# Chapter 12
# Reauthorizing Teachers:
## The Central Driver of Spiritually-Supportive School Culture

**Amy L. Chapman**
*Teachers College, Columbia University, USA*

**Lisa J. Miller**
*Teachers College, Columbia University, USA*

## ABSTRACT

*This chapter presents a revised framework for understanding how schools create a spiritually support-ive, or awakened, school culture. In a prior study, the researchers identified how schools intentionally design an awakened school culture which supports students' innate spirituality. This research identified 11 drivers of spiritually supportive schools which are applicable to all schools. During the 2021-2022 academic year, these 11 drivers were the foundation for a year-long professional development course for educators: The Awakened Schools Institute. Through the Awakened Schools Institute, educators learned the 11 drivers of a spiritually supportive school culture and applied them to their own classrooms and schools. Through observations and surveys about the application of the 11 drivers through this year-long course, researchers identified a 12th driver of a spiritually supportive school culture: the reauthoriza-tion of teachers. This chapter presents the identification of the 12th driver of awakened school culture.*

## INTRODUCTION

While there is an understanding that success and well-being require a "whole-child" approach to education, often this does not include support for the child's innate capacity for spirituality (Chapman et al., 2021). Spirituality is a foundational capacity for awareness and interconnection (Miller, 2015, 2021). Further, research indicates that having a strong spiritual core provides protective mental health benefits (Barkin, Miller, & Luthar, 2015; Wu, Wang, & Jia, 2015). Because spirituality is an innate capacity (Button et al., 2011; Kendler, Gardner, & Prescott, 1997; Koenig, McGue, & Iacono, 2008), it cannot be taught; rather, it must be cultivated through a spiritually supportive environment, including lived experiences

and meaningful relationships. Considering how formative schools are in the lives of young people, we set out to examine how schools nurtured students' spirituality.

Through a three-year grounded theory study (Charmaz, 2014), we identified how schools intentionally design an awakened school culture which supports students' innate spirituality. Our research identified 11 drivers of spiritually-supportive schools which are applicable to all schools. As aspects of an intentionally designed, awakened school culture, the drivers are culturally sensitive: they allow schools to use the language and values that are central to them to cultivate their students' innate spirituality. We know from this initial research that school leadership plays an important role in designing and maintaining spiritually supportive school culture. This research with "awakened schools" provided a blueprint for schools seeking to redesign their cultures to cultivate the spiritual core of each student.

During the 2021-2022 academic year, we shared this blueprint with schools and engaged school leaders and teachers through "The Awakened Schools Institute," a year-long process of engaging with these drivers to make school-wide cultural change. The educators who participated through The Awakened Schools Institute shared that The Awakened Schools Institute created a spiritual space which gave teachers time, practice, and community to separate from stress and to reconnect with their identity and purpose as an educator. Through modeling spiritually supportive education, and in supporting educators' own spirituality, teachers articulated to us how lacking this type of nurturing was for the teachers. By supporting teachers' own spirituality, the Awakened Schools Institute sought to provide teachers with inner resilience.

As the teachers who participated in The Awakened Schools Institute learned about the 11 drivers, and considered how they could be implemented into their classrooms and schools, teachers felt that they were able to reclaim their identities as teachers. As they began to implement these 11 drivers, we recognized that the *reauthorization* of teachers themselves was the central driver of spiritually supportive school culture. While this will be discussed in greater detail throughout the chapter, In using the term *reauthorization*, we mean that teachers who began to return to the root of their calling to be teachers and to feel agency in creating a spiritually supportive environment. Teachers experienced a renewal of their vocation and a reaffirmation of their roles as leaders and co-creators of school culture. It was through this reauthorization of teachers that we became acutely aware of the critical role of the teacher as an agent of change and co-creator of school culture.

This chapter presents findings from The Awakened Schools Institute which have led to a revised framework which can be applied by educational leaders and teachers to create a spiritually supportive school culture. Prior to addressing these findings, the chapter presents the science of spirituality and an overview of the initial study which led to the development of a framework for spiritually supportive school culture which became the basis for The Awakened Schools Institute.

## THE NEUROSCIENCE OF SPIRITUALITY

Every human being is born with a natural spirituality. Twenty-five years of scientific research have shown that spirituality is an innate human capacity which needs to be cultivated in order to fully develop. Just as we are born with the capacity to read, write, walk, and talk, so too are we born with the capacity for spiritual life; and similarly to those other capacities, our natural spirituality must be nurtured within the right environment in order for our inherent capacity to reach its full potential.

*Reauthorizing Teachers*

The evolution of the science of spirituality provides a rich, complex understanding of this innate human capacity. By studying identical twins who had been raised apart, Kendler and his colleagues were able to determine to what extent certain capacities derived from one's genetic makeup and to what extent those capacities were formed through the environment in which they were raised. Through these twin studies, Kendler and his colleagues found that spirituality is ⅓ heritable and ⅔ socialized (Kendler et al., 1997, 1999). Over our lifespan, we are born with ⅓ of our capacity for spiritual life, and ⅔ of our spirituality is nurtured through our environment and relationships (Button et al., 2011; Kendler et al., 1997, 1999). In the presence of a spiritually supportive environment, such as one's family, religious community, or school, one's natural spirituality can blossom. In the absence of a spiritually supportive environment, this innate capacity for spiritual life may lie fallow, or may not develop fully.

Further research has identified the neural correlates of spiritual experience. A study in which participants were led through three guided imagery exercises to prompt spiritual, stressful, and relaxing states of being while being in fMRI machines identified the areas of the brain which correspond to spiritual experience (McClintock et al., 2019; Miller et al., 2018). Specifically, these regions of the brain modulate our perception, attention, orientation, and emotional bonding. In a state of spiritual awareness, these regions work together, so that one experiences a sense of oneness, a sense of love and connection, and a feeling of being guided (McClintock et al., 2019; Miller et al., 2018). Importantly, this was true for both religious and nonreligious participants (McClintock et al., 2019; Miller et al., 2018). While each of these regions in the brain function independently in other states of awareness, when people are having a spiritual experience, these four regions of the brain work in tandem. Taken together, during states of spiritual awareness, we concurrently experience a sense of unity with all life and a sense of our own purpose, holding at the same time our individual freedom and uniqueness in dialogue with collective compassion and responsibility.

Further research has examined the development of this natural spiritual capacity over the lifespan. The heritable portion of our spiritual development burgeons during biological puberty, in parallel with other lines of development (Button et al., 2011; Koenig et al., 2008; Miller & Gur, 2002). During adolescence, there is a 50% increase in the heritable contribution of spiritual life (Button et al., 2011; Koenig et al., 2008). This increase in spiritual development during biological puberty has been seen cross-culturally: in countries and cultures with different forms of spiritual and religious expression, one's spiritual development surges during adolescence (McClintock et al., 2019; McClintock, Lau, & Miller, 2016). Given these findings, adolescence is a particularly critical time to support one's spiritual development.

Cross-cultural studies have also identified potential phenotypes of spiritual experience. A large study of over 5,000 adults in India, China, and the United States, identified five universal expressions of spiritual awareness: love (of others and of the transcendent), interpersonal interconnectedness (a sense of oneness with others), altruism, contemplative practice (prayer, meditation, yoga), and religious or spiritual reflection and commitment (McClintock, Lau, & Miller, 2016). Over 9,000 adolescents from Australia, Cameroon, Canada, England, India, Thailand, Wales, and the United States were surveyed about their spiritual engagement (Benson et al., 2012). Across these cultures, and in young people who were both religious and nonreligious, spiritual development began from within and included questing for one's purpose; a connection to the transcendent; contemplative practice; and a penchant for service (Benson et al., 2012). These findings were true even for adolescents who did not engage in any religious or spiritual practices (Benson et al., 2012).

219

## The Need for Spiritually Supportive Education

As an innate human capacity, spirituality cannot be taught. The ⅓ heritable portion must be supported through the environment in order for the remaining ⅔ of our spiritual life to develop (Button et al., 2011; Kendler et al., 1997, 1999). Historically, spiritual development was supported in any number of ways through one's environment: family; community; civic organizations; religious communities; and schools. However, increasingly, young people are not spending time in spiritually nurturing environments (Pew, 2015; Smith & Denton, 2009; Twenge, Exline, Grubbs, Sastry, & Campbell, 2019).

For many, the spiritual core is not being nurtured into full development, and this has had both individual and collective implications. Children and adolescents face unprecedented rates of anxiety, depression, and substance abuse (Lewinsohn et al., 2004; Mojtabai et al., 2016). Further, these elevated rates of pathology are present in both resourced and under-resourced children and adolescents (Luthar et al., 2013). At the same time, society is experiencing a general lack of civility, as there is greater political polarization in the U.S. than there has been in more than two decades (Pew, 2017). The decades-long focus on academics, and an underemphasis on civic learning, have focused on content acquisition at the expense of learning how to be in community (Chapman & Miller, 2022; Fitzgerald et al., 2021). While schools have long been seen as the place where students are formed to be citizens, both in content (Fitzgerald et al., 2021) and in culture (Chapman & Miller, 2022), schools are often focused on a memorization of facts at the expense of engaging in community life. Clearly, something must be done to alleviate such suffering, polarization, and disconnection.

## Teacher Burnout

We know that teachers have faced increasing stress and burnout over the last decades (Ferguson et al., 2012), which has only intensified since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic (Pressley, 2021). Over the past few decades, teachers have faced increasing workloads, state and national regulations, and fewer sources of support (Ferguson et al., 2012). Prior to the outbreak of the Coronavirus pandemic in 2020, and its accompanying shifts to emergency online teaching, 8% of all teachers, and 30% of new teachers, reported that they were close to leaving the profession (Learning Policy Institute, 2018). Teacher stress and burnout has been shown to impact students' learning and motivation (Shen et al., 2015; Sutcher et al., 2019). An empirical study of nearly 400 teachers in the midst of the pandemic identified the most proximal factors of teacher burnout: anxiety about teaching demands, parental communication, and a lack of administrative support (Pressley, 2021). Importantly, these factors were consistent across school or instruction type, geographic location, demographic factors, or years in the profession (Pressley, 2021).

While not part of our initial research, during the Awakened Schools Institute, the ways in which teaching has changed in the last few decades became apparent. Our intention had been to model spiritually supportive education for our Awakened Schools Institute participants, as a means of showing what awakened education was and how it felt to participate in a culture which was spiritually supportive. Beginning in the first session, participants shared how difficult teaching had become, and how tired and burned out they were. We realized very early on in the Institute that teachers' own spirituality needed to be nurtured and supported before they could create a spiritually supportive space in their classrooms or schools. Thus, the Awakened Schools Institute became a place where our first priority became supporting teachers' own spirituality, so that they then had not only the research and practices, but also the capacity to nurture their students' spirituality.

## Teachers' Spirituality

Our understanding of the importance of teachers' spirituality, and how to nurture it, is lacking. Professional fields outside of education, particularly nursing, have called for supporting spirituality as part of one's vocation (Becker, 2009; Greenstreet, 1999; Mthembu et al., 2016). While there have been calls to similarly nurture teachers' spirituality beginning in teacher education, (Huebner, 1995; Palmer, 2003), for the most part these calls have gone unanswered by the literature. There has been research which examines how teachers' spirituality impacts their practice, such as reason for entering teaching (Marshall, 2009), self-efficacy (Barsh, 2015), and social justice (Gillespie, 2019; Tisdell, 2002), but these studies noted the dearth of research on understanding or supporting educators' spirituality, in spite of noting its importance to educators' practice.

## Spirituality as a Protective Benefit and Means of Alleviating Suffering

Research has shown that having a strong spirituality is one key to mediating suffering. Adolescents who identify as highly spiritual – measured by a strong transcendent relationship with a higher power and viewed their lives as meaningful – had lower rates of depression and substance abuse than their peers who showed low rates of spirituality; these differences continued or expanded long after graduating from high school (Barkin, Miller, & Luthar, 2015). Having a thriving spiritual life fortified these students against depression, anxiety, and substance abuse, but only a small percentage of the students in the study had that strong spirituality. Additional studies have found a robust spirituality to be a strong protective factor against suicidality and completed suicide (Wu, Wang, & Jia, 2015). Further, there have been calls throughout the world to support spirituality in education in to prepare young people to live in various forms of self-government (Banerjee, 2022; Chapman & Miller, 2022; Desai & Wane, 2022; Kaneko, 2022; Kshtriya et al., 2022; Masaki, 2022; Maysless & Kizel, 2022; Miller, 2022; Niyom & Monboon-liang, 2022; Wahinkpe Topa, 2022). Given the national crisis of suffering and the research demonstrating the mediating effects of spirituality on that suffering, it is critical that we help all students to develop a strong spirituality. How students' innate spirituality is nurtured through schools is the focus of this study.

## Spirituality and Religion

In the United States, and particularly when speaking about schools in the United States, it is important to clarify what we mean by *spirituality*. As discussed above, spirituality is an innate human capacity, with biological markers in the brain: we are inherently spiritual beings. Although this innate capacity must be nurtured to fully develop, how any person chooses to cultivate and practice their spirituality is an individual choice. For some, spirituality is supported by and engaged with a religious tradition; data from 2017 indicate that for 48% of Americans identified as both religious and spiritual (Pew, 2017). For others, a religious community is not a part of their spiritual lives. When we speak of spirituality, and advocate for its inclusion and support within schools, we speak of spirituality without any preconceived notions about how one engages and enacts their spiritual life.

## AWAKENED SCHOOLS: THE INITIAL 11 DRIVERS OF SPIRITUALLY SUPPORTIVE EDUCATION

Knowing these benefits of a strong spirituality, we asked how the spiritual core might be supported from childhood so that children's innate spirituality was nurtured to full development. While families, community structures, and organizations can and do support each child's natural spirituality, the place where children often first learn to be in communities, outside of their families, is in schools. Schools are well poised to support students' spirituality. Schools already are focused on whole child education – they know the importance of teaching the child holistically, rather than just for academic knowledge. We therefore undertook to understand how schools are already supporting students' innate spirituality.

## Method

Our initial research examined how schools supported students' natural spirituality. Here we present a brief overview of the first phase of our research. The research design and methodology for this research has been written about in more detail elsewhere; for a more detailed description, please see Chapman, Foley, Halliday, and Miller, 2021 and Chapman, Foley, Barth, Halliday, and Miller, forthcoming.

To explore how schools were already supporting students' spirituality, we conducted a three-year ethnographic study using a grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2014). During the first two years of the study, we conducted site visits to 20 schools throughout the United States. Schools who participated in the study were identified as being spiritually supportive by the second author during school site visits. Of these schools, 15 were private and 6 were public. Of the private schools, nine of which were religious (four were Catholic, two were Protestant, two were Jewish, and one was Sufi). The public schools varied in cultural tradition, and included one school founded by the Black Panthers and one which was shaped by the Muslim tradition. The sample of schools was diverse in geographic area, size of school, and grade levels included in the school, and included both coed and single-sex schools. Throughout the sample there was racial and socioeconomic diversity, though echoing the reality of schools throughout the United States (Rothstein, 2015), most schools were not diverse within themselves. The sample represented schools from preschool through grade 12, though not all schools included all grade levels. The research team was made up of the principal investigator, a doctoral candidate and several masters level researchers, and three researcher-practitioners who had extensive experience in education.

We triangulated our data collection, conducting interviews; completing observations; and collecting artifacts. We conducted interviews with administration, faculty, staff, students, parents, and alumni, completed observations in formal and informal spaces throughout schools, and collected artifacts such as school handbooks, lesson plans, and student work. Grounded theory provided flexible yet clear guidelines for the collection and analysis of our data (Charmaz, 2014). In particular, we chose a *grounded interpretation* approach, in which we iteratively analyzed the data, built upon our insights through dialogue and memoing, and constructed meaning, We analyzed this data using the constant comparative method, choosing this approach so as to be in continuous dialogue with our data, determining whether any piece of data fit our existing coding scheme (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014).

*Reauthorizing Teachers*

*Table 1. Initial 11 drivers of spiritually supportive culture*

| Driver | Explanation |
| --- | --- |
| Transformative Relationships | Building student–teacher relationships grounded in connection and love |
| Inherent Worth | Seeing, knowing, and valuing every member of the school community |
| Authentic Being | Committing to drawing out the deep spirit and creative expression of the child |
| Transcendent Practice | Cultivating practices that nurture and elevate an augmented form of awareness |
| Nature Consciousness | Facilitating opportunities to form deep, lived relationships with nature and all life |
| Meaningful Learning | Connecting knowledge and service inside and outside of the classroom |
| Integrated Mission | Vertically integrating a lived and meaningful mission |
| Aspirational Values | Holding aspirational goals inside and outside the classroom |
| Ritual | Promoting community identity and belonging among diverse staff and students through ritual and celebration |
| Intentional Lexicon | Using a common language throughout the school rooted in interconnectedness, transcendence, and service |
| Authorized Keeper | A professional post for the embodiment and expression of core values |

## Findings

Through the analysis of this data, we found that schools which nurtured students' natural spirituality intentionally designed their school culture to foster students' spiritual development. Further, the schools in our sample had 11 elements in common which drove their spiritually supportive culture. We identified these 11 drivers of an Awakened, or spiritually supportive, school culture, which were common in the schools in our sample. A brief overview of these drivers is listed in Table 1; each of these 11 drivers is explored in greater detail in Chapman, Foley, Barth, Halliday, and Miller (forthcoming). We term schools which are spiritually supportive *Awakened Schools*.

## IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 11 DRIVERS: THE AWAKENED SCHOOLS INSTITUTE

The 11 drivers of an Awakened School culture created a framework which schools could use to design a spiritually supportive culture for themselves. In this way, the 11 drivers became a roadmap which provided specific and actionable ways in which schools could shift their culture to be more spiritually supportive, but which could also be adapted to best fit the needs of the school community. As a means of providing support to schools who wanted to use the 11 drivers as a blueprint to shift their school culture, we developed a year-long professional development course through which educators could learn how to apply our research to nurture spirituality in their classrooms and schools. We called this course *The Awakened Schools Institute*, and our initial cohort of the Institute ran from the fall of 2021 to the spring of 2022.

The Awakened Schools Institute was offered to schools and to individual educators at no cost in order to reduce financial barriers to attendance, and all educators were welcome, including preservice teachers, teacher educators, administrators, and paraprofessionals. The Institute consisted of three phases: for schools who signed up to participate in the Institute with three or more educators, our team would work

with the school's leadership team collaboratively over a period of a few months to assess how the school was currently attending to each of the 11 drivers. With the school's leadership team, and often with a broader team of faculty and educational leaders from the school, we identified 2-4 of the 11 drivers on which the school chose to focus for the 2021-2022 academic year. These schools were also eligible for site visits, in which members of our team would visit the school for two days to support whole school culture change. We worked collaboratively with the school to design the agenda for these site visits, which included faculty professional development; meetings with parents; meetings with department heads; individual meetings with faculty; and classroom observations. Site visits were also offered at no cost to the school.

All participants in the Awakened Schools Institute - both those who joined as part of school-wide participation and those who joined as individuals – attended 12 virtual sessions throughout the 2021-2022 academic year. Over 160 people registered to participate in the initial cohort of the Institute. They were based in twenty states within the United States and two countries outside of it. Participants included classroom teachers from grades PK-12; special education teachers; school librarians; school and district administrators; preservice teachers; and teacher educators, and included people who were relatively new teachers to those who had been in the profession for decades. Each week's attendance ranged between 60-90 participants, with many attending each session. Each session was facilitated by two master teachers who were part of the Collaborative for Spirituality in Education.

The twelve virtual sessions were created to achieve several objectives. First, the sessions themselves had to create a spiritual space for teachers. The Awakened Schools Institute modeled for educators what spiritually supportive education looks like. Specifically, we welcomed people by name; we encouraged people to come as they were and to be present as themselves, which thus included meeting their kids and pets; being supportive of those who were not comfortable turning their cameras on; and providing many ways in which people could engage during each session (e.g. using the chat; sharing verbally; observing; and participating in private reflection, small group discussions, and large group sharing).

Secondly, we gave teachers time and space to be contemplative, primarily through centering, meditation, and journaling. We gave teachers time to engage with each other in small groups, to get to know each other and to talk about this type of work in an intentional way in a space set aside for these types of conversations. We also provided time for whole group sharing, again allowing participants to engage through multiple means (chat, emojis, verbally) so as to decrease barriers to participation. In each session, we presented teachers with research and also with a set of practices which could be applied, used, or adapted for use in a variety of settings. We presented our research, along with the research of others, and showed how the 11 drivers of spiritually supportive schools provided a root system for social and emotional learning, trauma-informed pedagogy, and culturally relevant teaching.

The practices which we included varied widely, and we discussed during each session how they might be adapted for different classes, schools, settings, and grades. For example, during one session, participants learned about the Indigenous roots of circles and how circles are part of a larger restorative practice approach in school and classrooms (Boyes-Watson & Pranis, 2015; Owen & Buck, 2020). Participants also learned about the importance of creating a centerpiece for each circle, a ritual, symbolic focal point for the circle, which could be co-created with or entirely designed by students. Participants were then given time to think about how they might use circles in their classrooms, and what centerpieces they could create. In another session, participants meditated to a piece of music for nearly 15 minutes. The two facilitators then processed the meditation with participants, provided examples of how this meditation is used and adapted in PK-grade 12, and gave participants space to discuss how they might

use it in their classrooms. Finally, during one session, a guest facilitator led the participants through a process of workshopping an area of their teaching practice which they wanted to further develop. Prior to the session, all participants were invited to share an area of their teaching practice that they wanted to make more spiritually supportive. The guest facilitator led all other participants through a process of identifying current strengths of her practice, identifying her resources and where she had the power to make change, and to provide time for all to give ideas for how she could deepen her practice. Following each session, we provided teachers with resources, some which were for their own nourishment and growth and some which could be used in the classroom with their students. These included research articles, blog posts, activities, meditations, texts to use with students, videos, and music.

## Data Collection and Analysis

We collected data throughout the Awakened Schools Institute, which enabled us to develop sessions in response to participants' feedback and to assess the overall effectiveness of the program. We collected data in two ways: through participant surveys and through researcher field notes. During and following each session of the Awakened Schools Institute, the first author of this chapter wrote detailed notes about the session, paying particular attention to participants' comments and body language.

Participants were asked to complete a brief survey following each session, which was sent electronically. Each survey asked participants four open-response questions and one Likert-type item (an example survey is included as Appendix A). The four open response questions asked participants to share their biggest takeaway from the session; what questions or wonderings they had following the session; what they were looking forward to putting into their teaching practice as a result of the session; and what about the session could be improved. The Likert-type item asked participants to rate, on a scale of 1 (not at all helpful) to 5 (extremely helpful) how helpful they felt the session was. The final survey also included questions to evaluate the Institute in its entirety.

While each survey informed subsequent sessions of the Institute (e.g. we increased the amount of time participants spent in small groups, provided additional resources, increased our discussions around implementing this in public schools based on survey responses), analysis on the data was reserved until the Institute ended in spring 2022. We employed the same analytic methods to this data set as we had used for the initial data, choosing a grounded theory approach to inductively understand participants' experiences with the Awakened Schools Institute (Charmaz, 2014). The research team consisted of ten researchers, including the principal facilitator for the Institute and nine master's level graduate students, most of whom had also attended the Awakened Schools Institute as observers.

To begin our analysis, the survey data were cleaned, compiled, and separated by open-response and Likert-type items. Each member of the research team read through all of the open-response survey data, and independently coded it using inductive methods. We again used the constant comparative method, revising and adding codes to best name, label, and categorize the data (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2015). The team met on a weekly basis over six weeks to discuss and clarify their coding. Through these discussions, we began to see both common themes and counterexamples, which were tracked through analytic memos and which informed subsequent coding. The team also discussed the researcher's field notes. Once the coding of the open-response survey data had been completed, the team met several times to discuss the findings and next steps. Through these conversations, and in dialogue with the principal investigator of the initial research and with one of the other primary stakeholders of this work, we began to see the emergence of a 12th driver of spiritually supportive education: *the reauthorization of teachers*.

Over the course of several weeks, much discussion, and the writing of analytic memos, the team clarified this new driver. We also retroactively examined the data from our initial study to determine if this driver had been present in some way in our initial dataset, or if this driver was present only when participants were applying our framework. These findings are described in more detail below.

While a full analysis of this data is beyond the scope of this chapter, it is relevant to note that the average helpfulness score across 12 surveys was 4.57, indicating that survey respondents found each session of the course to be extremely helpful. This was also supported by the final survey, which showed that participants found the Awakened Schools Institute as a whole to be extremely helpful, rating the entire Institute at a 4.5/5 on the helpfulness scale.

## Limitations

There are a few limitations to this research. During the Awakened Schools Institute sessions, only one researcher took field notes. This was because there were only two facilitators in the room, and it would have been difficult for both to take notes. Though all those on the team discussed the notes and sessions, both shortly after each session and during our analysis period, having additional written field notes from the session may have added to our understanding of participants' experiences of the Institute. Our response rate on the survey was around 50% of people who attended each session, and so the impressions of half of the participants were not reflected in the surveys. It is also possible that those who took the survey felt the strongest and most positive about their experience, and thus our data might be skewed in a way that indicated that the Awakened Schools Institute was more helpful than it was.

## FINDING THE 12TH DRIVER: THE REAUTHORIZATION OF TEACHERS

The educators who participated in The Awakened Schools Institute were burned out, exhausted from the shift and extension of emergency remote teaching and all that teachers took on during the pandemic. Further adding to teachers' stress was our country's reckoning with systemic racism. Finally, educators faced presumptions that they were not working hard enough while simultaneously being asked to address more regulations and expectations than in the past. Each of these reports aligned with recent research around teacher burnout (Ferguson et al., 2012; Learning Policy Institute, 2018; Pressley, 2021; Shen et al., 2015; Sutcher et al., 2019).

By observing the application of the 11 drivers of spiritually supportive education through the Awakened Schools Institute, we identified a 12th driver of spiritually supportive education which supported educators in building inner resilience against these stressors. Specifically, we found through the teachers' application of the initial 11 drivers reauthorized teachers in their practice. During the Awakened Schools Institute, teachers felt that they were able to reclaim their identities as teachers. Teachers spoke about their experiences with the Awakened Schools Institute along three main themes: they spoke of teaching as a calling and returning to their true *inner teacher*; they spoke of increased agency; and they spoke about being reauthorized into their teaching practice explicitly. Each of these is described in greater detail below.

## Teaching as a Calling

Educators began to return to the root of their calling to be teachers: of creating a space for students to learn, grow, and thrive. For some, this was centered on the teacher's identity and how they wanted to be in the classroom. Some participants saw their inner teacher, the term used in the Awakened Schools Institute to describe one's highest self as a teacher, through the Institute. The inner teacher is the fullest and best expression of oneself as a teacher. One participant, a public elementary school teacher from Michigan, shared about her own recent experiences in the classroom and how the Awakened Schools Institute brought her back to who she wanted to be as a teacher:

*I've been losing patience in the classroom lately and it's been terribly challenging. Hearing that our inner teacher already knows exactly what to do, but our trauma and inner critic silences that wisdom was important for me to hear today. I think that will help me pause and respond more mindfully.*

The Awakened Schools Institute helped this teacher to understand why they were reacting as they were in the classroom, and provided research and strategies to guide them back to being the teacher they wanted to be.

For other participants, the Institute reflected back to them what they had done, or were doing, that aligned with their inner teacher. For instance, a public elementary school teacher from Michigan shared that the Awakened Schools Institute "really reaffirmed that a lot of things I'm doing with kids, or used to do with kids but forgot about, are really good." Teachers shared similar sentiments about reclaiming their inner teacher frequently, such as the public elementary school teacher from Massachusetts who said that she was "looking forward to being more of [her] authentic self in the classroom."

For some teachers, the Awakened Schools Institute prompted teachers to consider the educational environments they were creating in their classrooms. While some teachers considered how to create spiritually supportive pedagogies or activities as a means of nurturing their students' spirituality, some teachers thought more conceptually about how the culture of schools and classrooms could be spiritually supportive. As one public school elementary teacher from New York said,

*My biggest takeaway is to think about the systems I have in my classroom and think about if they are liberating or oppressing my students. I am really thinking about my purpose for the way things are being done and thinking about what it is truly teaching my students.*

The concepts of liberation and oppression – both spiritual and temporal – was echoed by other participants, including one public school teacher from California who said:

*My biggest takeaway is the reminder of how systems in my classroom and around my school are oppressive. Trust is essential, not only for the kids to trust me and me to trust the kids, but also trusting myself and not allowing others' oppressive voices to impact my community. I think I'm recognizing that I need to unlearn being compliant and become a leader, a teacher.*

Participants in the Awakened Schools Institute understood that creating spiritually supportive learning environments meant that they needed to understand who was in their classroom and how the dynamics of the culture (of the classroom, school, and wider community) impacted each student's spiritual and

holistic development. Teachers did not feel that this was an additional task; rather, they saw it as essential to teaching the whole child.

## Teacher Agency

Participants in the Awakened Schools Institute also felt a renewed sense of agency in their teaching practice. Teachers felt capable of creating spiritually supportive environments in their classrooms, and they felt empowered to do so. This shift towards greater teacher agency included knowing that they had the power to make change within their classrooms. Participants described their increased agency in a variety of ways, from a private school early childhood teacher in Kentucky shifting to "creating a sense of wonder and unconditional love and acceptance in my classroom," to a public high school teacher in New York realizing that they could "control in the manner that I remove boundaries to make room for spirituality." Another teacher who taught at a public elementary school in New York considered how to incorporate spirituality through activities they were already doing by "prioritizing more of this [spiritual] work in my classroom through read alouds." In each case, teachers knew how they wanted to shift their teaching practice to be more spiritually supportive and felt the agency to make those changes.

Some of the participants focused their agency on specific changes and goals for their classrooms. One private school elementary teacher from Kentucky was supporting students' spirituality during transition periods: "as a specialist teacher who has 6 different classes, I am thinking about my transition rituals to begin and end my classes." A teacher educator from a public university in Maryland, who joined the program to prepare her preservice teachers to create spiritually supportive classrooms, focused on revising her way of teaching about learning and morning meeting circles. In particular, she planned to revise her teaching about them to be grounded in their Indigenous and spiritual roots, saying she was: "very resolute about the importance of grouping people in a circle before a discussion starts. I had never reflected on the issues of equity, voice, trust and the infinite when working in circles." Some teachers put what they had learned immediately into practice, such as this middle and high school teacher from a private school in Kentucky:

*I was going to go in tomorrow and discuss what my 8th grade students have NOT done (i.e. assignments) but instead I am going to have a circle conversation with them about what they HAVE positively done and how we can work together to help each other fulfill their potential. I want to give them space to share what is holding them back and to give themselves permission to tell themselves that it's ok to feel insecure. I also want them to give me feedback on how I can better support them. That feels scary and I appreciate the encouragement to make myself vulnerable with my students. We ask them to be vulnerable in so many ways everyday.*

The teachers who participated in the Awakened Schools Institute felt they had the right and responsibility to create a spiritually nurturing environment for their students, and they now felt equipped to do so.

Finally, some teachers' agency led them to have agency over how they supported their own practice. Some teachers responded to the spiritual practices which were offered as part of the Awakened Schools Institute by seeing a need for on-going spiritual engagement themselves. For some, attending to their own spirituality and mental health brought clarity of purpose and provided time for teachers to think about why they were teaching in the first place. For instance, one of our participants, a public high school teacher from New York, shared that their main takeaway from the Awakened Schools Institute was:

*To check in with myself mentally and spiritually in order to step away from the onslaught of noise in our interconnected world and to encourage students to do the same as a way of being aware of where we are in this moment and refocusing on where we want to be.*

Participating in the Awakened Schools Institute prompted this teacher to think deeply about their teaching and about bringing their practice back to where they want to be as teachers. Teachers made the connection between supporting their own spiritual lives and creating spiritually nurturing environments for their students. One public elementary school teacher from Florida captured this well when she said that she would "Take time to center myself so I can continue to find my authentic self and then can better be equipped to facilitate a healing, centered learning environment where students can show up as their authentic selves too." Similarly, a public elementary school teacher from New York was grateful for the way in which the Institute modeled spiritually supportive education: "I was truly moved by the way the presenter took care of us as participants. Their honoring of our needs made learning possible. I hope to transfer this care to my class community." Through the Awakened Schools Institute, teachers felt they had agency to create spiritually supportive learning environments, by supporting their own inner lives and then creating pedagogical approaches and classroom culture that supported students' spirituality.

## Reauthorization of Teachers

Throughout the Awakened Schools Institute, educators were explicit about the ways in which they felt burned out. Teachers were already responsible for many student needs, both in and out of the classroom, to which was added the nation's racial reckoning, emergency remote teaching and collective trauma through the pandemic, and a renewed sense of disrespect for the teaching profession. As one of our participants, a public high school teacher from New York, put it:

*Thinking about how to address the oppressiveness of being expected to teach the same curriculum and at the same pace this year as in years past without taking into account that we need time to address the trauma of the pandemic on even us as educators. The amount of pressure we face this year is staggering.*

In their candor about sharing these experiences, teachers also contrasted them both with how they imagined teaching to be, and how they were being invited to reimagine it through the Awakened Schools Institute. Participants said that they felt supported and encouraged through the Institute; moreover, teachers saw themselves as active participants in changing school culture or the system for the better. Teachers were seen – and recognized themselves – as professionals, leaders, and change agents, and they felt a renewed sense of rootedness in their vocation. We termed this phenomenon that we observed *the reauthorization of teachers*.

We observed this reauthorization in teachers in a number of ways. Many educators seemed to come through a shift in the ways that they saw themselves. One public high school teacher from New York said that throughout the Institute, they felt "empowered and at peace." Others were more explicit, one of whom said they planned to "bring more of my authentic me to the classroom" (public high school teacher, Maryland). An early childhood teacher at a private school in Kentucky was reauthorized into "keeping in mind the GOALS of MY classroom." Another public elementary school teacher from New York felt encouraged to "show up more for the students I am of service to, even if it means coming out of my comfort zone," seeing themselves truly and being open to recognizing what their students needed.

Other educators reflected that they were still on the journey to becoming the teacher they wanted to be. As one middle school teacher from a private school in New Jersey shared:

*Wonderings I have for myself are how I can continue this work for myself and how I can continue this work at my school (not just for my students, but for co-workers, etc.). At a personal level, I am also questioning how I can be the teacher I want to be.*

Each of these teachers had a renewed sense of clarity and purpose in their teaching, even if they were still thinking about how their reauthorized practice would look.

For some educators, this reauthorization led to a reflective, creative space where teachers felt freedom to wonder and consider what changes were necessary. As one public elementary school teacher from New York shared:

*I want to take the next few days to do some deep listening at my school. What are students saying? What are teachers saying? What are our families saying? How can we as a school be better at listening and learning from one another?*

Another public elementary school teacher from New York was similarly reflective:

*I want to look for spaces where we can include spirituality at our school. I see a disconnect with students and I really believe that developing their spirituality is the key to the much needed healing.*

The work of creating spiritually supportive school culture deeply resonated with the participants. As on public high school teacher from New York put so well:

*The classroom is a space for awakened practices (meditation, etc.), awakened beliefs, community and identity work, awakened spirits, and so much more. It's important to focus on the whole person, while giving kids the space to nurture and grow. Teachers and students benefit from thinking about spirituality in their lives, the classroom, and school setting.*

These teachers saw in themselves the space and authority to consider what was best for their students and for their schools, and felt that asking these big questions was not futile but preparation for change.

Finally, the school wide personnel who participated in the Awakened Schools Institute were reauthorized into their practice as well. A public-school literacy coach from New York felt that part of their role was "encouraging the teachers to bet on themselves, choose the student over the mandate and to always go to meetings prepared with student data to support those bets!" Pulling everything together, a head of a private school in New Jersey said that "the more we see the humanity in our students and the more we see that teaching humanity is the greatest learning, the better teachers we become."

## DISCUSSION

The Awakened Schools Institute reauthorized the participants into their teaching practice. Teachers found the Institute to be accessible, helpful, and supportive; they understood the framework of the 11

drivers of a spiritually supportive school, engaged with the material, and thought deeply about how they might apply the framework in their own classrooms and schools. As the participants began to implement these 11 drivers, we recognized that this reauthorization of teachers themselves was the central driver of spiritually supportive school culture. It was through this reauthorization of teachers that we became acutely aware of the critical role of the teacher as an agent of change and co-creator of school culture. Throughout the Awakened Schools Institute, and in reviewing teachers' responses to the 11 drivers of an awakened school culture, it was clear that the reauthorization of teachers was the 12th and central driver of a spiritually supportive school.

Within their classrooms, teachers are agents of change and drivers of culture: they establish the climate, create rituals, and manage what happens in their classrooms. Further, teachers are co-creators of the whole school culture. While a school's mission and vision might be set by the principal or head of school, how the mission and vision are inculcated into school culture is through the participation of all in the school community. When teachers are reauthorized into their teaching practice – when they are recognized as professionals with expertise, agency, and vocation – they are able to create learning environments and experiences that support students' spiritual development, which in turn is a central driver of spiritually supportive school culture.

Importantly, all participants had some freedom and encouragement to create more spiritually supportive schools and classrooms from the school's leadership. Some participants had the explicit support of their administrators: they were participating as part of their school, and thus supported by administrators; or they were either encouraged by the school's leadership to engage with the Institute. There were some teachers who attended the Institute whose support from their school's leadership was more neutral: the administrators trusted their teachers to engage in professional development that they needed, even if it was not at the moment an administrative priority.

While many teachers have some degree of autonomy in their classrooms, meaningful change is best supported by having support in place to facilitate and maintain that change. In our initial dataset, the leaders and leadership teams of all participating schools intentionally worked to redesign their school's culture to be more spiritually supportive. Support for an awakened school culture came from the top, and time, resources, and support were given to ensuring that culture was the one which was co-created. While some participants in the Awakened Schools Institute were attending at the suggestion, or with the encouragement, of their administration, many participants were the only person from their school who was enrolled in the Institute. As one participant from a large public school district in California shared,

*I would have liked to have my school team (Principal, AP, Instructional Coach, PSA Counselor) to have participated as a whole group. This information was so very informative, applicable, necessary, vital, important at this crucial and sensitive time in education around the world.*

Meaningful change can begin from the ground and work its way up, and many of the participants in the Awakened Schools Institute intended to make change themselves and to encourage colleagues and administrators to be part of future cohorts of the Institute, making and sustaining cultural changes without support is difficult. As we continue to offer the Awakened Schools Institute, we will look for ways in which we can support teachers in working with their administrators to enact spiritually supportive school culture.

This has implications for both future iterations of The Awakened Schools Institute, the support of spirituality in education, and teacher professional development more broadly. Having the support or

trust of your administrators appears to be a necessary component of entering into this work fully. Thus, for future Awakened Schools Institute participants, and for those who wish to redesign their school's culture to be more spiritually supportive, the leadership of the school (and, if appropriate, the school district) needs to be supportive of this cultural shift. While those participants whose administrators were not yet ready to make whole-school culture change were trusted by their administrators both to attend the Institute and to make changes within their classrooms, this work will be easier, and teachers will themselves be more spiritually nourished, if administrators support whole school culture shifts towards more spiritually supportive education.

## IMPLICATIONS

This chapter has some important implications for researchers, teachers, and administrators. Given the lack of research in understanding educators' spirituality and its role in practice, future scholarly work should examine how teachers' spirituality can be supported and what the impacts of that support are. Importantly, this research has shown that nurturing educators' spirituality reauthorizes teachers by renewing their vocation, reaffirming their agency, and providing inner resilience against the stressors inherent to the system of education. Going forward, teachers and administrators should be attentive to their own spirituality, ensuring that their inner lives are an important priority. Like many, educators need support in this, and thus care and attention should be given to nurturing educators' spirituality as part of a spiritually supportive school culture. This could include physical space in the school and dedicated time in the school day set apart for spiritual practice and the inclusion of spiritual practices as part of the faculty meetings and professional development.

## CONCLUSION

These findings are a call to action. Creating spiritually supportive, or awakened, school culture has always been important, but it is timelier now. We face a widespread teacher shortage and teacher burn out, related to testing, emergency remote education, the country's racial reckoning, and increasing demands on education that are stressful for students as well as teachers. At the same time, young people are facing unprecedented levels of suffering in a society which is increasingly polarized and disconnected. Because we know that having a strong spiritual core – developed by fostering our innate spirituality in a spiritually nurturing environment – provides protective benefits against suffering, it is imperative that we find ways in which we can create spiritually supportive environments. For children and adolescents, one of those places must be where they spend much of their time: schools. Through our initial research, we identified 11 drivers of spiritually supportive schools, creating a framework which can be used by any school to create a spiritually supportive school culture.

The Awakened Schools Institute sought to model this framework for educators, as a way of learning through experience how to create spiritually supportive schools. Through this approach, teachers could experience a spiritually supportive environment while understanding the science underlying it and learning how to design such spaces for their students. Participants in the Awakened Schools Institute had a transformative experience themselves. Engaging with their own spiritual core as a point of entry to nurturing their students' spirituality allowed teachers to return to that purpose and intent, to feel buoyed

and uplifted, connected to their teaching practice, and seen as experts with great care and attention for their work. In effect, they were seen as whole beings and teaching as a whole-person enterprise; and what they experienced encouraged them to want to create it for their students. Through the Awakened Schools Institute, we identified that this reauthorization of teachers was the twelfth driver of spiritually supportive school culture.

Educators' participation in the Awakened Schools Institute showed how necessary supporting teachers' own spirituality is to creating an awakened school culture. Teachers become teachers because they have a passion for kids, a love of learning, and an inherent idealism about the power of education. In effect, teaching speaks to their own spiritual core: it is a vocation. As we heap more and more on teachers' shoulders without enough support, pay, time, or respect – nurturing teachers' spirituality allowed them to reconnect with their purposes of being educators and allowed them to see themselves as drivers of culture and student experience rather than part of a daily grind. Nurturing teachers' spirituality reauthorized them into their teaching practice, allowing them to reconnect with their vocation on a deeper level, and to see themselves as leaders and change agents in schools. The importance of the spiritual core of the teacher, and the connection between the teacher's spirituality, their calling as a teacher, and their agency in their teaching practice, cannot be overstated, making this twelfth driver of spiritually supportive school culture the most central to creating an awakened school.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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## KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

**Awakened School Culture:** School culture which supports students' innate spirituality.

**Awakened Schools Institute:** A year-long professional development course for educators to intentionally design spiritually supportive school culture.

**Drivers of Awakened School Culture:** Elements or factors which contribute to a spiritually supportive, or Awakened, school culture.

**Grounded Theory:** An approach to data analysis which approaches data without preconceptions or a prior framework against which data is evaluated.

**Spirituality:** A natural human capacity for an augmented state of awareness in which one feels connected to all life.

**Teacher Burnout:** Chronic stress and exhaustion related to teaching which has not been successfully managed and which may lead to teachers leaving the profession.

**Teacher Reauthorization:** Teachers experience a renewal of their vocation or a return to the root of their calling to be teachers and feel agency in creating a spiritually supportive environment.

# APPENDIX 1

*Figure 1. Awakened schools institute participant survey*