# What is workplace well-being?

Workplace well-being refers to the overall health of employees in the workplace, including their physical, mental, emotional and social health. It also encompasses the work environment and culture more broadly as these affect the extent to which employees feel supported, respected and valued. Workplace well-being is a shared responsibility of the district as the employer, unions/associations, co-workers and individuals.

There are three interconnected domains that work together to influence workplace well-being: *systems*, *each other* and *self*.
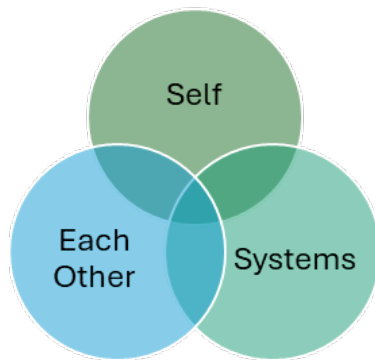
Systems: Policies, procedures and practices impact well-being in the workplace. This domain addresses the importance of identifying and understanding systemic factors that either contribute to or detract from well-being. When policies, procedures and practices that support well-being are embedded in the workplace, it allows individuals and teams to thrive.

Each Other: This domain highlights the importance of relationships and a sense of community. The nature of work relationships and the environments that contain them can have significant positive or negative impacts on well-being. Educators value having opportunities to connect with and support each other (Giroux, 2019).

Self: This domain includes self-leadership (i.e. knowing, motivating and managing yourself) and self-care. It is a recognition that, while well-being is inextricably connected to relational and systemic aspects of the workplace, individuals are responsible for being aware of their needs and how they can meet them in prosocial ways.

Why focus on workplace well-being in schools?

Personal and Community Benefit: While adults spend about 30% of their lives at work (based on a 40 hour work week), many educators are spending even more time at work. For example, BC principals and vice principals work an average of 56.9 hours a week (Wang & Pollack, 2020). When people are well at work, they tend to be healthier, happier and more successful at work and outside of work too.

Student Benefit: Workplace well-being is part of the BC Ministry of Education and Child Care's Mental Health in Schools Strategy. According to the strategy, "although the focus of the MHiS

Strategy is mental health promotion for students, we also know that the well-being of the adults in the system is just as important" (p.5).

The well-being of educators is linked to student well-being and academic achievement. According to Schonert-Reichl et al. (2023), educators who report higher levels of well-being are more likely to:
- Use teaching techniques that promote student voice
- Adapt learning activities to student learning needs
- Promote cognitive skill development
- Interact more with students
- Have students who perform better academically and report higher levels of well-being and engagement

Conversely, when educators report burnout or low well-being, they tend to be more likely to use punitive or reactive classroom management practices (Osher et al., 2007). Students in these educators' classes appear to have more behaviour problems, poorer social adjustment and lower academic outcomes (Hoglund et al., 2015). They also report being less engaged in school (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2023).

Financial Benefit: Investing in workplace well-being lowers costs to organizations and allows educators to do their best, most creative work. Improving workplace well-being can boost employee satisfaction, engagement, and productivity; it can also reduce health costs, employee turnover and lost work time (Government of Canada, 2016).

What is the scope of the issue?

Educator well-being was an issue before the pandemic, but the pandemic has likely exacerbated it (Gadermann et al., 2021). In a 2022 Gallup poll in the US, 44% of K-12 educators reported feeling very often or always burned out - the most burned out workers of any industry (Marken & Agrawar, 2022). Workplace well-being is currently an issue in BC as well. Teachers, administrators and support staff all report experiencing increased stress levels and challenges to their well-being. According to 2023 research from the BCTF, compared to the year before, teachers reported increased workloads and stress levels, which contributed to continued challenges to their well-being. For example, 40% of teachers reported that their physical health is worse now than it was last year. Over the last 10 years, principals across the country have been reporting higher time demands as the intensity of their work increases (Wang et al., 2023). In a recent study of BC principals, a strong majority of principals and vice principals reported that they felt stressed at work (Wang et al., 2023).

Supporting workplace well-being

A comprehensive, holistic approach to workplace well-being supports all three of the interconnected domains of well-being and helps make actions more sustainable.

Systems: Embedding well-being at a systems level can be an excellent way to promote well-being, lower individual and organizational stress and reduce burnout. Ideas for supporting the systems domain well-being include (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2023, Markin, 2023):

- Learn about, acknowledge and support workplace well-being in all three domains: self, each other and systems.
- Support workplace well-being learning opportunities for all employees.
- Establish ongoing ways to measure and monitor workplace well-being (e.g., surveys, focus groups, human resources data).
- Using the staff well-being data collected, explore and consider revising or strengthening district policies and practices that may be impacting workplace well-being.
- Include workplace well-being in district mental health and wellness plans and district strategic plans.
- Consider establishing a well-being team(s) at the district and/or schools level to support well-being for students and staff.

Each Other: Supporting each other and working well together impacts the well-being of everyone. Ideas for supporting the *each other* domain of workplace well-being include:
- Develop and encourage social connections at work. For example, provide support and resources for people to come together on a project or host a lunch gathering once a month, seeking out opportunities to do so in ways that replace rather than add tasks in people's schedules. Provide time and space before meetings to invite people to connect in an informal way.
- Support justice, equity, diversity, and identity (JEDI) initiatives to build a sense of belonging and allyship among educators and become aware of unconscious bias. Some examples include JEDI education, anti-racism training and affinity groups.
- Identify ways to create time and space for staff (regardless of specific position) to engage with each other in ways that are supportive of well-being and their expressed needs.
- Develop team norms and practices that encourage psychological safety[1] where everyone feels able to contribute to collective goals.

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[1] Psychological safety is the belief that the environment is safe for people to share their perspectives or to ask questions without fear of being rejected, shamed, or punished in some way for doing so (Edmondson, 2019).

Self: While individuals are responsible for their self-leadership and self-care, districts can support employees with their individual well-being by providing information, support and best efforts towards organizational cultures that foster well-being. It is particularly helpful to support social-emotional skills and practices as they increase well-being and act as a buffer against chronic stress and burnout (Collie & Perry, 2019; Mérida-López, & Extremera, 2017; Schonert-Reichl, 2017). Ideas for supporting the self domain of workplace wellbeing include:

- Invite people in various roles and parts of the system to share what they find helpful and meaningful in supporting their well-being, such as in a short, dedicated space in staff meetings.
- Support development of educator social-emotional competencies. A starting point for this could include: the delivery of social-emotional learning programs to students[2] or offering programs designed to support educator well-being by enhancing educators' social-emotional competencies such as emotion regulation, mindfulness and compassion[3].
- Make social-emotional skills and practices a part of the organizational culture. For example:
    - Provide training for leaders to build their social-emotional skills so they can practice and model self-leadership and self-care.
    - Provide time and opportunities for self-reflection during the working day. For example, written and/or artistic journaling (McKay & Barton, 2018). This can also be done as a combination of self-reflection and and sharing with others to support team connection.

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[2] Through learning to deliver a SEL program, actually delivering it, and participating in coaching to support delivery of the program, educators may enhance their own social emotional competencies, which may help them improve their instructional skills, manage their classroom and work with students more effectively, and reduce stress and burnout (Domotrovic et al. 2016; Hagelskamp et al., 2013). Teachers who teach SEL to students also report feeling more effective at their jobs and have lower levels of job-related anxiety (Greenberg et al., 2016).

[3] Some of these programs, such as CARE and CALM have been researched and have evidence that they can be effective in supporting improved emotion regulation and reduce educator stress, burnout, symptoms of anxiety and depression, psychological distress and (Jennings et al., 2017; Roeser et al., 2012).

Potential Resources and Further Reading

- [Compassionate Systems Leadership BC Network](#)
- Kelty *Where You Are* podcast episode: [When School Staff Are Well, Students Are Too - Strategies To Avoid Burnout](#)
- Gail Markin: [Beyond Self-Care Podcast](#) and other [Resources](#)
- Mental Health Commission of Canada: [National Standard for Psychological Health and Safety](#)
- EdCan: [Well at Work](#)
- Penn State Issue Brief: [Penn State Issues Brief: Teacher stress and health: Effects on teachers, students, and schools](#)
- Affinity Groups: [Affinity Groups - DEI Toolkit - Resources at New York Education Department](#)
- Learn to Be Anti-Racist: An Introductory Course from the BC Ministry of Education and Childcare: [Learning To Be Anti-Racist: An Introductory Course — Home](#)
- Canada Centre for Diversity and Inclusion Workshop Toolkits: [CCDI diversity and inclusion Toolkits for the workplace](#)
- Canada Centre for Diversity and Inclusion Podcast: [Podcast](#)
- CASEL**:** [Adult SEL: Personal Assessment and Reflection](#)

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TIMELINE FOR SD50 STAFF

Tuesday Feb. 4th

- *Follow up 'Wellness in the Workplace' questions emailed to all SD50 staff.*

Friday, Feb. 14th

- *Collection period for question responses closes.*

Wednesday, Feb. 26th

- *Joint HGTA, CUPE, District Staff Committee meets in Port Clements to begin review of responses.*

Tuesday, April 8th

- *Joint HGTA, CUPE, District Staff Committee 2nd meeting in Port Clements to review key themes from responses.*

Follow up Questions to Staff Wellness Presentations

Hawaa in advance for your thoughtful consideration of the questions below. Your stories, experiences, reflections, and creative ideas are valued and appreciated as we undertake this work of learning more about staff wellness.

Please share if you are a member of _____CUPE, _____ HGTA, _____ Exempt Staff

A.1 *Tell us a story to describe a time or two when you felt really inspired and engaged at work.*

A.2 *Reflect on your story to share how the emerging themes, thoughts, or ideas about the district or school approaches contributing to your feeling(s) of wellness.*

B.1 *Tell us a story of a uniquely Haida Gwaii experience that helped you gain a deeper connection with students, families, colleagues, or community.*

B.2 *Reflect on your story to share how the emerging themes, thoughts, or ideas about the unique Haida Gwaii experience contributed to your feelings of belonging, connection and collaboration.*

C.1 *Tell us a story to describe a strategy or two that you have successfully used to foster your personal well-being at work.*

C.2 *Reflect on your story to share how the emerging themes, thoughts, or ideas about your chosen strategies contributed to your feeling of wellness.*

D *If you reflect on your current context and role within the school district, what specific obstacles / challenges hamper staff wellness?*

Hawaa!