

Vol. 2 Principal's Acorn Ally- Together Nurturing Acorns Into Mighty Oaks

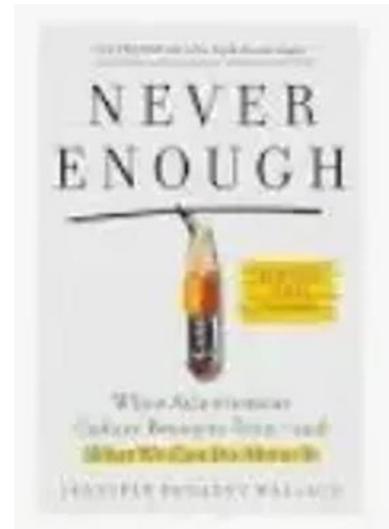
2025-26 Parent Book Study: Introduction

As a mom, I've had the privilege of raising two very different boys. Both are deeply precious and valued, yet each with unique gifts. My oldest was insatiably curious and accelerated quickly in academics, while my youngest was full of joy, people-centered, and lived life wholeheartedly. My husband and I worked to nurture who they were at their core while also stretching them in areas where they needed to grow. We were intentional about not letting their strengths define them too narrowly; instead, we hoped they would remain curious, adaptable, and open to new experiences. With that said, we were not always successful.

Why share this with you? Because parenting is hard. Like you, I've navigated the ups and downs of raising children in a complex and demanding world. I don't speak to you from a place of perfection, but from experience, humility, and a desire to partner with you. It's also why I select certain books to share each year through the Acorn Ally. Last year, we studied *The Anxious Generation*, which helped us understand the factors contributing to rising levels of childhood anxiety. (If you haven't yet had a chance to read it, or would like to revisit my chapter summaries, they are available on our school website.)

This year, our focus will shift to another challenge many families quietly face: the pressure of achievement. Our parent book study will be *Never Enough* by Jennifer Breheny Wallace. In this book, Wallace explores what she calls a "toxic achievement culture", a world where children can feel that no matter how much they do, it's never quite enough. She introduces the powerful idea of *mattering*: that what truly protects kids is not perfect grades, trophies, or accolades, but the deep sense that they are valued for who they are and for the contributions they make to those around them.

This book resonates with me deeply as I reflect back on raising my boys, especially my oldest, who at times bought into the pressures of achievement.



I remember one defining moment during his senior year at Folsom High School. He was taking advanced classes, serving as the starting center for the defending state champion football team, applying to multiple competitive colleges, and chasing the dream of valedictorian. In the midst of winter finals, while battling injuries and the weight of so many expectations, things didn't go as planned. He felt the sting of falling short in a world that measured success by titles, scores, and rankings. After the loss of the NorCal Championship game, my husband and I waited outside the locker room as teammates trickled out one by one. Blake was the last Bulldog to leave. At that moment, we couldn't fully grasp how heavy it all felt for him, and we wondered how we got to a place where a 17 year old was carrying "the weight of the world".

The book 'Never Enough' is displayed, featuring a minimalist cover design. Looking back, we recognize that Blake was caught in a toxic cycle of achievement, and there were ways we, as his parents, could have intervened differently. Additionally, as a community, we all contribute to the values and goals our children hold as measures of success, and in our case, we unintentionally reinforced pressures that became overwhelming for him. While I will always want the best for my boys and continue to hold them to high expectations, I also wish I had found ways to intervene that more directly supported their mental health and well-being. This reflection is one of many that inspired me to choose this book for the 2025–26 school year.

At Empire Oaks, our students love to learn and achieve, and we celebrate that. At the same time, we want to ensure their growth and success never come at the cost of their well-being. My hope is that as we read and discuss Never Enough, we will reflect on how to balance high expectations with unconditional love, how to see setbacks as opportunities for growth, and ways to raise children who not only excel but also know, deep down, that they truly matter.

This book, along with last year's study, supports EO's vision to "Inspire and empower every child to reach their full potential" and serves as a tool to live out our mission: "In partnership with our community, we nurture lifelong learners through inclusive, caring, and culturally responsive education fostering growth, resilience, and a sense of purpose."

In partnership,
Mrs. Christerson