
Approaches to Teacher Well-Being

August 2024



Acknowledgments

The contents of this document were developed under a contract from the U.S. Department of Education through the Office of Innovation and Early Learning Programs (IELP) within the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE), by AnLar under Award # GS00F229DA. This contains resources that are provided for the reader's convenience. These materials may contain the views and recommendations of various subject matter experts as well as hypertext links, contact addresses, and websites to information created and maintained by other public and private organizations. This report benefited from the insights and expertise of two external reviewers: Hannah Putman of the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) and Shalika Robie of SR Learning Designs. The views and opinions expressed in this report are the responsibility of the authors. The U.S. Department of Education does not control or guarantee the accuracy, relevance, timeliness, or completeness of any outside information included in these materials. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the positions or policies of the U.S. Department of Education. No official endorsement by the U.S. Department of Education of any product, commodity, service, enterprise, curriculum, or program of instruction mentioned in this document is intended or should be inferred.

Suggested Citation

Fatahi, Negar and Warner-Griffin, Catharine. (2024). Approaches to Teacher Well-Being. White paper produced by AnLar and the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education; Education Innovation and Research Program (EIR).

Summary

The Education Innovation and Research (EIR) program supports some of the U.S. Department of Education's most innovative ideas for addressing challenges in K-12 education. Numerous past and present EIR grantees highlight educator well-being in their innovations through diverse approaches, including social-emotional frameworks, data-driven practices, and professional learning. Additionally, the conversation around teacher wellness and workplace strains is complemented by changes in education policy and increased attention to social-emotional learning following the COVID-19 pandemic. The interconnections between student and educator well-being (Braun et al., 2019) indicate the importance of supporting educator well-being. This white paper is a contribution to understanding the practices and literature around educator wellness.

Teacher well-being is linked to positive classroom environments that promote students' academic and non-academic outcomes (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Jennings, 2011; Arens & Morin, 2016; Klusmann et al., 2016; Granziera et al., 2023; Sorensen & Ladd, 2020). Teachers with higher levels of well-being are more likely to engage in emotionally supportive interactions with students (Braun et al., 2019) and offer social-emotional learning instruction (Hamilton & Doss, 2020), which has been shown to positively impact children's social and emotional development and academic achievement (Ashdown & Bernard, 2012). This paper addresses (1) definitions of educator well-being and recent changes in the educational setting that may create challenges for teacher wellness, (2) organization-wide frameworks to address educator well-being, and (3) an array of practices currently in place across schools and districts.

Understandings of Teacher Well-Being

Research defines teacher well-being in numerous ways, including feelings of satisfaction; fulfillment; and healthy psychological functioning, characterized by low stress levels and absence of burnout. Specific measures of teacher well-being often include items addressing workload, organizational factors, professional growth, engagement, and student interactions (Collie & Martin, 2023). Broadly, work-related well-being is distinct from general well-being and pertains to positive evaluations of and healthy functioning within the work environment (Van Horn et al., 2004). Having multiple definitions means priorities for addressing well-being can vary based on educators' contexts and experiences, but it also makes systematic assessment challenging (Collie et al., 2015; Fox et al., 2023; Hascher & Waber, 2021).

In this white paper, teacher well-being is understood in terms of both the negative aspects of well-being (e.g., burnout, anxiety symptoms) and positive indicators of well-being (e.g., enthusiasm for teaching, career optimism) (Fox et al., 2023; Hall-Kenyon et al., 2014; Hascher & Waber, 2021; Weiland, 2021). Figure 1 below offers an overview of broad categories used to measure educator well-being.

Figure 1. Graphic representation of educator well-being measures



*Social emotional feelings refer to qualities such as mindfulness, emotional intelligence, and resilience. Teacher self-efficacy refers to teachers' feelings of success and ability in specific aspects of their teaching. Job commitment and meaning refers to teachers' views on the extent to which they plan to stay in their position, find meaning in their work, and feel positively about specific factors at their school.

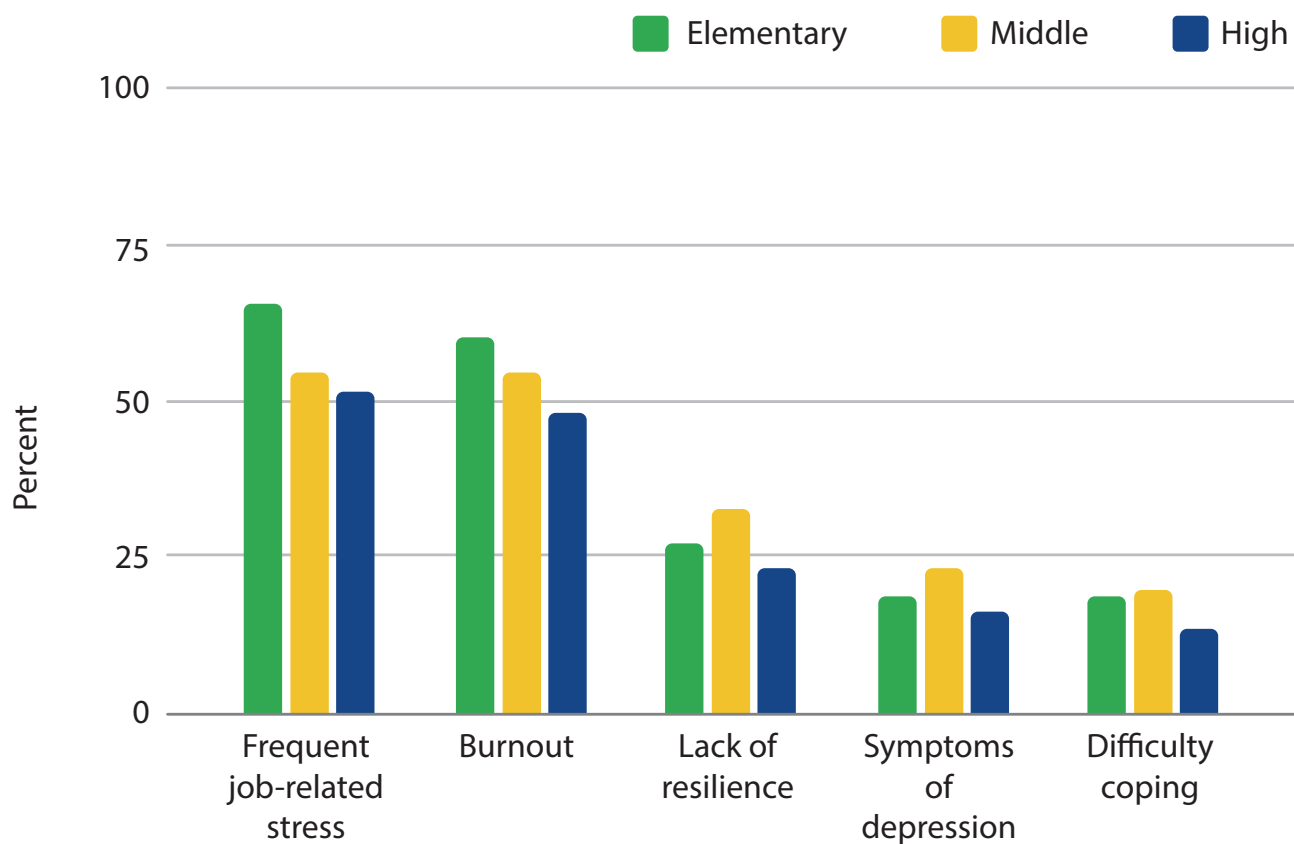
Source: Adapted from Fox et al., 2023 and Dreer, 2023.

Focus on Wellness for Retention

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted already existing workplace strains for teachers, and media conversations around teacher wellness have increased (Steiner & Woo, 2021). Recruiting and retaining high quality teachers is a longstanding challenge in education (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Garcia et al., 2022). Recent data from Washington state following the pandemic indicate small increases in teacher attrition and turnover, not outside of existing trends, but enough to create staffing challenges (Goldhaber & Theobald, 2022). Teachers face many contextual factors in their day-to-day experiences

that may create stress, including a high workload, potential lack of understanding from families or leaders, student behavior challenges, and demand for a wide range of differentiation across students (Carver-Thomas et al., 2021; García & Weiss, 2020; Goldring et al., 2014). In particular, RAND’s nationally representative 2023 *State of the American Teacher Survey* shows higher rates of job-related stress compared to other working adults, and half of teachers reported experiencing two or more negative indicators of well-being (Doan et al., 2023).

Figure 2. Teachers’ experiences of negative well-being, by grade level, 2023



Source: Doan, S., Steiner, E. D., Pandey, R., & Woo, A. (2023). *Teacher Well-Being and Intentions to Leave: Findings from the 2023 State of the American Teacher Survey*. RAND Corporation. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA1108-8.html.

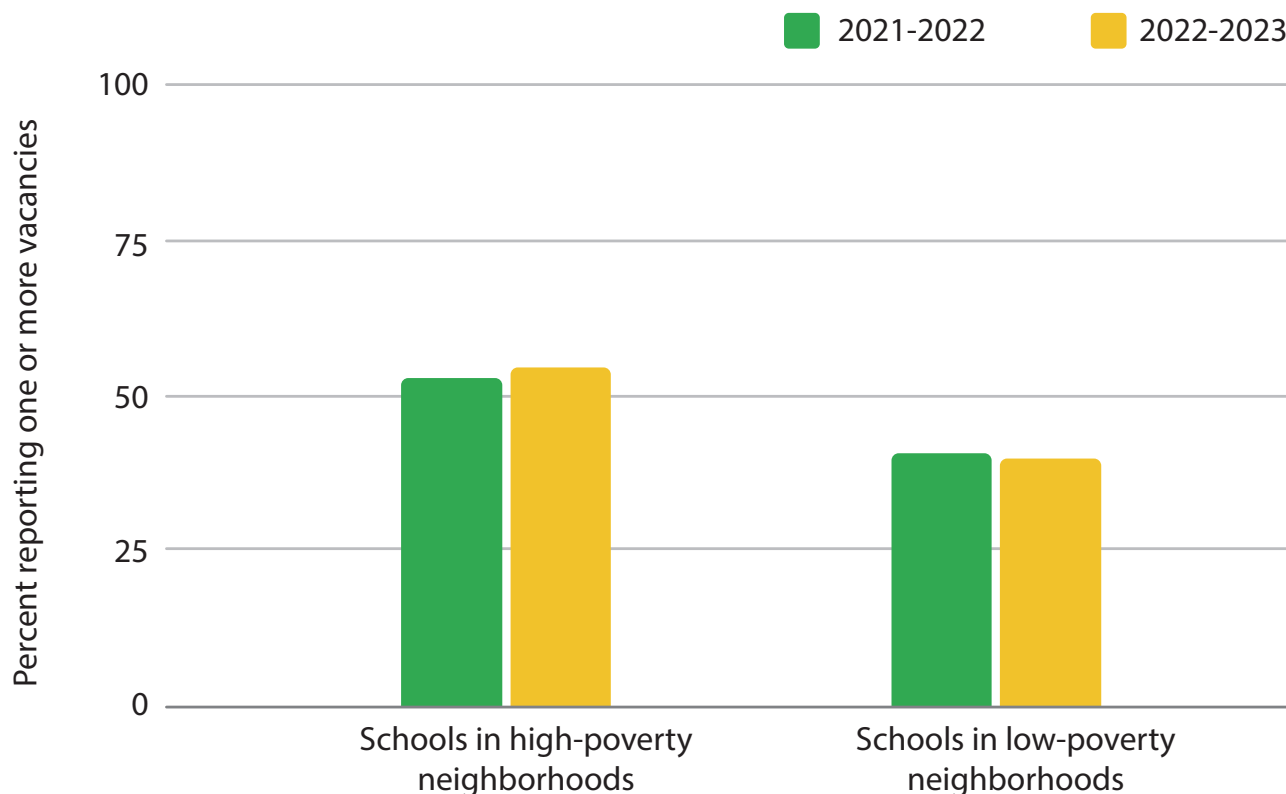
Local Complexities for Teacher Attrition, Recruitment, and Supply

The extent to which shortages reflect a low supply of new teachers, higher rates of attrition from the field, or the creation of more positions to provide additional support yields a complex picture (Alderman, 2023; Guarino et al., 2011). Recent data analyses indicated a decline since 2020 in the number of individuals working in K-12 education, though at a rate on par with other local government positions (Alderman, 2023). Furthermore, teacher shortages vary based on specific context, making the full picture of teacher shortages hard to visualize (McVey & Trinidad, 2019). While the lack of national or state-level data hinders the accurate assessment of the magnitude of teacher shortages (Saenz-Armstrong, 2022), regional reports suggest there are shortages in many parts of the country (Illinois State Board of Education, 2021; Learning Policy Institute, 2019; Nguyen et al., 2022; U.S. Department of Education, 2023).

Teacher shortages are often more common in certain subjects and grade levels. Subjects like math, science, special education, and bilingual education face a higher prevalence of shortages (Carver-Thomas et al., 2021; Aragon, 2016). High schools often experience more acute shortages than do elementary and middle schools (McVey & Trinidad, 2019; U.S. Department of Education, 2023), despite elementary teachers reporting higher rates of job-related stress (Figure 2).

Teacher shortages are also challenging at schools with a higher percentage of students experiencing economic disadvantage (Figure 3) or schools with consistently lower achievement levels (Carver-Thomas et al., 2021; Aragon, 2016; García & Weiss, 2020; Dee & Goldhaber, 2017; U.S. Department of Education, 2023). A school’s location can also influence staffing, with schools in urban and rural areas reporting more challenges in recruiting and retaining teachers (Carver-Thomas et al., 2021; Aragon, 2016).

Figure 3. Percentage of schools reporting one or more teaching vacancies, by neighborhood poverty level, 2021-2023



Note: Poverty level refers to an NCES measure of the income-to-poverty ratio for neighborhoods around school buildings. For more information, visit NCES’ [Education Demographic and Geographic Estimates](#).

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, School Pulse Panel 2021–22 and 2022–23.

Rapid Changes in Classroom Teaching

During the spring of 2020, when most schools shifted to remote teaching, teachers faced the demands of engaging students, supporting learning, and maintaining daily contact with students while outside the school setting (Hodgman et al., 2021; Steiner & Woo, 2021; Steiner et al., 2022).

Pandemic-related work challenges were evident in the stress levels reported by teachers, who were twice as likely as adults in other fields to report experiencing stress and difficulty in coping with stress (Steiner & Woo, 2021). While rates of job-related stress, burnout, and lack of resilience among teachers decreased between 2021 and 2023, they remain higher than the working adult average (Doan et al., 2023). The pandemic coincided with or triggered several changes in the classroom, including changes in instructional technology, student learning and behavior, and demands on teachers' time.

Instructional technology

The transition to remote teaching during the pandemic presented new challenges to teachers across the nation. The most significant cause of stress reported by teachers was related to changes in instructional mode and technical issues associated with the abrupt transition to remote and combined remote/in-person teaching (Hodgman et al., 2021; Steiner & Woo, 2021). In one study of almost 6,000 teachers, 50 percent reported their sense of success declined in spring 2020 during school closures, with disproportionate effects among teachers in schools with high percentages of students facing economic disadvantage (Kraft et al., 2021). Schools that were able to offer resources and support for digital remote work mitigated some of the negative effects of remote learning (Kraft et al., 2021). However, many teachers lacked support in using new modes of teaching; only about half reported receiving training on delivering remote instruction in 2021 (Steiner & Woo, 2021). Blended and fully online learning has continued since school districts reopened in the 2020-21 school year. In 2021, 96 percent of schools provided digital devices to students and 70 percent provided internet access at students' homes (National Forum on Education Statistics, 2022).

Learning loss and behavioral health challenges

Following school closures in 2020 and 2021, students continue to struggle academically and emotionally. Students' level of achievement is influenced by teachers' effectiveness, with higher-achieving students benefiting more from effective teaching (Aucejo et al., 2022). Changes since COVID-19 are associated with decreased student achievement and may limit the impact of effective teaching. Before the pandemic, approximately 36 percent of students were behind grade level at the start of the school year, but this number increased to 50 percent at the beginning of the 2021-22 school year (NCES, 2023). At the start of the 2023-24 school year, 44 percent of students performed below grade level, with rates as high as 59 percent in some schools, often affecting historically marginalized groups of students disproportionately (NCES, 2023). Nearly all public schools nationwide reported that at least some students were behind grade level in English or language arts and mathematics (NCES, 2023). In 2021-22, 45 percent of school respondents noted that school absenteeism "increased a lot" since before the pandemic (NCES, 2022a). Increased absenteeism makes academic recovery after COVID-19 more difficult (Dee, 2024). Teachers may experience additional stress as they work to provide additional scaffolding and differentiation to help students close a widening achievement gap.

Similarly, challenging or disruptive student behaviors can lead to teacher stress and burnout (Embse et al., 2019), making teachers feel less competent (Collie, 2023) and hindering their ability to effectively manage classrooms, teach students, and respond to student needs (Carroll et al., 2021; McCarthy et al., 2022). When student-teacher interactions are positive and respectful, teacher well-being increases (Hascher & Waber, 2021; Collie, 2023). The pandemic increased challenges around classroom management. About eight in 10 public schools reported delays in behavioral and socioemotional development in their students in 2022 because of the pandemic, with more classroom disruptions caused by student misconduct (NCES, 2022b). In April 2022, more than two thirds of schools (69 percent) reported that more students were seeking mental health services,

and 76 percent of public schools reported that staff members voiced concerns about students' mental health (NCES, 2022c). Approximately 43 percent of schools indicated they may not be able to effectively provide mental health services¹ to all students in need, with 61 percent of those schools citing a shortage of mental health professionals as a factor (NCES, 2022c). The lack of adequate mental health services for students may increase the demands on teachers to provide mental health support for students. The Office of Safe and Supportive Schools recommends policies and administers grant programs aimed at creating safe, supportive, and positive school environments to address increasing behavior challenges (U.S. Department of Education, 2023).

Continued demands on educator time

Teaching is a demanding profession (Doan et al., 2023; Brown & Roloff, 2011; Greenberg et al., 2016). One recent study indicated that teachers would prefer access to support specialists (e.g., special education experts, counselors, nurses) over a 10 percent salary increase (Lovison & Mo, 2024). Teachers are responsible for a wide range of tasks – instructing, supporting learning, managing student behavior, and handling administrative tasks – often in resource-limited environments. Research notes teachers' expanding role in the past 20 years, with a particular increase in non-teaching-related duties around communication, supervisory responsibilities, student clubs/activities, and mentoring as a result of increased expectations from policymakers, families, and supervisors (Pacaol, 2021; Van Droogenbroeck et al., 2014). The potential for experienced teachers to exit the profession due to burnout associated with increased responsibilities and the declining appeal of a career in education can worsen teacher retention issues (Van Droogenbroeck et al., 2014).

Given rising demands, additions to educators' workforce development should be approached thoughtfully. Professional development that targets self-care and social-emotional skills for teachers can foster their well-being and help them handle their profession's evolving challenges (Manian et al., 2021). One way to better align organizational and individual needs is self-directed professional development. **Online or in-person teacher-directed professional learning**, a focus for several EIR grantees, gives educators increased control over their learning, greater diversity of training options, and skills that speak to specific teaching needs (AnLar, 2022; Artman et al., 2020).

Organizational Approaches to Educator Well-Being

Research on well-being in the workplace and specifically at schools emphasizes that an individual approach to structural problems will not provide a long-term solution (Santoro & Price, 2021). While researchers are still exploring the efficacy of specific intervention frameworks, best practices emphasize an approach that includes organization-wide implementation, support from leadership, and teacher and student voices. This section highlights two frameworks that include these components, a trauma-informed approach for youth mental health and a job demands-resources framework.

Youth Mental Health and a Trauma-Informed Approach

Since 2020, states have enacted over 100 laws to support youth mental health through school-based services, addressing topics such as social-emotional learning (SEL), mental health education, and suicide prevention (Horton & Slone, 2023). Between 2021 and 2023, bills related to students' mental and behavioral health were introduced in 42 state legislatures (Education Commission of the States, n.d.). This approach takes into account how students' experiences of childhood trauma

¹ Percentage of respondents reporting strongly disagree, moderately disagree, or neither agree nor disagree.

or chronic stress affect their behavior and long-term academic success (Perfect et al., 2016). A trauma-informed approach relies on several components of implementation to support students who experience trauma, including individual screenings, educator knowledge of trauma supports (workforce development), established policies and procedures for safety and discipline, varied levels of intervention resources and supports, and an organizational commitment to improving students' sense of safety (Champine et al., 2019; Chafouleas et al., 2016; SAMHSA, 2014)². Trauma-informed approaches may be implemented in individual or group settings, in the classroom, or school-wide (Herrenkohl et al., 2019).

Broadly, best practices in trauma-informed approaches would include dimensions of educator well-being. While the focus is on student growth and belonging, current wisdom emphasizes the importance of educators' emotional knowledge and skills to successful SEL and youth mental health implementations (Gimbert et al., 2023; Ibarra, 2022). Teacher interactions are central to students' sense of belonging and classroom engagement (Ibarra, 2022). Best practices recognize that adults learn differently than children and focus on educators' SEL competencies (e.g., self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, and relationship skills) in ways that align with educators' values and highlight the competencies' immediate relevance (Gimbert et al., 2023). One pilot effort to build educators' social-emotional competencies found improvements in educator self-care, overall well-being, and student-educator conflict (Fitzgerald et al., 2022).

Creating Positive Climates

School administrators make an intentional effort to build strong relational capacity with staff. School administrators make judgments based on human feelings. They understand there is life outside of school and respect the use of personal days to take care of self and family.

*—Teacher, Treadwell Elementary,
Memphis-Shelby County Schools
(Holland, 2022)*

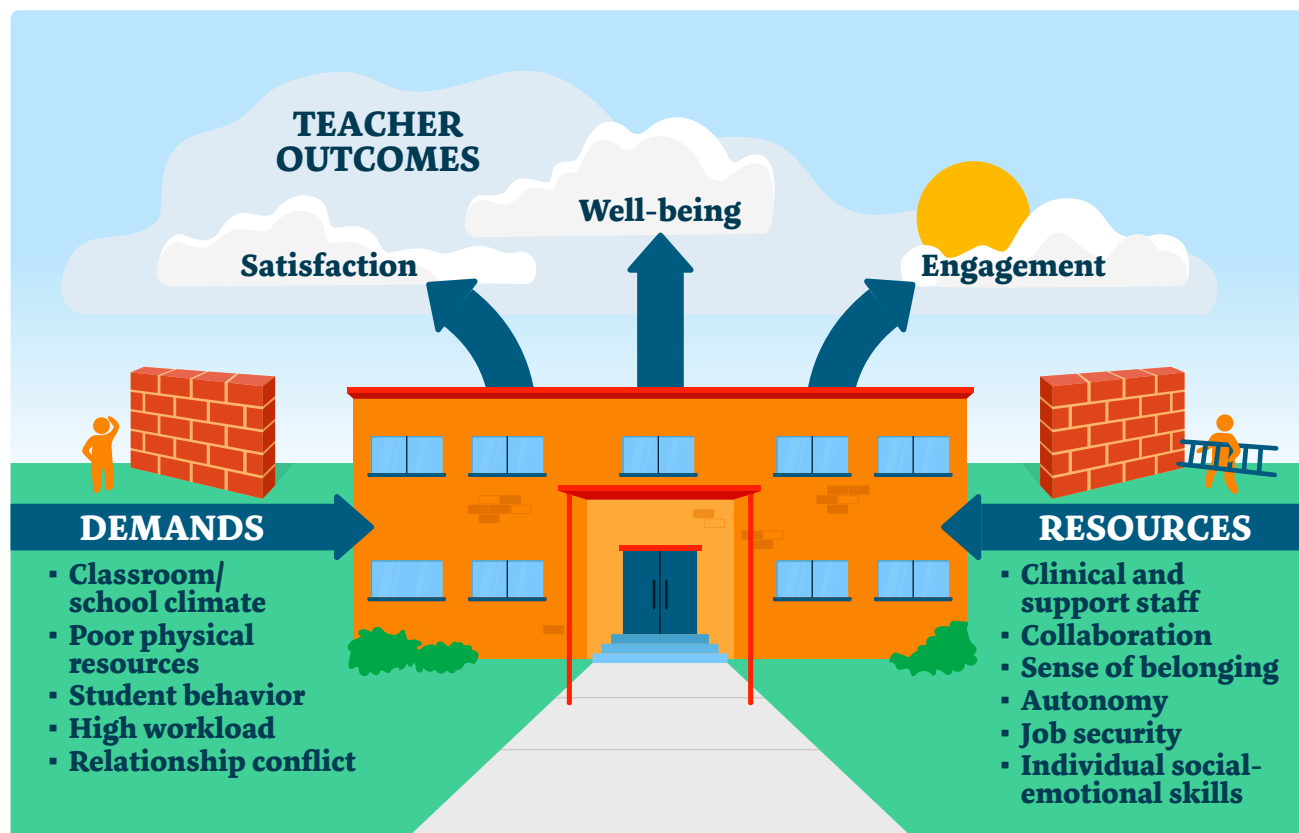
Job Demands-Resources Framework

One example of an organizational approach is the job demands-resources framework (Figure 4), which has been used to predict well-being across a number of occupations (Lesener et al., 2019). Used in education, this approach considers both workplace demands on educators (e.g., disruptive behaviors) and resources available to support educators (e.g., mental health professionals, professional learning) (Bottiani et al., 2019; Granziera et al., 2021; Kwon et al., 2021; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018). Research notes that resources and demands may occur at both an individual or organizational level, and the effects may vary based on which demands and resources are present at each level and how often an individual experiences them at work (Niks, 2015). Broadly, teachers experience stress when daily demands exceed a teacher's coping resources (McCarthy, 2019). Job demands predicting decreased educator satisfaction may include working conditions discussed above, as well as workload, time pressure, conflict, or low student motivation (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018; Stang-Rabrig et al., 2022). The job demands-resources framework acknowledges that teachers will encounter challenging professional moments and ensures that resources are available to support resilience and growth.

² Organization-wide trauma-informed approaches that address each of SAMHSA's recommended components are rare, with a relative lack of evidence to support effectiveness (Avery et al., 2021).

In some cases, teacher well-being is more strongly affected by job demands, with only moderate buffering effects from additional resources (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018). The selection of specific resources relies on the challenges and opportunities for a specific school or district. The intent is to help educators have more positive experiences than negative ones (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018), with the knowledge that negative interactions will occur.

Figure 4. Teacher outcomes, job demands, and resource opportunities



Source: Adapted from Granziera et al., 2021.

One effective school or district resource is a climate of support for educators that focuses on collaboration, communication, and positive relationships (McLean et al., 2017). Approaches that foster a climate of support could include several initiatives that emphasize establishing a distributive leadership model. These models involve teachers working alongside school leaders, such as through teacher-led instructional improvement initiatives, opportunities for teachers to guide school policies, and intentional efforts by school administrators to establish relationships with staff by modeling social-emotional skills (Holland, 2022; U.S. Department of Education, 2022).

Finally, education is a highly meaning-oriented field, which affects teacher well-being (Hascher & Waber, 2021). Many educators enter the field with the aim to improve children’s lives (Guarino et al., 2006; Watt & Richardson, 2008), and the extent to which teachers feel they belong in the school community moderates the relationship between meaning-making and well-being. A culture of support builds belonging; such a culture could be measured through positive relationships between teachers and students or families, between colleagues, or through access to quality professional learning opportunities.

Efforts from the Field

The following section outlines a sample of current efforts to foster teacher well-being, ranging from organization-wide approaches to specific school or classroom initiatives. Understanding projects that work to improve teacher well-being can shed light on the current landscape and help generate ideas for strategies that can be replicated and adapted. Some of these approaches are implemented or supported through current EIR grants and provide a snapshot of recent grants related to enhanced teacher well-being. While many of the efforts below are based on promising evidence, not all examples provide quantitative evidence of effectiveness in improving teacher well-being.

Organization-Wide Approaches

The primary goal of many organization-wide initiatives is to improve student outcomes. However, comprehensive approaches take into account the importance of educator well-being in achieving those goals.

Student Well-Being Model

Transcend's [Student Well-Being Model \(SWBM\)](#), implemented using a [whole child approach](#) at 20 elementary schools, recognizes that teachers play a central role in creating a supportive learning environment. Through EIR funding, the SWBM uses a community-driven and integrated approach to improve the classroom learning environment across the school. The model is a personalized approach for students and teachers, with flexible implementation to ensure it is not a "one size fits all" approach. The SWBM includes three research-based components: CARE (Compassion-Assertiveness-Relationships-Environment) (Tier 1), Boost (Tier 2 and 3), and Family Circle. The SWBM emphasizes ongoing professional development and coaching for educators. Transcend provides coaching, resources, and frameworks that are adapted for local context.

Initial training starts with school-based design teams of five to seven individuals, including representation from teachers. The selection of the design team is intentional, focusing on members who can lead advocacy and spread of the model. The design team then supports the larger school community's learning, using resources and methods Transcend designed. Before implementing student-facing practices, teams focus on adult culture and well-being. Educators engage in professional learning that is grounded in the science of adult learning, prompts reflection on their current beliefs, and enables them to practice strategies like empathy that support a strong adult community. The teams conduct surveys and interviews to understand the state of adult well-being and are supported by Transcend to set goals and prioritize strategies that are most aligned to their staff needs. The teams work to make the surveys short (typically just a few questions) and open-ended to make it easier for teachers to respond. The teams use survey results when creating annual implementation plans. By involving teachers in the decision-making process, the SWBM's community-driven approach aims to foster a sense of ownership in the changes taking place.

Project Transform

A 2022 EIR grant, [Project Transform](#), is designed to facilitate the adoption of a trauma-engaged school (TES) approach. The project's overarching goals include building schools' capacity for TES implementation, enhancing educators' understanding of trauma and their role supporting a TES, promoting trauma-engaged practices, and addressing disparities in student outcomes. Project Transform's [approach](#) is multifaceted and acknowledges the crucial role of educators. Equipping teachers with strategies for trauma-engaged practices enhances

their ability to create supportive and empathetic learning environments, potentially reducing stress related to challenging student interactions. Lastly, the community-driven approach ensures active teacher engagement in decision-making to promote a sense of ownership and investment in the project's success.

Project Transform is implemented at the state level by the Association of Alaska School Boards (AASB) and the State of Alaska Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) in collaboration with five rural districts. These districts often face staffing struggles, and AASB and DEED project leaders and coaches are working with over 20 educators to provide a full day of professional learning followed by additional coaching sessions. Alaskan educators learn to manage stress thoughtfully and productively, strengthen their classroom practices, and expand their understanding of childhood experiences. The project team also acknowledges teachers' diverse backgrounds, aiming to foster a more inclusive work environment. Educators participate in professional learning communities and regularly complete a reflexive practice piece to consider positive outcomes from new efforts and opportunities for learning. In addition to student academic outcomes, the grant will measure school climate and connectedness among students, staff, and family members. Evaluators will also conduct focus groups with teachers to better understand what is working with students.

Workforce Development

Another strategy for enhancing teacher efficacy, reducing stress, and increasing well-being is to provide targeted coaching and support to teachers to improve interactions with students. Research recognizes the challenges of designing successful professional development programs and measuring effects of teacher learning (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Desimone, 2009). This section highlights three implementation efforts that show positive outcomes, not only in terms of teachers' learning, but also their well-being.

MyTeachingPartner-Secondary (MTP-S)

MyTeachingPartner-Secondary ([MTP-S](#)) is a professional development program focused on enhancing teachers' daily interactions with students. The program received funding from EIR between 2017 and 2022, in addition to other grant awards. After two years (2021-23), the program showed [positive effects](#) on teachers' enthusiasm about teaching. At the end of the program, the teachers who participated were more likely than teachers in the control group to report being glad they selected teaching as a career and looking forward to teaching in the future. Similarly, teachers in the program were less likely than teachers in the control group to report that they lack enthusiasm about teaching or that the stress involved in teaching wasn't worth it (Wayne et al., 2023).

MTP-S uses the Classroom Assessment Scoring System-Secondary (CLASS-S) domains to describe, assess, and intervene in classroom interactions. The CLASS-S domains focus on the extent to which teacher-student interactions provide a positive emotional climate, are sensitive to student needs, and play an active role in student learning. Teachers in the MTP-S program send their coaches video recordings of their classrooms during the school year. Trained coaches review the recordings, maintaining a strong focus on positive teaching interactions that teachers can build on to benefit the classroom environment. Coaches spotlight successes in the classroom and use positive reinforcement to call attention to factors highlighted in the CLASS-S domains. For each video segment, the coach writes a customized prompt that highlights the connection between teacher behavior and student responses. The teacher observes their behavior and subsequent student reactions and responds to the coach's prompts. This is followed by a 20- to 30-minute phone or video conference where the coach and teacher discuss the video segment and plan ways to enhance interactions using the CLASS-S system. This cycle is repeated approximately once every three weeks over the school year. In the project impact study, teachers were asked to complete six to 10 cycles each year.

Teacher-Directed Professional Learning

[Charleston County School District](#) received an EIR [grant](#) in 2020 to implement C³ (Choice in Cultural Competency), a program that supports teacher-directed professional learning with a focus on growing teachers' cultural competencies. Teachers receive an annual stipend to choose learning opportunities from a curated inventory that supports program goals and educators' priorities. Educators who participate in the program complete an assessment on their cultural competencies and then select professional learning in the form of conferences, online training, and workshops that support areas for growth. The program also offers professional learning support from the EIR team and coaching sessions with experts outside the school district. These external coaches are trained in adult learning approaches and help educators make sense of their assessments through reflection and professional learning; coaches work closely with teachers as they pursue areas where they will find value personally and in the classroom. Educators develop a plan with the EIR Professional Learning Specialists to align learning opportunities based on their goals, district priorities, and student needs. As the grant continues, additional assessment measures will include surveys of teacher practices and knowledge growth, how the stipend was used, and measures of student ELA and mathematics proficiency. C³ offers professional development where teachers take an active role in shaping their learning experiences to enhance their ability to serve all students.

Resilience in Schools & Educators

Since 2017, schools in Boulder, Colorado have offered educators at 15 schools an adult-centered trauma-responsive prevention program to build educators' social-emotional skills. In collaboration with the University of Colorado at Boulder's Center for Resilience and Well-Being, [Resilience in Schools & Educators](#) (RISE) creates positive school environments by establishing initiatives with school leadership, implementing professional development programs, and fostering educators' skills through coaching and professional learning communities. Pilot results for the program show improvements in teachers' pre- and post-reports of social-emotional competencies, self-care, and well-being (Fitzgerald et al., 2022).

Improvements to Working Conditions

Although changes to a specific classroom or school will not necessarily create long-term gains in educator and student outcomes, improving educators' working conditions can create momentum for small steps in a larger plan to improve teacher and student well-being. This section offers strategies that can help schools and districts improve teachers' working conditions.

Conduct needs assessments

Gaining input from teachers through valid and reliable scales, focus groups, and meetings can provide valuable information on which specific improvements teachers seek, larger problems shared across staff members, or ideas for accessible supports that can be put in place quickly. The Institute of Education Sciences and Regional Education Laboratories offer [suggestions](#) for teacher outreach. The Colorado School of Public Health's Center for Health, Work & Environment developed the [Workplace Mental Health Module](#), which assesses current workplace offerings to promote staff mental health and is available to all U.S. employers, including schools. Five Colorado school districts are currently using the module to expand their strategies to improve teacher well-being. North Carolina fields a [Teacher Working Conditions Survey](#) to all teachers and principals in the state every two years to collect data on professional development, climate, policy priorities, and equity.

Establish and promote district priorities for educator well-being

North Carolina's Department of Public Instruction and Department of Health and Human Services received a SAMHSA Project AWARE Grant in 2018 and 2021 to support the state's [Project ACTIVATE](#) (Advancing Coordinated and Timely InterVentions, Awareness, Training, and Education), currently implemented across five school districts. The implementation approach includes customized evidence-based practices to support student mental health based on each district's needs. Each district also addresses educator well-being using diverse approaches suited to its current infrastructure and needs.

One district, Sampson County Schools, fielded a staff survey on well-being to collect feedback; the survey indicated moderate stress levels for staff as an ongoing concern. The district then hosted a retreat for teachers featuring wellness activities, resilience talks, and community speakers. The district also provided wellness and resilience training for nutrition staff. In the upcoming year, the Sampson County team is planning three designated spaces within an elementary, middle, and high school where staff have a dedicated space that offers resources for teachers' to explore mindfulness and calming activities aimed at building resilience.

Another district, Nash County Schools, surveyed staff members using the Panorama Teacher and Staff Survey focusing on belonging and school climate. The district prioritized coaching for administrators and teachers to embed SEL strategies and competencies into classroom instruction; these efforts included a wellness program for staff, including Mindful Mondays (listening circles, mindfulness activities, yoga), Talk About It Tuesdays (information shared about wellness), Walking Wednesdays (physical activities offered live), Thirsty Thursdays (focus on hydration), and Feel Good Fridays (affirmations, relationship support). The district also created microgrants for schools to pursue SEL opportunities for staff and students.

Provide targeted initiatives for teachers and administrators

The [Office of Effective Educator Development Programs](#) (EEDP) provides discretionary grants to support teachers and school administrators. These grants can span a range of activities, including support for teachers in high-need subjects and schools, professional development, and non-traditional certification pathways. Examples of current grants include professional development on [mathematics, SEL, and equity](#); support to help school leaders provide resources for [educator well-being](#); and funding to postsecondary institutions to improve [teacher preparation](#).

Offer convenient access to well-being tools and resources

The [Delaware Department of Education](#) offers various resources to promote teacher well-being. In particular, the state supports mindfulness tools; for example, Delaware school staff have access to [Pure Edge](#), which provides mindfulness-based stress reduction strategies, in addition to [Headspace](#), an online resource providing resilience strategies for educators.

Some states and districts streamline educators' access to mental health services and employee assistance programs. California offers assessment and counseling services for teachers and staff in a number of their school districts through the [Employee Assistance Service for Education](#) (EASE) and [Care Solace](#) programs. Likewise, the Georgia Department of Education has partnered with Kepro (a national quality of care organization) to create [Georgia's Public Education Employee Assistance Program](#). This program supports teachers' and public education employees' well-being through various free services, including confidential counseling and legal and financial consultations. Similarly, [Telemetrynd](#) provides virtual mental health support for K-12 teachers in New Jersey. Telemetrynd curates a network of licensed mental health providers who accept all New Jersey teachers' health insurance, providing educators in the state access to ongoing mental health treatment.

A number of states offer various online classes and instruction to support educators' mental health and well-being. For example, in 2021 and 2022, the [Alaska Healthy Schools Learning Collaborative](#) hosted over 30 sessions related to school health and wellness. These sessions were recorded and remain available for Alaska school staff to view on YouTube and Vimeo. The [California Department of Education](#) provides various webinars and online resources on staff wellness.

Thriving Teachers, Thriving Students

Teacher turnover is a driving factor for teacher shortages nationwide (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Sutchter et al., 2019), and employment rates in public education have been slower to recover compared to the private sector post COVID-19 (Aldeman, 2023). About one in four teachers expressed intentions to leave their jobs by the end of the 2022-23 school year, with higher rates among teachers of color (Doan et al., 2023), although intention to leave does not always translate into teachers actually leaving (Harbatkin et al., 2023). Enhancing teacher well-being could increase teachers' job satisfaction, reduce burnout, and reduce turnover rates (Greenberg et al., 2016; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017). Moreover, educator well-being is linked to positive classroom environments that promote positive academic and non-academic outcomes for students (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Jennings, 2011; Arens & Morin, 2016; Klusmann et al., 2016; Granziera et al., 2023; Sorensen & Ladd, 2020).

Several EIR grantees and other trailblazers offer examples of how they have prioritized educator well-being in states, schools, or districts. Efforts range from smaller one-off resources and opportunities to broader organizational initiatives. These efforts show that the first steps taken vary widely, with promising outcomes associated with broad organizational initiatives; targeted, uplifting professional development programs to support teachers' personal and professional priorities; and a keen focus on changes that will make even a small difference in educators' daily working conditions and show they are a priority. At the same time, some factors associated with teachers' well-being have less clear implementation trajectories. For example, while workload poses a challenge for teachers, there is less information on how best to provide teachers with appropriate support staff, improve physical resources, and reduce demands on teachers' time. Effective solutions are also likely to vary based on the specific gaps and challenges teachers face in their own local context, making open dialogue and integrated leadership a key component to all implementation efforts. This paper provides one more exchange in the conversations about educator well-being and, ultimately, student success in the classroom environment. As innovators continue to think about roads to teacher well-being, the Department of Education offers [EIR](#) grant options to support new projects with rigorous impact evaluation, [EEDP](#) discretionary grants aimed directly at educators and school leaders, and toolkits and dissemination tools to replicate prior implementation.

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