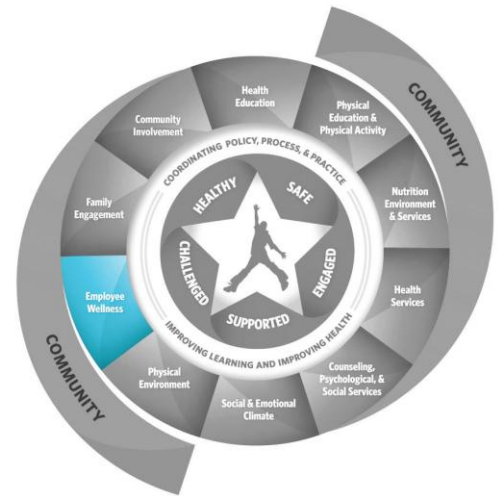


## EMPLOYEE WELLNESS: Evidence-Informed Practice Brief

### WHAT DO WE MEAN?

*Employee Wellness* focuses on the health and well-being of school employees to promote a positive school environment for all school personnel and students.<sup>1</sup> Employee wellness includes not only promoting the health and well-being of teachers but all school employees, including bus drivers, food service workers, custodial staff, and administrative employees. A comprehensive approach to employee wellness includes both prevention and intervention activities. To address the health and wellness of adults in schools, employee wellness approaches must consider both risk factors and health conditions that affect school staff.<sup>1</sup> Schools can promote physical activity among employees, provide resources for employees to manage stress, and create an overall environment that encourages healthy habits and discourages unhealthy behaviors.



*Healthy Workforce 2010 and Beyond* outlines elements of comprehensive worksite health promotion programs that are consistent with the [WSCC](#) conceptualization of employee wellness.<sup>2</sup> One component is health education, which involves teaching the skills necessary to implement healthy changes in the daily lives of employees. Another component is a supportive workplace environment, which includes social and physical support to promote positive health behaviors. In addition, the employee health promotion program should be combined with employee health benefits and other programs, such as employee assistance programs and other forms of psychological support. Last, health promotion programs within the workplace should establish partnerships with health insurance programs to conduct health risk screening to be paired with follow-up services as needed.

Promotion of employee wellness can take many different forms in school environments. One direction for health promotion includes health-related programs that address behavior change, such as stress management or physical activity.<sup>3,4</sup> Employee wellness may also be affected by school policies; for example, policies prohibiting tobacco use on school property and grounds, or around personal time. In addition, environmental supports—such as providing healthy food and beverage options and offering time for mental and physical breaks—may also influence the health and wellness of employees.<sup>1</sup> These supports may also help employees transfer the skills learned in a school-based program into their everyday lifestyles.<sup>1</sup>

# WHY IS IT RELEVANT TO SCHOOL OUTCOMES?

## Employee Outcomes

School employee diet, exercise, and sleep patterns are associated with absenteeism, job satisfaction, and productivity in the workplace.<sup>5,6</sup> Mental and physical health challenges, such as obesity, smoking, and depression, can negatively impact teachers' ability to be productive at work.<sup>7</sup> Stress is a major barrier to employee wellness and is considered one of the primary reasons teachers leave the field, with 58%-77% of teachers indicating that their work is often or always stressful.<sup>8,9</sup> There is evidence to suggest that workplace stress is related to a variety of negative health outcomes,<sup>10,11,12</sup> mental health distress,<sup>13</sup> and depression.<sup>13</sup> In addition, teachers who report being more stressed have shown lower self-efficacy, meaning they question their ability to be successful in their position and may also be less satisfied with their profession.<sup>10,14</sup>

## Student Outcomes

Employee wellness may also indirectly impact student outcomes. Previous research has documented associations between teacher stress, classroom organization, student motivation, and reading ability as early as kindergarten.<sup>15</sup> Other studies have also documented relationships between teacher burnout, turnover, and negative student outcomes, including school climate, student grades, and standardized testing scores.<sup>16,17,18</sup> Improvements in school employee physical and emotional well-being can promote teacher effectiveness and retention, which is likely to have positive effects on students.<sup>16</sup>

## Financial Outcomes

In addition to benefits to school employees and their students, employee wellness also presents financial benefits for the larger system.<sup>19</sup> When employees and the overall school environment are healthier, health insurance premiums and staff turnover may be reduced.<sup>19</sup> Given that employees who are healthy tend to be more productive and have fewer absences,<sup>7</sup> schools can save money that would otherwise be allocated to pay substitute staff.<sup>5,19,20</sup> In addition, successful employer-sponsored wellness programs have shown to lead to a return on investment (up to \$6 for every dollar spent on prevention programs over a two- to five-year period), increased productivity, reduced worker's compensation, and reduced need for health care utilization by employees.<sup>2,19,20</sup>



## PROMOTING EMPLOYEE WELLNESS: EVIDENCE IN ACTION

*The strategies provided here summarize a review of available evidence and best practice recommendations in this domain.\* Strategies are grouped by anticipated resource demand (e.g., funding, time, space, training, materials). Research specific to school employee wellness is emerging, thus evidence on promoting wellness of employees in other fields is included to inform recommendations for schools.*

### Level 1: Low resource demand

#### Establish an employee wellness committee

- The employee wellness committee should solicit input from employees across positions (e.g., teaching staff, bus drivers, administrative staff) to ensure that activities match interests and align with health-related needs. The committee can encourage participation by disseminating information about available programming to all employees.
- The committee can also work at the organizational level to improve employee physical and mental health by proactively identifying and responding to common workplace stressors.<sup>21</sup> Work could include individual-level supports as well as audits of employee workloads, resources, and system supports.<sup>22,23</sup>

#### Support positive workplace climate

- School climate and culture impact not only student outcomes but also employee outcomes such as burnout, job satisfaction, and commitment to position<sup>19</sup>—with studies demonstrating that collaboration and culture among employees are also associated with student and teacher outcomes.<sup>18,24,25</sup>
- School administrators can implement supports such as professional learning communities<sup>26</sup> and professional learning about critical topics such as stress and social responsiveness.

### Level 2: Moderate resource demand

#### Implement environmental changes to support healthy lifestyle habits

- Environmental changes are naturally occurring components of the school environment that support employee health (as opposed to wellness programs that employees opt into).<sup>27</sup> Research has documented relationships between environmental changes and improved employee dietary habits.<sup>27</sup>
- Environmental changes include access to free drinking water, healthy food and beverage options in the cafeteria and vending machines, opportunities for physical activity breaks, and policy changes (e.g., requiring healthy options for meetings or celebrations, anti-tobacco policies).<sup>2,27</sup>

#### Encourage participation in online health and wellness promotion

- Research has documented the effectiveness of online wellness interventions for promoting cardiovascular health;<sup>28</sup> these programs are most likely to be effective when paired with environmental changes (see above) or face-to-face interventions.<sup>29</sup> Online program delivery options have been associated with improved mental health outcomes, including increased access to services and resources.<sup>30,31</sup>
- School leadership can offer online opportunities such as access to health education, health and wellness monitoring tools, and/or social networks to support health behavior change.

### Level 3: High resource demand

#### Provide supports to prevent and respond to employee mental health needs

- Research has demonstrated that programs targeting mental health are most effective when they use cognitive-behavioral strategies—such as reframing interpretations and responses to stress—or relaxation techniques.<sup>4,32,33</sup>
- Mental health supports may include workplace stress management programs,<sup>4,33</sup> mindfulness interventions, resilience training,<sup>34,35,36,37</sup> or treatment in response to mental health needs such as depression or anxiety<sup>32</sup> – and should be implemented in a way that is relevant to the setting.

#### Provide coaching and ongoing professional learning

- Teacher stress is highly prevalent and is associated with poor mental health outcomes and turnover; many teachers report that their greatest concern is managing student behavior.<sup>38</sup>
- School leaders can provide coaching and professional learning related to identified areas of need (e.g., classroom management) to facilitate improved implementation of strategies<sup>39,40,41</sup> and reduced teacher stress.<sup>23</sup> Efforts should include specific attention to addressing challenges faced by novice teachers.<sup>42</sup>

*\*For more information about the systematic review process we used to identify evidence-based practices, please refer to our overview brief which can be found [here](#).*



## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

*Note: The [WellSAT WSCC](#) allows users to evaluate district policy alignment with 'best practices' in policy associated with Employee Wellness and other WSCC model domains.*

### **Action for Healthy Kids**

#### Staff as Healthy Role Models

This webpage offers a list of suggestions for how teachers and staff can develop their own healthy habits and model healthy lifestyles to students.

### **Alliance for a Healthier Generation**

#### Staff Well-Being

This page includes resources that are helpful for developing employee wellness programs, including guides for worksite health-risk assessments and sample employee wellness interest surveys.

### **CDC**

#### Employee Wellness Guide

This website discusses strategies for creating employee wellness programs and resources for promoting employee wellness.

### **Child Trends**

#### A Comprehensive Approach to Wellness for All School Staff

This resource outlines six dimensions of wellness for school employees with links to more information.

### **Cigna**

#### Creating a Workplace Wellness Committee: A Toolkit for Employers

This document provides step-by-step instructions for developing employee wellness initiatives that reflect employees' health interests and needs.

#### Guide to School Employees' Well-Being

This document describes the need for school employee health supports and four steps to take to create employee wellness programs in schools.

### **Greater Good Science Center**

#### Adult Well-Being

This webpage provides practices that promote the social and emotional well-being of school staff.

### **Kaiser Permanente**

#### Thriving Schools

This webpage includes resources for school employee well-being including healthy eating, physical activity, social & emotional well-being, and webinars about promoting employee health.

#### Teacher and Staff Well-being

This page provides resources to support school staff, including case studies about schools that have successfully implemented employee wellness programs with their staff.

### **National Education Association**

#### Student and Educator Mental Health

This website offers background on mental health and offers resources on adult social emotional learning.

### **Penn State University & Robert Wood Johnson Foundation**

#### Teacher Stress and Health

This document describes the prevalence and impact of teacher stress and evidence-based strategies to prevent and respond to these stressors.

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