



### **The Road Back to Normal—"Accentuate the Positive"**

By Wes Eby

First, a disclaimer. I am retired and no longer a teacher. That is, I no longer go to school daily to face a classroom of students. I no longer occupy a school office to assume the role of an administrator. Both were important positions in my distant past. I am confident no school district would ever hire this mid-octogenarian. But—and this is a huge BUT—I am still a teacher and educator at heart. I believe in the rather trite adage, "Once a teacher, always a teacher." In fact, when I googled that phrase, in a split second it generated about 841 million references. Hence, that most fitting phrase is not novel by any means. But, for me, it is so true!

Second, joining the Nazarene Educators Worldwide council has been refreshing and rewarding for me. Connecting with other educators frequently has filled a significant void in my "retired" life because I believe, "Once a . . ." Oh, I just said that, didn't I?

Third, for the purpose of this article, allow me to play a "what if" game. What if I were a teacher again? What would I do to return to a school setting after the long, bleak days of the pandemic? What would I do this fall if I were given the responsibility of a class of middle-school students, the age-level I taught for several years?

## Accentuate the Positive

Here is what I think I would do. I would adopt the vintage song “Accentuate the Positive” as my theme. The lyrics by Johnny Mercer certainly fit the situation we find ourselves in right now as we try to redeem the negatives of the previous year. The refrain goes:

“You’ve got to accentuate the positive.  
Eliminate the negative.  
Latch onto the affirmative.  
Don't mess with Mister In-Between.”

What would I do in the classroom? From the first moment with the students, I would practice what the lyrics command—accentuating the positive and eliminating the negative. And I can do that best through **celebration**. One definition of celebration states: “Do something enjoyable because of a special occasion.” Returning to the classroom is truly a *special occasion* after being quarantined or after engaging in virtual education for way too long.

I would celebrate every day. I would celebrate throughout the day. I would help the students to experience the sheer joy of being in school again.

How a teacher celebrates, of course, depends on the age and maturity of the students. Activities for preschoolers would naturally be different than those for high-school students. Also, safety guidelines and protocols would need to be considered based on a particular school or district’s policies.

## Try These Ideas

Let me share a few ideas that I would try. I will leave it up to the teachers to ascertain if the suggestions might work for them and their situations.

1. **Create a cheerful, optimistic atmosphere.** Place positive signs and banners around the classroom, such as “Hooray for School,” “Glad We’re Back,” “Today Is a Great Day to Learn,” “You Are Amazing,” “I Like School,” etc. It would be vital not only to establish such an atmosphere but to maintain it all year long.
2. **Plan a party.** Choose an upbeat theme, such as a “Coming Back to School” party, and schedule it for the first day or during the first week. Everyone likes parties, so celebrate that you can be back in school again. Enlist some parents to help. Create a festive atmosphere. Decorate the room. Prepare simple refreshments. Then invite the principal, school secretary, and any other administrator to join the celebration.

3. **Stage a parade.** Like with parties, parades are always popular with children. Again, select an appropriate theme, such as “Hooray for School.” This activity can be as simple or elaborate as you desire. Make banners and streamers. Construct band instruments and/or other noise makers. This fun, celebratory event could be just your class. Or invite other teachers to join you, even making it an entire building or school project. Plan for more than one during the school year, making each one fresh and exciting for the students. Solicit input and involvement from the local fire and police departments.
4. **Affirm the learners.** Find many ways to compliment the students throughout the day—for their hard work, their effort, and their behavior. Establish an award system that is fair and shows no favorites. Create a special recognition such as Pat-on-the-Back award or ABCD (Above and Beyond the Call of Duty) award that is given daily for some special achievement or deed or behavior, making certain that every student at some time receives it.
5. **Honor student work.** Dedicate one or more bulletin boards to display each student’s work. No one likes to be left out; every student deserves to have his/her best work posted. Celebrate what each student is doing to meet your curricular objectives and expectations.
6. **Incorporate fun, positive music.** For my students, I would teach them to sing “Accentuate the Positive” and make it a vocabulary lesson to learn new words/phrases, such as “accentuate,” “eliminate,” “latch onto,” and “Mister In-Between.” You can find dozens of such songs on the internet. For Christian schools, there are many God-honoring, God-praising songs and choruses that would be appropriate.
7. **Consider the pandemic positives.** Look for anything good that has come from the pandemic and celebrate it. Two examples: (a) Many students have learned and mastered the use of new technology while studying at home; therefore, celebrate that accomplishment and build upon it, helping the students to realize the long-range value of that learning and skill. (b) Many teachers have established positive relationships with parents that did not exist pre-pandemic; therefore, work to increase those connections that will certainly benefit their children going forward.

This short list is only the beginning, but maybe the ideas will stir your creative thinking. Add to these suggestions, and then share with others.

Consider what the Apostle Paul said to the Christians in Philippi: “Summing it all up, friends, I’d say you’ll do best by filling your minds and meditating on things true, noble, reputable, authentic, compelling, gracious—the best, not the worst; the beautiful, not the ugly; things to praise, not things to curse” (Philippines 4:8, MSG).

**Prayer:** Father God, I pray that You will guide me, inspire me, and help me to be the best teacher possible for the students You have entrusted to my care. Help me, as Paul said, to fill my mind with all that is good and beautiful and uplifting. Help me to accentuate the positive and, no matter how difficult, to eliminate the negative in our classroom. Help me be the teacher You have called me to be—for Your glory. Amen.

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