say oh, our grading system must be too easy. It must be too easy to achieve. We're going to make it harder. We're going to change a test for the kids, the rating system for the school.

The job is to make it harder. The whole system is designed by designed for you to feel insufficient. You cannot get caught in the trap. It's an illusion. You're being sold a game that you're actually not playing. The game is not chase after test scores and get perfection and get all the A's and get all the five stars and get the whatever score. That's the facade that you've been sold on, but that's not it. It's a hook.

I want you to consider what you're making your school score mean about you, about your students, about your staff, about your school community. Are you taking it and applying it so personally and so heavily that you feel like you can hardly breathe when you look at that score? That score means nothing. Somebody made it up.

I know you'll say, but it matters to the superintendent and it matters. It matters. It matters because we taught people. Here's what an A means. Here's what a B means. Here's what a C means. Here's what a D means. Here's what an F means. In the field of education, don't you dare ever consider getting an F because if you do, that's very bad because it describes your character, your capacity, your effort.

Ep #356: School Scores

We're making grades mean something very personal about the human character, the human, the internal humanness of the student, of the teacher, of the principal. When, in fact, it's a made up score, scored by humans who made up the system, who are also imperfect, but they're hiding behind a rating that they're not giving themselves, but they're making it mean something about you personally. They're making mean something about your students and your staff and your ability to be inspirational and to be engaging and to what?

No, the test isn't measuring what you actually do in your job. What you actually do in your job is build up emotional regulation in students and staff, maturity, communication, connection, developing not just their academics, but their humanness, their ability to socialize, their ability to problem solve and resolve conflicts and communicate effectively and physically develop, especially with the younger ones, right? They're developing their bodies physically, kinesthetically. That's what we're doing.

We don't measure those things. We don't measure the character of somebody, but yet we make the academic grade mean something about their character. Don't fall into the trap. It's a trap. It's a loop. They want you to feel bad so that you'll do more. But then what's happening is you go out and do more and burn out and then you leave, and they think the solution is we get different people in. That's not it.

The difference between schools that do well and schools that don't is everybody feels great about being there, about what learning looks and feels like, about what teaching looks like, and they're not focused on the test score or what they make the score mean. What they're doing is they're re-establishing the meaning behind it. They're interpreting test scores differently, school scores differently. Your school score does not identify you unless you let it.

Ep #356: School Scores

When you think about the community, oh, that school got a D, that must be a bad principal. That must be a bad school. You have to interpret what does this D mean? Is it true? Did we just not put any effort in? Did we not try with kids? Did we not teach this year? Or were we developing young humans? Were we showing up every day, giving it everything we had in spite of what we might have been dealing with on our campus, mentally, emotionally?

You were not a grade. That is not your identity. The D is designed to push the most painful human emotion of insufficiency, but it does not push the button of inspiration. It's desperation, pressure. It's a pain point used to try and, I don't know what, control, manipulate. Create what? Pressure, power. I'm not sure why we're doing this to people, but it doesn't feel good.

When school leaders don't feel good, their schools don't do well. When kids don't feel good about themselves as students, they don't perform well. When teachers don't feel good about themselves as teachers, they don't teach well. If there's one thing that I could offer you this school year is that your test score doesn't equal, or your school score, any score. It doesn't equal your character. It doesn't equal the character of your teachers, the integrity behind your work, the alignment around what you're doing. It's simply a made-up score.

Now, if we could flick it to the side of the road and never have to deal with it again, that'd be amazing. But we are dealing with the institution and the systems that are in place, and the rating systems are a part of that. Your school's going to get rated. It's what you make it mean. It's how you interpret it. Is it from insufficiency, or is it the house where it's sufficient, and yeah, it's got a punch list. It's got projects that need doing.

But there's always a project. There's always something we can be tweaking and working on, and changing and improving and upgrading. But we're not in a rush. We're going to triage. We're going to prioritize. We're going to do

Ep #356: School Scores

this project this fall, and then maybe we'll do another project in the spring. Then we're going to do another project next fall, and then we're going to maybe do this little project in the winter. We have seasonal projects at our school. It's a home. It's evolving. There will never not be a gap.

So instead of focusing on the gap, you can focus on the sufficiency of where you're at right now. Because I promise you this, if you were to hate your home the whole time you lived in it and was always looking at what's broken, what's leaking, what's squeaking, what's not fixed, what's scratched, what's chipped, and every day you just focus on all those little things that drive you crazy and you can't stand it, promise you this. It won't be long before you move into your beautiful, big, custom-built, brand new mansion home, and you're going to start to see the little imperfections.

That big beautiful house that you worked so hard and thought it was going to be perfect when you got there, you're going to find that it has punch lists and imperfections just like the old house did. It's about how you feel about yourself and your school and your staff and your students and what you make those scores mean.

Separate the score from the character of the person. Your school scores do not define you, your staff, your students, or your school. If there is work to do, it isn't a problem. All schools have it. If you were to have an A rating, I promise you this, they'd rewrite the rating, and you'd be back down because the goal is evolution.

So focus on what's progressing, what's evolving, what's transforming, what you're learning as a leader, what your teachers are learning as teachers, the joy and experience of engaging with students. Watching a child go from not being able to regulate themselves at all to having a day where everything's calm, that's a huge win. Having five students who can't regulate down to three students who can't regulate, that's a huge win.

Ep #356: School Scores

I want you to consider the score has nothing to do with your integrity, with your values, with your character, with who you are. Because insufficiency has nothing to do with failure. Failure is just missing the mark. I set a goal, I missed the mark. Sufficiency is whether I believe in myself and whether I value the progress I did make and the things I did do versus looking at everything I didn't do.

I know this might feel controversial in your mind. It might really rub up against some of your belief systems and what you make it mean about yourself or your school. But I promise you, that school score does not have to define you. If it's something you struggle with, you can join EPC. The doors are open in October because the fall dip happened, and I know that people are struggling. This is the time when most people join.

So I'm opening the doors in October to let you in, to get you in through the rest of the year. So come on in. The doors will not be open the rest of 2024. It's open through October. Come on in. We would love to support you. We can turn this around, I promise you. Please go have an amazing week. Take good care of yourselves, and I will talk to you all next week. Take care. Bye.

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