

Educators Who Thrive Together: A Guide for Building a Community of Practice

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Teaching is deeply meaningful work — and it is also emotionally and cognitively demanding.

Across Southern Arizona and beyond, educators consistently name resilience, emotional regulation, and sustaining joy in teaching as ongoing professional needs. Yet much professional learning focuses primarily on instructional strategies, pacing, or curriculum implementation.

What if professional learning also strengthened the people doing the work?

This guide outlines a ready-to-use model for facilitating a short-term Community of Practice (CoP) centered on educator resilience. This model is designed to be implemented by teacher leaders, instructional coaches, or administrators who want to cultivate sustainable, relationship-driven professional learning — all without adding significant time demands.

The framework draws on themes from *Onward: Cultivating Emotional Resilience in Educators* by Elena Aguilar and can be adapted to a variety of school/district contexts.

This framework was designed around several core design principles —

Principle	What can this look like in practice?
1. Low-Demand, High-impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Three sessions● No required homework● No reading outside the meeting time
2. Experience First, Text Second	Engaging in reflection or experiential activities before reading short excerpts to keep learning grounded, relevant, and personal .
3. Participant Safety and Relational Trust	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Predictable structure● Small-group dialogue● Clear norms
4. Actionable Takeaways	Each session concludes with one small, realistic commitment — not a large-scale change initiative.

The following example of a 45- to 60-minute structure for the CoP. Each session flows to a consistent rhythm that models regulation and predictability, helping participants feel grounded and supported.

CoP Session Component	Time	Purpose
Opening	2 min	Centering and transition
Connection	5 min	Build relational trust
Content & Reflection	25 min	Engage with key resilience themes
Application & Planning	10 min	Identify one actionable intention
Closing	2 min	Reflection and closure

Instead of covering an entire book, for example, this framework focuses on three high-leverage themes, each one covered during a single 45- to 60-minute session.

Session 1: Self-Awareness & the Stories We Tell Ourselves

- Participants explore identity, mindset, and internal narratives.
- Resilience begins with awareness of the beliefs shaping perceptions and reactions.

Session 2: Emotional Resilience in Practice

- Participants examine emotional patterns common in teaching and explore habits of mind that support constructive responses to challenges.
- The emphasis is on learning to work with emotions rather than suppress them.

Session 3: Resilience in Community

- Participants reflect on how relationships, belonging, and collective efficacy contribute to long-term well-being.
- Resilience is framed as something cultivated collectively—not individually.

The components below constitute a “Facilitation Toolkit” and are designed for immediate use and adaptation for your CoP.

Sample Opening Activities

- Guided breathing (4–5 slow breaths together)

- One-word arrival check-in
- Gratitude reflection
- Short journaling prompt: “What did today require of you?”

Sample Connection Prompts (performed in pairs or triads)

- Share a recent moment when you responded to a challenge with resilience.
- Describe a small win from this week.
- What story are you currently telling yourself about your work?

Timing should remain structured to build connection while maintaining emotional safety.

Content Engagement Options

- Read a 1–2 page excerpt together.
- Use a jigsaw approach with short passages.
- Share a brief video clip or quote.
- Begin with an experiential activity (e.g., emotion-mapping) and then connect to text.

The design honors time and capacity, and avoids assigning reading outside of the meeting time.

Application and Planning

- Participants complete the sentence: “One small practice I will test between now and the next session is...” *Examples may include*
 - Pausing before responding to challenging communication.
 - Practicing daily gratitude
 - Scheduling a five-minute reflective reset.
 - Intentionally reaching out to one colleague.

The emphasis is on experimentation, not perfection.

Closing Rituals

- One-word checkout
- “I’m leaving with...”
- Silent written reflection
- Gratitude circle

Structured closure reinforces safety and containment.

This framework here is designed to respect educators’ time while still offering depth and meaning. Be sure to communicate this in your recruitment efforts.

Recruitment Suggestions

- Clearly communicate the purpose and time commitment. For this framework, the total commitment is three hours across three sessions, with no required work outside of meetings
- Use a brief interest form to gather participant goals.
- Encourage commitment to all three sessions to build trust.
- Invite participants to bring a “resilience buddy” for built-in support.

Sustainability Considerations:

- Limit group size → 10–15 participants supports depth of dialogue
- Rotate facilitation if expanding the model.
- Keep participation voluntary.
- Avoid turning reflection into evaluation data.

In terms of intended outcomes, this framework is designed not only to provide immediate support but to also establish sustainable habits and relationships that extend beyond the structured sessions.

Participants develop —

- A personal toolbox of resilience practices
- Greater emotional awareness
- Strengthened professional relationships
- Renewed connection to purpose and joy

An Invitation to Lead

This framework is intended to be adaptable, with teacher leaders, instructional coaches, and administrators encouraged to modify it to meet the needs of their specific context.

What’s more, it’s important to understand that professional learning does not have to be heavy to be meaningful. Instead, focus on reducing the commitment, cognitive load, and other obstacles that limit teacher participation — all while providing a structured space for participants to reflect, connect, and breathe together.

Educators thrive together, and creating opportunities for that to happen is a powerful way to sustain the joy for teaching.

EDUCATORS WHO THRIVE TOGETHER

A GUIDE FOR BUILDING A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

A low-time, high-impact professional learning model that supports educator resilience through structured reflection, connection, and actionable practices.

WHY THIS MATTERS

- Teaching is emotionally and cognitively demanding
- Most PD focuses on instruction not educator
- Resilience + emotional support are ongoing needs

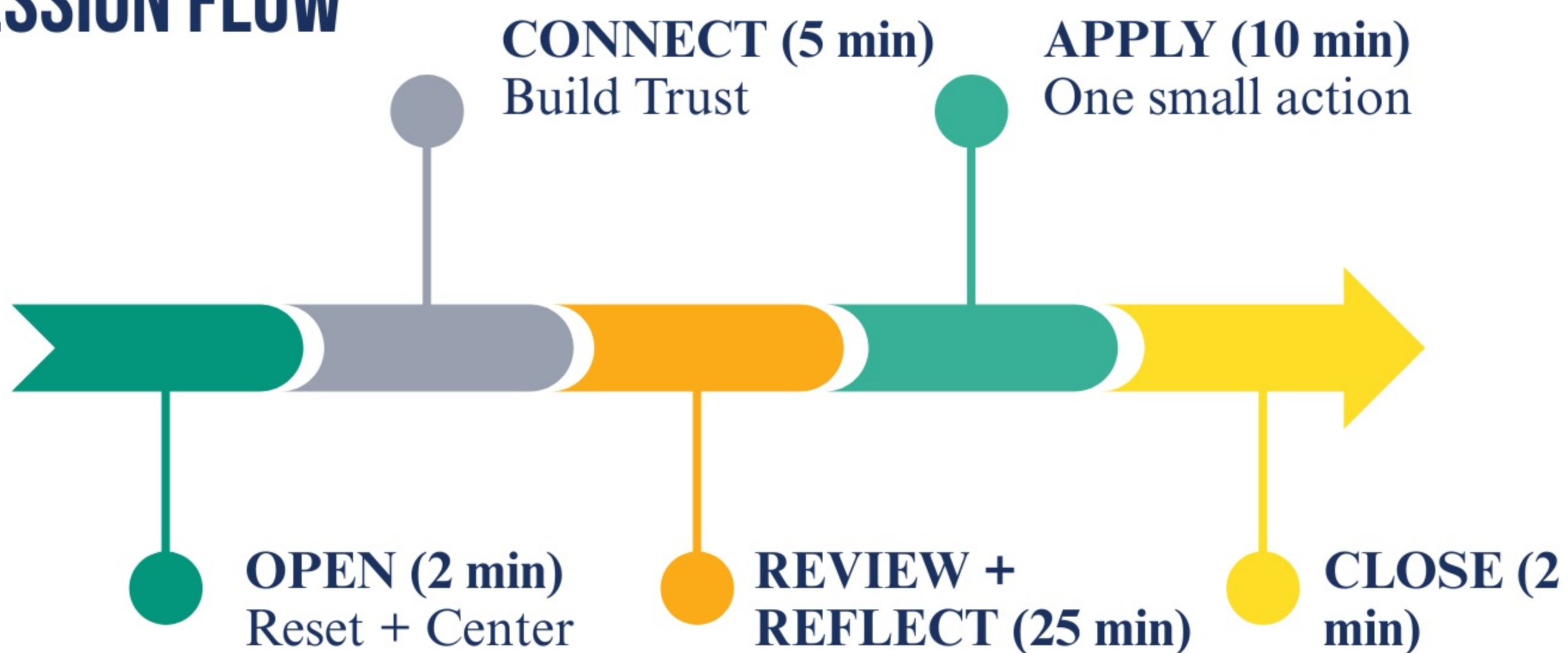
THE MODEL

- 3 sessions, each lasting 45–60 minutes
- No homework or extra time required
- Focus on reflection, connection, application

SESSION TOPICS

- Self-awareness & the Stories We Tell Ourselves
- Emotional Resilience in Practice
- Resilience in Community

SESSION FLOW



OUTCOMES

- Personal resilience strategies
- Stronger collegial relationships
- Increased emotional awareness
- Renewed sense of purpose

CLASS PRINCIPLES

- Low demand, high impact
- Safe, structured environment
- Actionable, though not overwhelming