Mid-America (HHS Region 7)
MHTTC
Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network
Funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

NCSMH
NATIONAL CENTER FOR SCHOOL MENTAL HEALTH

THE VALUE OF TEACHER WELL-BEING:
A RESEARCH BRIEF

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers were at a high risk for experiencing professional burnout and stress. During the pandemic, teacher stress has increased and morale has decreased. With teacher well-being directly impacting student outcomes, a lack of focus on educator well-being contributes to a public health crisis and states, districts, and schools have an ethical obligation to respond.

61%

IN A 2017 POLL FROM THE AMERICAN FEDERATION OF TEACHERS, **61% OF EDUCATORS DESCRIBED THEIR WORK AS 'ALWAYS' OR 'OFTEN' STRESSFUL**, COMPARED TO 30% OF THE GENERAL POPULATION.

MAIN AREAS OF TEACHER STRESS
- school organization (leadership, climate and culture)
- job demands
- work resources (support and autonomy in decision making)
- personal social-emotional competence (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2016)

50% OF TEACHERS HAVE SERIOUSLY CONSIDERED LEAVING THE PROFESSION. RATES ARE HIGHER (62%) FOR TEACHERS WHO REPORT FEELING UNDERVALUED AND UNDERPAID. (PHI DELTA KAPPA INTERNATIONAL, 2019)

50%

WHAT IS WELL-BEING?

Well-being is a construct that includes **positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishments** (Seligman, 2012).

Burnout (depersonalization, emotional exhaustion, lack of personal accomplishment) can **impact well-being and have adverse effects on the education system** (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010).

Individual- and organizational-level factors impact teacher well-being. In order to improve teacher well-being, schools must **support teachers in developing coping strategies** while simultaneously **addressing organizational factors that increase stress & burnout.**

WHAT FACTORS NEGATIVELY IMPACT TEACHER WELL-BEING?

CONTRIBUTORS TO TEACHER STRESS
- organizational and social pressures
- lack of administrative support and organizational structure
- lack of teacher support
- lack of professionalism
- unclear expectations
- heavy workload
(Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017)

"THIS JOB IS STRESSFUL, OVERWHELMING AND HARD. I AM OVERWORKED, UNDERPAID, UNDERAPPRECIATED, QUESTIONED AND BLAMED FOR THINGS THAT ARE OUT OF MY CONTROL."
(American Federation of Teachers, 2015)

Time pressure had **documented effects on teachers' emotional exhaustion,** while discipline problems and student disengagement were associated with feelings of **depersonalization and lack of accomplishment** (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017).

HOW DOES TEACHER WELL-BEING IMPACT OUTCOMES?

A large urban school district that invested in on-site employee wellness **saved $2.8 million in employee health care costs**, saw a **6% decrease in turnover intention**, as well as **higher teacher evaluation scores and student achievement**
(Integrated Benefits Institute, 2015)

TEACHERS' INCREASED EMOTIONAL EXHAUSTION WAS ASSOCIATED WITH A **9% DECREASE IN STUDENTS' STANDARDIZED ACHIEVEMENT SCORES** (ARENS & MORIN, 2016).

TEACHERS' WELL-BEING WAS DIRECTLY ASSOCIATED WITH AN **INCREASE IN STUDENTS' NUMERACY ACHIEVEMENT** (COLLIE & MARTIN, 2017).

Teacher stress is linked to **high turnover**, which in turn can result in l**ower achievement for students and higher costs for school districts** (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and Penn State University, 2016).

77% of teachers say they are **working more in 2020 than in previous years**, and 60% report they enjoy their job less than a year ago. Approximately **27% of educators are considering leaving the profession due to COVID-19** (Horace Mann Educators Corporation, 2020).

School-wide wellness promotion programs can **save schools money**. A school district implementing a staff wellness program did a cost analysis over two years and found on average **medical claims payments were lower for teachers in the wellness program** (Merrill & LeCheminant, 2016)

PROFESSIONAL **ATTRITION** FROM ROUGHLY HALF A MILLION TEACHERS EACH YEAR COSTS THE UNITED STATES UP TO **$2.2 BILLION ANNUALLY**
(Alliance for Excellence in Education, 2014).

$2.2 B

WHAT FACTORS POSITIVELY IMPACT TEACHER WELL-BEING?

School **administrators can create a positive school climate** and promote teacher well-being through "respecting educators as professionals, granting teachers autonomy and voice, creating opportunities for relationship building, and setting realistic goals " (Albrecht, 2019).

Trust in colleagues and **a trusting environment is critical for teachers' work place satisfaction**, emotional well-being, resilience and professional self-efficacy (Yin et al., 2016).

Teachers' **positive perceptions** of school climate were linked to **increased job satisfaction. Teachers' self-efficacy in managing behavior had a positive effect on job satisfaction and a negative effect on burnout** (Malinen & Savolainen, 2016).

HOW CAN SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING IMPROVE TEACHER WELL-BEING?

Because adults are the **primary agents of change**, adult SEL skills must first be cultivated to optimally improve student social, emotional, behavioral, and academic outcomes.

Adult SEL cultivation results in:
- Increased patience and empathy, healthy communication, safe learning environments
- Teacher retention, collaborative work, collegiality
- Better modeling for students
- Increased quality of relationships and school climate

When educators reflect on their social, emotional, and behavioral skills, identify their strengths and their areas of struggle, and design a plan to use this information to grow personally and professionally they become better equipped to meet the social, emotional, behavioral, and academic needs of **all** students.

WHAT UNIVERSAL STRATEGIES CAN IMPROVE TEACHER WELL-BEING?

ENVIRONMENT
- keep physical environment well-lit and well maintained
- establish a gratitude wall in classroom/school
- designate teacher wellness spot, such as a break room
- provide access to how and where to seek support
- encourage mental wellness through materials displayed in school

RELATIONSHIPS
- foster intentional mentorship
- provide opportunity for teacher-to-teacher connection
- allow for multidirectional feedback
- demonstrate and accept that its okay to make mistakes
- commit to catching others doing well and calling them out
- do random acts of kindness

ENGAGEMENT
- identify personal character strengths and have conversations with colleagues about strengths
- have leadership match staff with activities that use their strengths
- set meaningful goals

VALUES & MEANING
- include and promote wellness as part of school values
- have leaders provide time & resources for teachers to work on their personal wellness
- track professional progress
- provide opportunities for education about stress and well-being

ACCOMPLISHMENT
- reinforce wellness goals
- set goals with multiple pathways
- engage in solution-focused conversations
- celebrate moments of positive impact

(Falecki & Mann, 2020)

WHAT ARE THE FIRST STEPS STATES, DISTRICTS, AND SCHOOLS CAN TAKE TO IMPROVE TEACHER WELL-BEING?

Prioritize Teacher Well-Being

Create time for staff to focus on their well-being
- Review educators' responsibilities
- Remove some responsibilities to allow time for staff well-being
- Designate specific time for teacher well-being
- Send out a statement from leadership that teacher well-being will be a priority, highlighting action steps

Assess Need

Collect data to inform well-being strategies and practices
- Identify which well-being measures to use
- Make sure any measures can be completed easily (online form)
- Summarize and disseminate findings to teachers regularly
- Respond to feedback

For individual well-being
- Professional Quality of Life Scale (PROQOL)
- Positive Ways of Working through Stress
- Teacher Subjective Wellbeing Questionnaire

For schools/organizational well-being
- Organizational Self-Care Checklist

Create Safe & Supportive Environments

Adapt organizational culture to promote well-being
- Clearly define teacher roles and responsibilities
- Allow for staff to provide input into practices and policies
- Provide regular supervision that includes addressing job-stress and self-care strategies
- Provide training on well-being strategies and support to implement those strategies

Normalize & Practice Wellness

Leaders should normalize that wellness is an on-going process full of peaks and valleys
- Regularly discuss stress and the nature of stress
- Dedicate well-being time in meetings
- Identify a wellness 'champion' (or team of champions)
- Create accountability groups

Address Barriers & Reinforce

Regularly check-in & assess feedback about barriers to practicing wellness
Reward and Recognize wellness as something valued by the school
- Publical recognition of wellbeing practices
- Financial and material rewards

RESOURCES TO SUPPORT EDUCATOR WELL-BEING AND ENHANCE SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING

Supporting Teacher Well-Being

Adult Resilience Curriculum (ARC)
WISE Teacher Well-Being Workbook
Yale Managing Emotions in Times of Uncertainty & Stress
Classroom Wise: Well-Being Information and Strategies for Educators

Supporting Whole School Mental Health and Well-Being

The MHTTC School Mental Health Curriculum
The SHAPE System
The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)

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Resources

1. Adult Resilience Curriculum-https://mhttcnetwork.org/centers/mid-america-mhttc/adult-resilience-curriculum-arc-educators
2. WISE Teacher Well-Being Workbook-http://www.medstarwise.org/resources/teacher-well-being-workbook.pdf
3. Yale Managing Emotions in Times of Uncertainty & Stress-https://www.coursera.org/learn/managing-emotions-uncertainty-stress
4. Classroom Wise: Well-Being Information and Strategies for Educators-https://mhttcnetwork.org/free-smh-course
5. The MHTTC School Mental Health Curriculum-https://mhttcnetwork.org/centers/mhttc-network-coordinating-office/national-school-mental-health-curriculum-and-related
6. The SHAPE System-https://www.theshapesystem.com/
7. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)-https://casel.org/