

W-3: Sustain energy to reach ambitious goals

Make time for yourself

We feel such tremendous responsibility for our students' success and well-being that it can be easy to neglect our own needs—and if we neglect ourselves too much, we can end up on the path to burn out. In order to avoid this, be sure to make time for the activities that best reenergize and relax you. For some teachers, this means keeping a journal, cooking, gardening, going to the movies, visiting museums, painting, playing or listening to music, following a favorite sports team, participating in community theatre – but you should do whatever activities relax and rejuvenate *you*. Find a reading nook, a café or some other relaxing or invigorating spot in your new city, town, or region. Plan dinners or events that have nothing to do with school. Many corps members find that making time for their spiritual life is absolutely essential to them in maintaining energy and motivation in the classroom. Whatever it is that you need, scheduling personal time into your work week is a healthy and important move that will help you remain a real source of strength for your students.

Rachel Meiklejohn (New Mexico '02) shares her own realization that she was going to have to step back and make more time for herself if she was going to truly support her kids throughout the whole year:

My first few months as a teacher I worked hard! I felt as if I was eating, sleeping, dreaming, and breathing teaching; despite all this effort, I felt as if I was failing. My life experiences up to that point had taught me that if I just worked hard enough I would be successful. As a teacher, however, I discovered that this strategy had its flaws. There was always one more poster I could be making, one more paper to grade and so I drove myself to do more and more. As long as I was exerting every ounce of myself into planning and creating, I didn't feel guilty for failing to create an effective classroom because I was doing everything within my power to reach that goal. It was an eye-opening experience to realize that if I took time away from my work for myself, not only was I happier and more balanced, and therefore better able to deal with problems that arose, but that I was able to reflect and prioritize and therefore work more efficiently.