Foreword

Drawing from extensive, varied and relevant experiences, these authors show us the possibilities of educational equity and justice when educators decide to notice instead of judging, care rather than criticizing, and pursue wellness over pathologizing. All Students Must Thrive is an extremely important and excellent book that focuses on structural, institutional, systemic, and individual challenges we face in education in our quest to teach and support the whole child. The authors place, front and center, the critical need for those in education to understand and respond to students and educators’ psychological, social, and emotional wellness and humanity. A fine balance of insights and recommendations for student and adult development, we read in this book how living and learning in racist, sexist, homophobic, xenophobic and otherwise discriminatory contexts, inside and outside of school, can result in various forms of toxicity, which have been shown to result in increased stress, anxiety, depression, and trauma writ large.

This book demonstrates that it is difficult to teach subject matter to any group of students in any school context without deeply interrogating and building tools to teach to and through the psychological, social, and emotional health of students. Readers are introduced to elements of what the authors conceptualize as critical wellness. Critical wellness is advanced as a necessity for educators and others who work in educational contexts with students whose social, emotional, and political landscapes have worked against them, their families, and their communities. Indeed, as the authors have conceptualized it, anyone working with young people from camp counselors to social workers to school educators should press toward critical wellness. When critical wellness becomes part of our educational ethos, students and educators alike benefit because they work concurrently toward healing and humanization. As a pedagogical stance and an outcome, the authors advance humanization as an essential tenet of critical wellness. In the authors’ words: “Humanization as a critically relevant, and real, form
of social and emotional health and well-being, must channel the hurt and desire of students to express the pathos of community suffering that too often goes unacknowledged.”

Thus, drawing from research literature, the authors offer optimistic views, insights, and recommendations of what is possible in our quest to support and care for the humanity and the humanization of all students inside and outside of school. Indeed, the book advances an optimistic agenda of transformation, one that leaves readers with not only a call to do better but overt examples of what we can and should do to build knowledge and understanding of Black and Brown students, students whose first language is not English, students experiencing homelessness, and students who live below the poverty line. Cornel West wrote in the preface of the important book *Restoring Hope: Conversations on the Future of Black America*:

> Hope is not the same as optimism. Optimism adopts the role of the spectator who surveys the evidence in order to infer that things are going to get better . . . Hope enacts the stance of the participant who actively struggles [emphasis added] against the evidence in order to change the deadly tides of wealth inequality, group xenophobia, and personal despair. Only a new wave of vision, courage, and hope can keep us sane—and preserve the decency and dignity requisite to revitalize our organizational energy for the work to be done. To live is to wrestle with despair yet never to allow despair to have the last word. (p. xii)

What might happen when teachers and other educators are prepared and equipped with tools to support students whose psychological, social, and emotional needs are viewed as essential to their academic success? How can we support educators in building the knowledge, attitudes, and understandings necessary to identify and respond to students’ traumatic, grieving, and psychologically strained situations? Moreover, what might happen if students who are placed on the margins of learning, those whom schools most often give up on, are understood as human beings—worthy and deserving of educational facilities, institutions, and educators of excellence? This book graces readers with eight chapters that draw from and on story, research, and promising practices that address these and so many other relevant and interrelated questions.
An invitation to push past the obvious and a call to learn with students about the intersections of mental health, trauma, and education, this book teaches as it heals and humanizes.

—H. Richard Milner IV, Cornelius Vanderbilt Professor of Education, Vanderbilt University

Reference