



## New Year Narratives: A Hopeful January Reset



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January has a way of handing us a script before we even walk back into the building.

*"This year I'll finally have it all together."*

*"This class is going to be hard."*

*"We lost momentum."*

*"I'm behind."*

*"They're behind."*

*"I should feel ready, but I don't."*

Those lines don't mean we're negative people. They mean we're human. When we step into a new stretch of time—especially after a break—our brains try to make fast sense of what's ahead. We build a narrative: a story that explains what's happening and predicts what's possible. And here's the hopeful part: narratives are not facts. They're drafts.

January doesn't require a reinvention. It offers a restart in the simplest sense: a new page, a new week, a new chance to choose a better story—one that helps us teach with clarity, interpret students with generosity, and move forward with confidence.



## What a “New Year Narrative” Really Is

What is narrative? A narrative isn't the event itself. It's what we decide the event means.

Coming back after a break is an event. The story we attach to it can be discouraging—“We lost everything; we have to start over”—or it can be grounded and hopeful—“We're returning; it'll take a few days to get our rhythm back, and we know how to do that.”

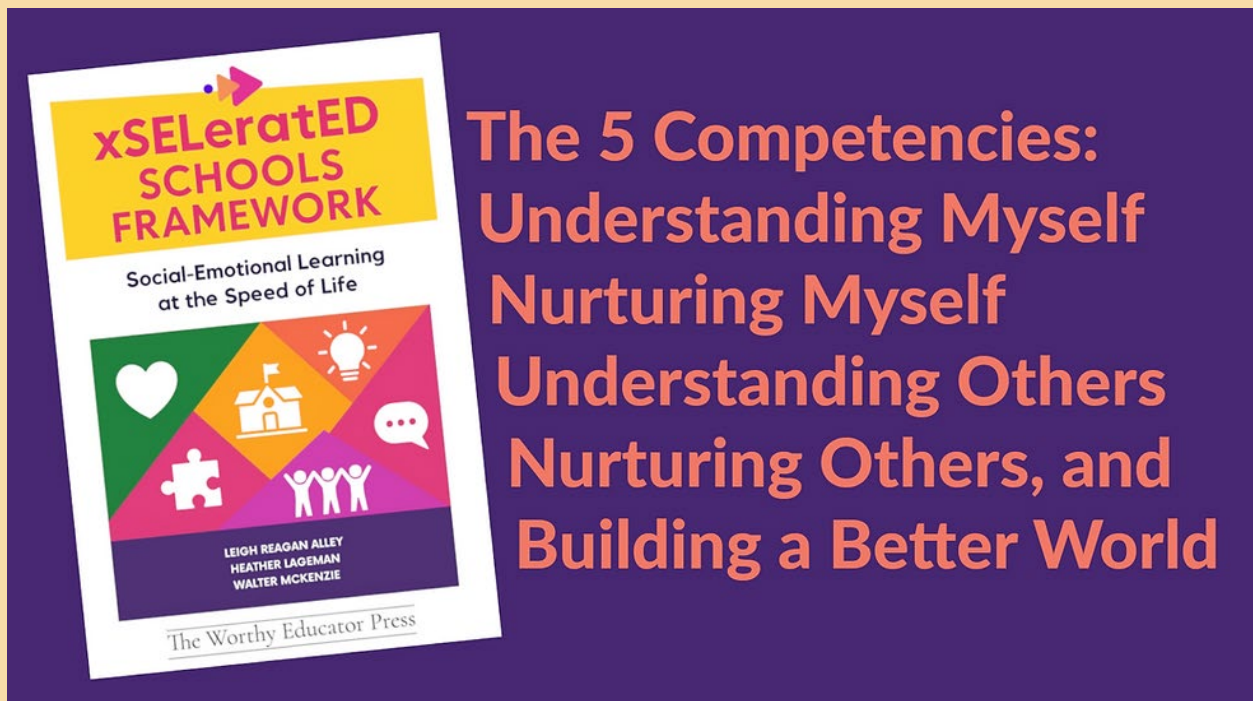
A student coming back distracted, resistant, or unusually quiet is an event. The story can tilt toward certainty—“They don't care”—or toward possibility—“Something is making this harder today; I can approach this with steadiness and a plan.”

Feeling tired or scattered is an event. The story can become personal and harsh—“I'm failing”—or it can stay accurate and workable—“I'm coming back into the pace; I can start small, get organized, and build momentum.”

Narratives aren't automatically wrong. They're often incomplete. January is simply the month when incompleteness tends to sound more convincing than it actually is.

This is why this topic sits so naturally inside our xSEleratED Schools Framework.

It's **Understanding Myself** when we notice the story we're carrying. It's **Nurturing Myself** when we choose a story that strengthens our capacity. It's **Understanding Others** when we resist assumptions about students and families. It's **Nurturing Others** when our story makes room for encouragement and invitation. And it's **Building a Better World** when our story shifts from blame to shared responsibility and shared possibility.



## The January Narratives That Quietly Shrink Our Hope

Certain scripts show up so often in January that they can feel inevitable.

One is the “perfect fresh start” story: If I do it perfectly from day one, everything will be better. It sounds motivating, but it sets us up to judge normal bumps as proof we can’t do it. Hope doesn’t come from perfection; it comes from progress.

Another is the “behind” story: We’re behind, they’re behind, I’m behind. It narrows our focus to deficits instead of growth. It makes us rush, and rushing often creates more friction. A more hopeful story doesn’t deny the work ahead; it remembers that learning is not a race, and momentum can be built.

Another is the “fixed forecast” story: This group is just like this. This year is just going to be hard. This one is subtle, because it sounds like realism. But it closes the door on change. Hope doesn’t require certainty—only openness.

And then there's the "solo hero" story: It's all on me. This one often comes from care. But it can turn care into pressure. A more hopeful story says: I can lead well, and I can lean on others. We do this work together.

The goal isn't to scold ourselves for having these narratives. The goal is to revise them—so they tell the truth and still point toward possibility.

## How to Revise the Story in Realtime

When you notice a heavy January thought, don't argue with it. Don't shame it. Just treat it like a draft and edit it.

Start here: "**The story I'm telling right now is . . .**"

That simple sentence puts you back in the author's seat.

Then ask: "**What's another true thing?**"

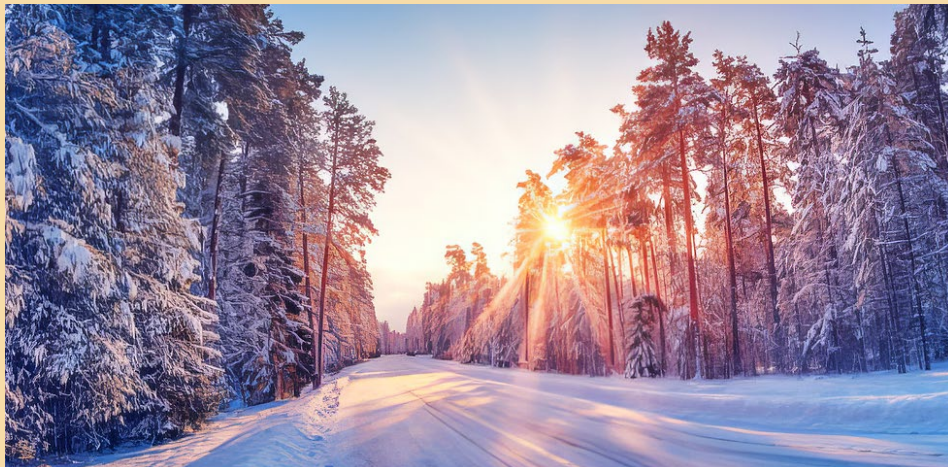
Not a forced positive. Just another true thing that widens the frame.

For example:

- The story is: "We lost momentum."  
Another true thing: "We've built momentum before—and it comes back faster than we think."
- The story is: "They don't care."  
Another true thing: "Caring doesn't always look like compliance—and I can lead with clarity without making assumptions."
- The story is: "I should feel ready."  
Another true thing: "Readiness is built by doing the next right thing, not by waiting for all of the conditions to be perfect."

Then bring it down to action: "**So today, I'm going to . . .**"

January becomes hopeful when it becomes doable.



## The January Shift That Changes Everything: Identity Anchors

Resolutions often focus on outcomes. January hope is stronger when it's rooted in identity—statements of who we are being, even while we're still warming up.

You might choose one sentence to carry for the month:

- **We are a class that practices coming back.**
- Or: **I lead with steadiness, not speed.**
- Or: **We can do hard things in kind ways.**
- Or: **Progress counts—even when it's small.**

An identity anchor becomes even more powerful when it becomes shared language. Put it where you can see it. Say it when the day starts. Return to it when it's helpful. It turns January from a test into a direction. It is language that keeps the story hopeful. Hope isn't hype. It's tone, framing, and the message, "This is workable." Sometimes that's as simple as what we say out loud.

To students, it can sound like: "It makes sense that coming back feels different. We'll get our rhythm back." Or: "Let's take the next step together." Or: "We're building the kind of classroom where we can try again without being embarrassed."

To yourself, it can sound like: "I don't have to win January. I just have to begin it." Or: "Clarity over quantity." Or: "One good routine today is progress."

If you want to bring this idea to students without making it heavy, keep it simple and forward-looking. Ask: "What helps you get back into school mode?" Then: "What do we want our January story to be as a class?" Then: "What's one habit we'll practice this week to support that story?"

Close with your anchor—short, confident, and true:

***We practice coming back.***

If you're walking into January with mixed feelings, you're not doing it wrong. You're just starting. And you have more influence than the first, often overwhelming week makes it seem. You can choose the story you tell about your students, your class, your leadership, and your capacity. You can choose a narrative that is honest about the challenge and still generous about the possibility.

January isn't asking for perfection. It's offering a fresh chance to build momentum. Give yourself permission to take hold of that gently and hopefully.

# Your Bonus January Resource!



## **New Year Narratives Draft-to-Doable Worksheet Bonus Resource**

### 1) The Draft (Name the Narrative)

Write the story your mind is handing you right now—exactly as it sounds.

"The story I'm telling right now is..."

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