



Educator Wellness Toolkit:

Leading a School with Wellness at the Forefront



Division of
**Nutrition &
Physical Activity**



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Foreword by Dr. Adam Saenz

I'm on my fifth cup of coffee this morning. Wonder if just one more will finally snap me out of this physical and mental funk? They're not going to follow my recommendations anyway, so why bother? Even when I muscle up the energy to do my job, am I really being effective and doing good work?

Those three questions became a “check engine” light on the dashboard of my life. It was February 2002, and I was struggling in my second year as a school psychologist.

My plan upon completing my doctoral program was to work in the school system for a year, complete licensure requirements, and then enter private practice. I was surprised, though—I absolutely loved working in schools, and I was beginning to consider what a life-long career as a school psychologist would look like. But here was my dilemma: I was into the second year of my career, and I was already peering over the cliff of burnout. How could I possibly be sustainable?

I looked ahead to my colleagues in education who had invested their lives in children and were approaching retirement. I noticed two groups seemed to emerge. Group One: Life Givers. Group Two: Life Suckers. As seasoned veterans, the Life Givers were filled with joy about the seemingly immeasurable investment they had made in countless individuals, young and not-so-young, over their careers. In contrast, the Life Suckers (fortunately, a much smaller group) were bitter and cynical, and they seemed to be approaching their retirement as a get-out-of-jail free card that was not, in fact, free, and came way too late in the game.

It was a wake-up call for me: would my future land me with the Life Givers or Life Suckers? I knew I alone was in control of and responsible for that outcome. Based on the “check engine” questions that had invaded my thought life at that early stage in my career, I knew my prognosis was poor. What could I do?

I—the healthcare professional—finally started asking what self-care needed to look like. Not for the teachers I served. Not for the parents I served. Not for the educators I served. For me. What would it look like for me to practice wise stewardship of each major area of my life?

Almost twenty years later, I am happy to report that I am not a Life Sucker! With each passing year, I find greater joy and satisfaction in my work with educators and students across the world, and I'm looking forward to many years to come. I have learned that self-care is a practice and a process, not a destination. In fact, I would take it a step further: self-care is *the* practice and process that makes possible all other effective practices and processes in our lives.

This resource represents the collaborative efforts of many leaders in the state of Indiana, all of whom want you to live your best life, sustainably. We know that what you do not only matters, it matters *deeply*. We want to do everything we can to position you—the educational leader—to successfully model positive self-care and to create safe and healthy relational environments in your sphere of influence.

Thank you for all you do to love and serve the students and families in your life. Remember: one of the most loving things you can do for those depending on you is to offer them the best version of yourself. Self-care is not an act of narcissism, vanity, or indulgence. It is an act of love. Be encouraged. Be well.

Adam L. Saenz

Introduction

Intended Audience

Though personal wellness and accountability are critical for educators to show up and effectively execute the difficult job of a teacher, **school/program administrators and/or leaders** must proactively build healthy environments that both encourage and enable educators to be well. Much attention has been paid to the importance of educator wellness and ways in which educators can improve their own personal wellness to promote positive relationships with students and staff, effective classroom climates, and manageable work-life balance. The Indiana Department of Education (IDOE) released the self-paced, online *Science of Happiness* course for educators seeking to create more awareness and learn strategies to improve their own well-being and happiness.

In a perfect world, every child would start their day with a nutritious breakfast. They would say goodbye to their parent or guardian, who would send them on their way to walk to school safely with friends. They would show up ready to learn, use social and emotional strategies to regulate when tough feelings arise and look forward to their 30 minutes of built-in physical activity breaks throughout the day. For lunch, they would sit for a full 20 minutes with a lunch sourced from locally grown fruits and veggies and understand where their food came from due to gardening embedded into science curriculum. After school, there would be an array of extracurricular activities to choose from. The best part is that there would also be opportunities for families to play together.

Similarly, in a perfect world, every educator would show up engaged and ready to teach. The educator who recently came back from maternity leave would have sufficient time and a comfortable place to pump, if she wishes, rather than using a restroom. When an educator felt overwhelmed, school leadership would activate a co- or self-regulation protocol which would allow a walking break to center and collect emotions, while also being physically active. There would be meaningful relationships and respectful partnership between educators and school leaders where both parties supported each other's wellness journey. Moreover, there would be a culture of wellness that was woven through all initiatives and programming to better serve, retain and fuel the education workforce.

In many Indiana schools, this is not the norm, nor is it expected to be the norm. Educators are expected to do more with less. They are never going to have “the perfect world”, however leaders can make strides towards a better environment where educators feel supported and have a chance to make healthy choices in order to build a culture where students can also thrive.

Landscape of Educator Wellness in Indiana

Physical and Mental Health in Indiana

On average, 13% of Hoosier adults have reported 14 or more poor mental health days in a month. That means there are on average two weeks out of each month that there is a build up of stress, anxiety, or overwhelming emotions that alter the course of the day. (CDC, 2018). This data is not inclusive to those with chronic depression or severe mental health barriers. Additionally, 27% of Hoosiers, aged 20 and older, do not participate in physical activity. The lack of physical activity contributes to several diseases, ranging from diabetes, cardiovascular disease and premature mortality. Indiana is in the 10th percentile for physical health—one cannot have a healthy body without a healthy mind.

County Health Rankings & Roadmaps (CHR&R) illustrates healthy behaviors and the cause of adverse health outcomes in states and counties. This data also shows what we can do to create healthier places to live, learn, work and play. CHR&R brings actionable data, evidence, guidance and stories to communities to make it easier for people to be healthy in their neighborhoods, schools and workplaces.

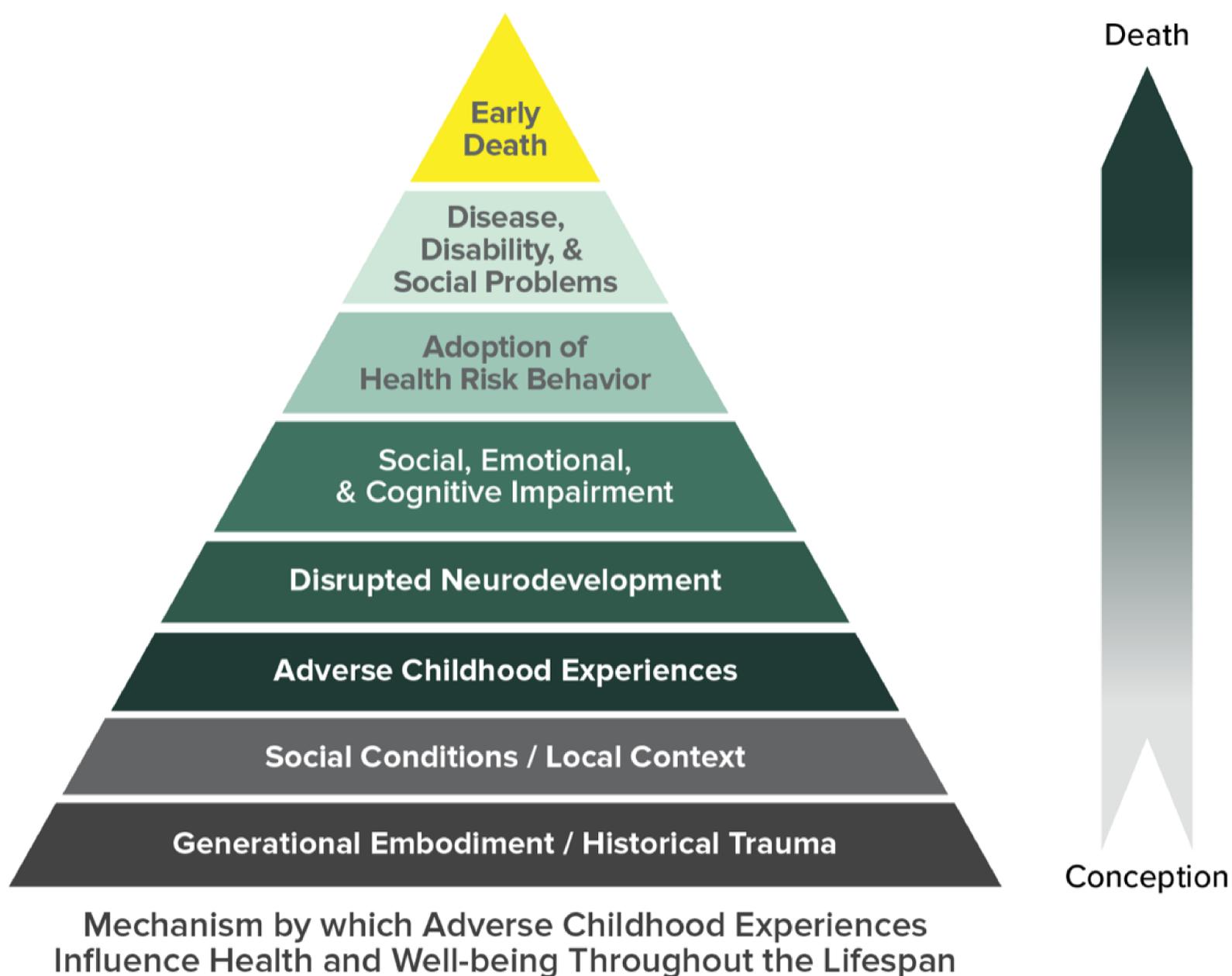
[Indiana 2018 County Health Rankings](#)

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

Education and awareness about Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) has increased over the past few years. The [ACE Study](#) uncovered how ACEs are strongly related to development of risk factors for disease, and well-being throughout the life course. It is important to keep in mind that students and families are experiencing a wide range of risk factors that will ultimately influence their academic success and engagement with school. School employees that have endured potentially traumatic experiences in childhood will be at a greater risk for adverse health outcomes such as difficulty forming healthy, stable relationships, financial struggles, and even depression.

The ACEs Indiana Coalition is dedicated to growing awareness on Adverse Childhood Experiences and building self-healing communities. The ACEs Indiana Coalition is composed of professionals from around the state. The backgrounds of these professionals vary so that they each bring a unique perspective to this initiative. The goal of this coalition is to bring awareness to the effects of childhood trauma and to help communities build support in the human services sector with a focus on building trauma-informed, self-healing communities and programs. Free training is offered statewide. Please visit <https://www.acesindiana.org/> to request training.

The ACE research is a great resource to build the foundation of safe and resilient school environments for all. As educators work to support students, it is essential for administrators to work to support educator wellness as a priority. An individual's ACE score does not determine their life outcome, rather, it is one factor of their wellness journey. Research shows that healing communities help to build resilient citizens which include employees in the workplace.



Indiana Educator Wellness

As part of the Project AWARE (Advancing Wellness and Resilience in Education) grant initiative, the Indiana Department of Education (IDOE) collaborated with the Indiana University School of Social Work (IUSSW) in the Fall of 2019 to identify the range of practices, programs, and implementation strategies each Indiana public school district employs to promote student and staff wellness.

With 254 Indiana school district respondents, many pointed to human resource-related support, including health insurance incentives and employee assistance programs, as their main source for employee wellness improvements. Other

schools outlined wellness teams and health/behavioral health services that were integrated into their school settings. Several schools collaborated with community partners to provide wellness services to employees. A common theme present in this report's data showed schools employing strategies to build a shared school culture around wellness, including employee programs for physical activity and school-wide newsletters providing guidance for physical and emotional health. Respondents indicated a growing focus on the linkage between adult and student health, and schools were starting to provide structures and supports that would allow teachers to take breaks to focus on their own mental health and self-regulation during the school day. Professional development and stress management among teachers aligned with the focus on adult wellness. Additionally, the data revealed a wide range in strategies that schools used to support and facilitate employee wellness, with some providing minimal support and others providing a more integrative framework.

Teacher Retention and Satisfaction

Teacher retention has become a major issue in our country and Indiana is no exception. On average, Indiana teachers work only 5 years in the classroom after graduating. We know teachers leave the profession for an array of reasons but one commonly reported reason is working conditions and lack of support ([Learning Policy Institute, 2016](#)). Part of creating a supportive and comfortable work environment is focusing on wellness among all dimensions. By hiring and training quality administrators that model wellness and make it a school-wide priority, teacher retention rates are likely to increase.

In 2017, the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence conducted a national survey—including over 5,000 educator voices—asking how they were feeling:

"Teachers Are Anxious and Overwhelmed. They Need SEL Now More Than Ever."
[EdSurge](#)

"...the top five emotions were: *frustrated, overwhelmed, stressed, tired and happy*. The primary source of their frustration and stress pertained to not feeling supported by their administration around challenges related to meeting all of their students' learning needs, high-stakes testing, an ever-changing curriculum and work/life balance."

Further, in a statewide survey conducted by Panorama in May 2020, following the shift to remote learning due to COVID-19, teachers continued to express both their resilience and struggles in the face of adversity and high expectations. Of the 6,072 educators surveyed, nearly 40% indicated they were somewhat or extremely concerned about their social emotional wellbeing while 43% were concerned about their physical wellbeing. The data also show that professional relationships matter; with 90% of respondents reporting that they had someone at their school or another educator outside their school who they could count on to help them, no matter what.

Erin Bechtold
Principal
Northwood Elementary

"Relationships are the key to building a strong work environment. When staff feels cared for you can accomplish greater levels of success. People need to know that they are valued, respected, and cared for and they will do just about anything you ask them to do. I have found a simple note or small gesture is the first step to creating these relationships."

Teacher Preparation Program Enrollment

One of the best ways to prepare educators is through Teacher Preparation Programs. According to Title II data, over the last decade there has been a decrease in educators completing Teacher Preparation Programs. During the 2018-19 academic year, just under 3,500 homegrown teachers were added to Indiana's education workforce. While this number is up around 500 students from the 2017-18 academic year there is still a significant reduction in the pipeline.

Indiana is making strides to create a stronger educator pipeline. According to the Learning Policy Institute, the best ways to encourage students to become teachers is to offer service scholarships, loan forgiveness programs, and develop teacher residencies to create local 'grow your own' pathways for students to follow. Of these three programs, Indiana offers two at the state level: the Next Generation Hoosier Educator Scholarship, the William A. Crawford Minority Teacher Scholarship, and variations of a student teaching stipend. The state also recently launched a teacher residency grant to help fund institutions partnering with K-12 schools to create and execute quality residency programs. The grants will support 26 teacher residents, funded at \$15,000 per teacher. Funding can be used to pay resident and mentor teacher stipends, as well as support costs for higher education partners. Initial grant recipients may be eligible for renewal of the grant for the 2021-22 school year. If we can support students in the ways listed above while also teaching them about wellness and balance, Indiana will see an increase in students becoming and staying teachers.

Happy Teachers, Happy Students

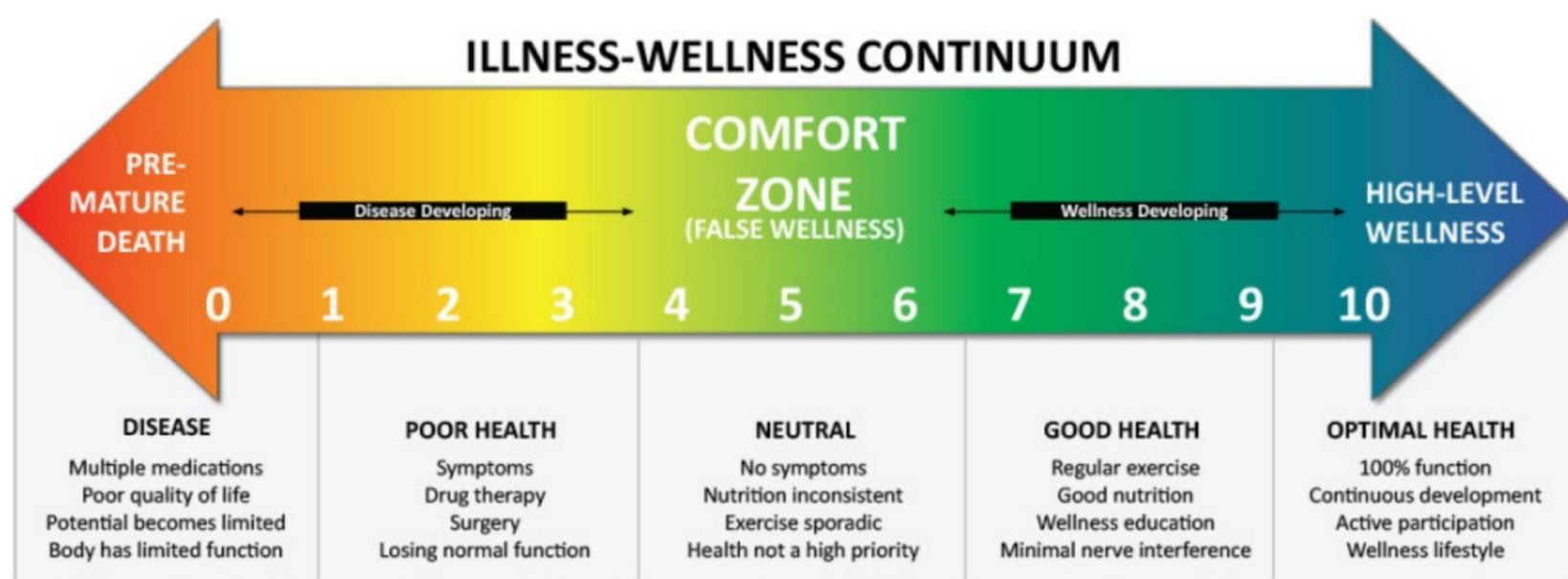
Educators that are happy can have a positive impact on students' well-being. They are able to focus their energy on ensuring that the students' needs are met while also modeling healthy behaviors. In addition, healthy employees are more productive, they have more energy, and are better able to manage stress. By prioritizing employee wellness, schools can empower staff to feel their best while further supporting students' well-being.

Effective employee wellness initiatives can also-

- Reduce staff stress
- Boost morale, productivity, and effectiveness in the workplace
- Reduce staff turnover and burnout
- Reduce costs associated with staff healthcare and absenteeism

Continuum of Wellness

Achieving wellness is a continuous process that never ends. Wellness is made up of several dimensions that all play an equally important role in a person's life. The continuum of wellness is a paradigm that shows it is more than preventing illness and disease but rather a deliberate set of actions to achieve optimal wellness. Below is a visual of the continuum of wellness created by Dr. John Travis in 1972.



To achieve the highest level of wellness, an individual must have wellness education that continuously develops. The person must also be an active participant in a wellness lifestyle. This toolkit is designed to help create programs to not only educate educators about wellness but also to help them become an active participant in a wellness lifestyle.

If You Want to See It, Be It

The critical role of modeling positive behaviors and habits by all adults cannot be overlooked. School/program administrators can be role-models and advocates for personal wellness in the same way that teachers are for the students they serve. Leaders may even go above and beyond this call to action by speaking about personal experiences around wellness with students or teachers.

Tim McRoberts, Associate Executive Director of the Indiana Association of School Principals, shares his personal wellness story and the intentionality needed to be an effective leader:



As with a lot of people, my “moment” when I realized I needed to make sure and pay heed to my mental and physical health occurred when, as a principal, I started experiencing health issues. I knew, and was validated medically, that the stress of my job, coupled with my inability to pay attention to my diet, exercise and sleep, was taking a tremendous toll on my body and mind. I was also not managing my relationships (personal and professional) in a healthy manner.

What I determined was that I needed to become “intentional” about my habits and life. I have adopted the word “intentional” as a life word to help me accomplish this. I strive to be intentional with my relationship management, diet, exercise, and sleep. I also feel that being intentional about what I read and other influences that I allow into my mind and spirit are healthy.

I feel that modeling this lifestyle is important as a leader. I have promoted, both as a high school principal and as an associate director with IASP, that being intentional about wellness is a must. You must place your family above your profession. You must make an intentional effort to attend to your own wellness as a leader. You must set the tone and encourage those you work with to adopt the same intentional priorities. ”

**-Tim McRoberts, Associate Executive Director of the
Indiana Association of School Principals**

Building Healthy Environments

There are several approaches that can be taken when school leaders are considering ways to build healthy school environments. Each chapter in this toolkit is organized by the dimensions of wellness and readers are encouraged to explore each dimension through the four lenses listed below:

Healthy School Environment Approaches

P o l i c y

Example: Implementing a policy that allows staff to purchase healthy meals from the cafeteria at a discount.

P r a c t i c e

Example: Allowing time for staff and students to take physical activity breaks or participate in social activities that promote positive relationships among staff.

N o r m s

Example: Leadership participation in wellness offerings to set the tone and encourage others to participate.

I n f r a s t r u c t u r e

Example: Providing quiet space for mindfulness, deep breathing, and other stress relief approaches.

Adapted from NACDD's [Healthy Schools, Healthy Staff, Healthy Students, A Guide to Improving School Employee Wellness](#)

Employee Wellness Environmental Scanning

We recognize that all school corporations are vastly different with their priorities, culture and skill sets. Rather than reinventing the wheel, best-practices state to start where you are. Construct a wellness committee to come together in order to evaluate your wellness goals. Utilize this SWOT analysis template to guide which wellness sub-topic to begin with:

SWOT ANALYSIS



Strengths

The first factor of the analysis is strengths. Strengths are internal factors that a company excels at.

- What are your key differentiators between your school and others?
- What do you do better than other ECE and school environments?
- Where are you most making an impact with educator wellness?
- What do parents, community members and students perceive your strengths to be?
- What feature/functionality/value does educator wellness initiatives deliver that other schools lack?

Weaknesses

Weaknesses are internal factors such as organizational challenges that limit a school's productivity.

- What are the areas you could improve upon?
- What shortcomings are you experiencing within the scope of educator wellness?
- What resources are you missing or could benefit from?
- What features /functionality does your current wellness initiatives lack?
- What characteristics might educators within your setting view as a weakness?

Opportunities

Opportunities are typically external factors that could be seen as great possibilities for a company to succeed and grow.

- Can you provide additional value to your educators?
- Are there similar schools who you could collaborate with?
- Can you use technology to improve your process?
- Are there new community partners you can pursue?
- Have you engaged with a vast array of educators to evaluate their needs, wants, or ideas?

Threats

Threats are generally external factors that pose a risk or create vulnerabilities that could hinder your success in the scope of educator wellness.

- What hurdles are you facing?
- Is changing technology making things difficult?
- Are there economic issues or changes in your field?

Compile the Results and Take Action

Once the discussion is finished, compile and analyze the results. Use the results to develop a strategic plan for each area that can be presented to key stakeholders. The plan should include ways to convert weaknesses into strengths and threats into opportunities. You should leverage your strengths to capitalize on opportunities and minimize threats.

From here, create an action item list and plan (be sure to prioritize the weak areas).

When done correctly and consistently, a SWOT analysis is a fantastic tool for promoting discussion and arming your team with an arsenal of information to help you predict changing trends. Use these powerful insights to guide your strategic decision-making process using your available resources and capabilities. It is recommended you conduct a SWOT analysis at least every six months as a check on your current school environment, and also prior to the start of any new major initiatives.

Resources

School Leader's Tool for Assessing and Improving School Culture:
http://www.mssaa.org/gen/mssaa_generated_bin/documents/basic_module/School_culture_triage.pdf

Big 6 Action Items

Wellness policies can be overwhelming, especially for leaders at the local school/program level who may not hold the power to influence this sort of channel. Here are six action items that can be accomplished right now to improve the wellness of the educators in your building. For more tips and strategies, please see the respective Powerful Practices section for each dimension of wellness.

Physical Wellness

Nutrition Education Professional Development:

Teachers with more knowledge about nutrition and healthy eating can not only lead happier, healthier lives—they can be stronger role models for our kids and be better advocates for school wellness policies.

The Healthy Teachers Program is a free two-hour nutrition and cooking class designed to transform staff wellbeing through inspiration. It is a fun, interactive class that breaks down simple nutrition into digestible information that everyone can use. The class covers:

- Basic principles of eating a whole foods diet
- Tips for shopping economically while still making healthy choices
- Healthy cooking demonstrations and recipes

The [Healthy Teachers Program](#) is **not** a diet program, but an open concept to basic nutrition that fits everyone!

Physical Activity for Social Connection:

Building in time for educators to move doesn't have to be an all or nothing approach. Encouraging standing and movement breaks throughout class time will benefit both students and educators, though breaks can be limited within the education setting. This can be anything from walking breaks or encouraging the use of movement, like yoga or stretching, rather than large amounts of time sitting during meetings. The recommended amount of movement for adults is 150 minutes of moderate-vigorous physical activity each week, and many of those minutes will be spent within the school setting for educators. Utilizing language

around “movement,” which feels more attainable than “exercise,” which so often has a negative connotation, can be a great place to start. Walking meetings or encouraging educators to coordinate a walk with fellow staff members is also an opportunity for connectivity. This can also create an opportunity for intimacy, construction of a support network, all while releasing hormones that fuel our bodies with positivity.

<https://www.actionforhealthykids.org/activity/staff-professional-development/>

Financial Wellness

Offer Financial Wellness Sessions for All New Employees

Financial wellness plays a critical role in our overall wellness. Financial stress contributes to all aspects of wellness in that if we cannot fulfill our most basic needs that require money, we cannot necessarily practice overall wellness. Offering new employees an opportunity to attend a financial wellness session sets the tone that it's part of your school culture and okay to talk about.

Social Wellness

Conduct a Personality Assessment

Social wellness provides support which enhances the quality of life and provides a buffer against adverse life events. Social wellness is also not a “one size fits all” spectrum. One thing you can do as a leader to best help your staff is conduct a personality assessment using Myers-Briggs, Gallup, or other assessments with your staff to learn their personality preferences and strengths. Adapt how you engage with them to best fit their personality.

Spiritual Wellness

A Practice That Meets Your Individuality

Spiritual wellness provides us with a system of beliefs, values, and practices centered around the core of our being. For some it could be volunteering, belonging to a community organization, meditation, prayer or even journaling. It encompasses a level of commitment to express oneself by knowing oneself. Administrators should encourage educators to take on new experiences and cultivate the skills that promote a positive outlook. As a leader in education, you can create a mentorship program between staff members that focuses on boosting morale and connecting educators with each other. You can incorporate a “Take Ten” policy that encourages spiritual self-care. This allows educators to dedicate time for themselves to build their desired rituals.

Emotional Wellness

Conduct a Professional Learning Community Around the Science of Happiness

Released in January of 2020, the Department of Education worked closely with Dr. Laurie Santos—the original creator of the undergraduate Yale course—and Butler University to provide educators from around the state with a free, self-paced online course to learn more about the science behind happiness. Educators can earn 45 professional growth points upon completion and some schools around the state have taken this resource and embedded the content into their existing professional learning structures.

To learn more about the course, visit www.doe.in.gov/sebw or enroll at <https://moodle.doe.in.gov/course/index.php?categoryid=51>.

Occupational/Intellectual Wellness

Create a culture of vulnerability-based trust where educators feel comfortable sharing challenges and are supported by leadership and colleagues who share their stories and experiences where vulnerability helped them connect with others and combat the forces of shame.

Watch Brené Brown's TEDxHouston talk titled, "The Power of Vulnerability": https://www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_the_power_of_vulnerability?language=en and discuss what vulnerability looks like in the educational sphere.

How to Get Started

When looking to implement programs to promote educator wellness, one might ask "how can I fund these opportunities?" The Every Student Succeeds Act Title IV Part A is a perfect fit. ESSA Title IV Part A is divided into three Focus Areas: Well-Rounded Education, Safe and Healthy Schools, and Use of Technology. Most educator wellness programs would fall under the Safe and Healthy Schools focus area. Title IV Part A differs from Title I in that Title IV funds may be used at any school in the district, not just Title I designated schools. You can add more to your LEA's Title IV allocation by transferring Title I or Title II funds into Title IV. With transferring, this allows for much more flexibility between funding streams to implement educator wellness programs in your school. If you have more questions regarding funding and the allowability of programs, reach out to your LEA's Federal Grant Specialist at IDOE or your LEA's Title IV Grant Specialist.

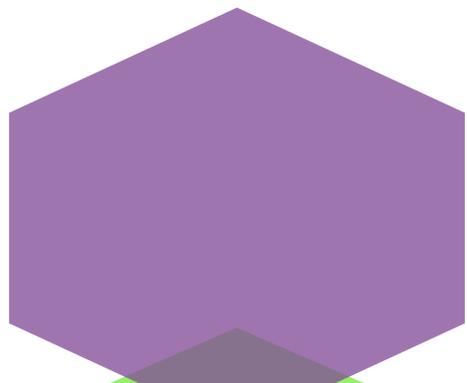
We also encourage all schools and programs to seek opportunities to fund wellness and mental health supports for their staff. We would also encourage seeking out community partners who may be able to offer supports and services for low or no cost.

Moreover, this toolkit is not the ultimate guide to all things within the scope of educator wellness. One will see that a school or ECE leader can pick and choose what they want to implement. We recommend choosing a pathway, or dimension of wellness, that already has momentum or staff buy-in at your school. Utilize [SMART Goals](#) to create a cohesive plan for action items set within your selected dimension of wellness. This isn't to say that you cannot try an activity in all pathways, but an opportunity to start where you are.

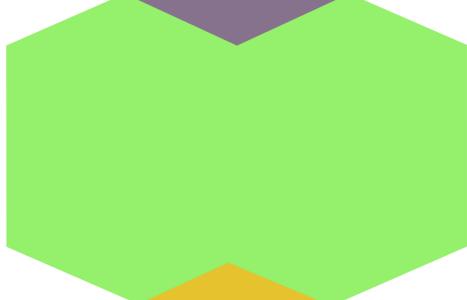
Conclusion

Educator wellness is easier said than done. We all know that change doesn't happen overnight, however, we hope this toolkit presents the building blocks for an effective educator wellness program. Schools are in a unique position to improve the health of Indiana's educators. Using the resources and implementing the strategies in this toolkit can help achieve the ultimate vision for healthy educators, which in turn, aid healthier student bodies.

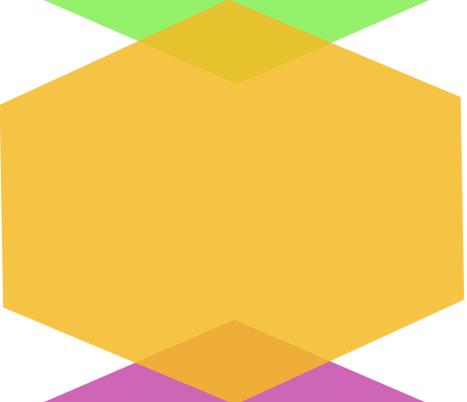
Dimensions of Wellness



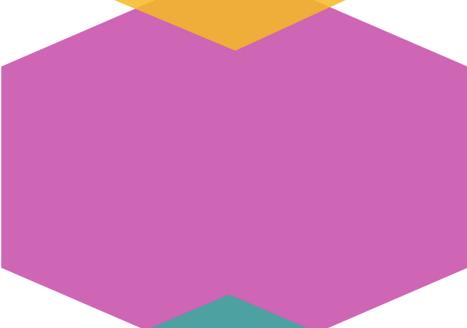
Emotional Wellness



Financial Wellness



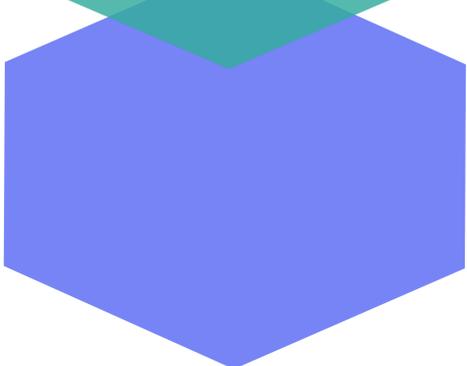
Occupational & Intellectual Wellness



Physical Wellness



Social Wellness



Spiritual Wellness

Emotional Wellness

The degree to which we are able to appropriately experience and express a wide range of emotions (Saenz, 2012), successfully handle life's stressors, and adapt to change and difficult times (NIH).

Rationale

School employees can experience “vicarious trauma,” which refers to the emotional strain that results from working with students who have experienced stressful or traumatic events. High levels of stress can also result from increasing demands of high-stakes testing, disjointed professional development and balancing work-life priorities.

The inability to effectively process feelings and manage stress can have an adverse effect on one's mental and physical health.

An emotionally-well adult is able to forgive themselves and extend forgiveness to their coworkers. Individuals may or may not seek guidance from a trained counselor when experiencing high levels of stress and adversity but are able to consistently seek guidance and support from their network. A supportive, caring, and transparent working environment will enable school employees to proactively tend to their emotional well-being and practice appropriate ways of expressing difficult feelings that will inevitably arise in a school setting.

Examples and Case Studies

Recognizing educators' efforts and accomplishments:

One southern Indiana school created a system—with consent from each educator—where administrators “called home” to a family member or partner of an educator/employee who deserved a little extra recognition for their hard work. Just when teachers make calls home to parents, these calls were specific and intentional!

Ensure that educators understand that all social emotional learning is not created equally:

Wayne Township schools conducted four professional development sessions in January 2021 for the District Mental Health and Wellness Committee members to

understand how cultural programming impacts brain development and how we interpret the world.

Create reliable systems to check-in and respond to educators' mental wellness:

One central Indiana school created an optional, daily check-in for teachers to communicate to school leadership how they were feeling that day. The responses remained anonymous to everyone but the school social worker and principal took ownership of checking in with educators that indicated they needed some help.



Wellness Challenges

- Assign specific office hours dedicated to wellness check-ins with administrators
- Model and practice deep breathing exercises during staff meetings.
- Conduct a [5-Day Gratitude Challenge \[1\]](#)
- Promote the [Professional Quality of Life Scale \(ProQOL 5\) \[2\]](#) to measure compassion satisfaction and compassion fatigue
- Test out Kaiser Permanente's [Staff Break Room Makeover Tips \[3\]](#)
- Conduct a Mindfulness Inventory- [What is the best mindfulness practice for me? \[4\]](#)
- Review Evansville Vanderburgh School Corporation's [Building a Self-Regulation Plan for Educators in the wake of COVID \[5\]](#)
- Review Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence's [Managing Emotions in Times of Uncertainty and Stress \[6\]](#). 10 hour, free online course for educators.

Emotional Wellness

Emotional Wellness Powerful Practices

Examples of ways administrators and program leaders can support emotional wellness:

Across all types of care and education programs, leaders can:

- Provide a dedicated room for relaxation and wellness at the workplace where employees can take a mental break, practice yoga, or relax in a massage chair
- Encourage technology-free meetings (when possible) so distractions are limited and connection is encouraged
- Create the space and opportunity for self-care and collective care such as offering educator-led healing/listening/support circles
- Offer professional development on topics related to trauma informed care, healthy coping strategies to address chronic stress and compassion fatigue
- Recognize and support all educators' accomplishments, both personal and professional
- Ensure that Employee Assistance Programs provide opportunities for short term counseling, resources, referrals, and follow up for work-related or personal problems and educators know how to access these services through leadership training
- Ensure employee participation in decisions regarding workplace issues that affect job stress
- Develop organizational priorities that include work/life balance, growth, and recognition
- Involve administrators and support staff for short relief breaks (5-10 minutes) to allow teachers to relieve tension when a disciplinary issue arises
- Identify partner/mentor teachers where students can go for additional emotional support
- Help educators learn about and reflect on the mindfulness practices that work for them (quiet stillness, self-compassion, meditation, etc.)
- Model requesting and extending forgiveness
- Leverage and improve existing teacher mentoring and induction programs to encourage vulnerability and open discussion of the stressors that new teachers face
- Institute a policy that allows teachers to engage in physical activity during their prep periods, including the ability to leave the building for fresh air
- Build off of existing work on Indiana's Social Emotional Learning Competencies for K-12 students using this [social and emotional educator self-assessment\[7\]](#)

Financial Wellness

Financial wellness focuses on how to successfully manage financial expenses in life and find financial security.

Rationale

Financial wellness plays a critical role in our overall wellness. Financial stress contributes to all aspects of wellness. If we cannot fulfill our most basic needs, which require money, then it is difficult to balance other dimensions of one's wellness practices. Success in this dimension does not necessarily mean just having the ability to buy necessities but create and maintain a secure lifestyle. Everyone has financial stress but some more than others. This includes savings, reduced debt, retirement planning and budgeting. Success in this dimension leads to more satisfaction in other areas of life and discussions should be had early in careers. Financial wellness can be a difficult topic to discuss as your financial situation is very personal. It is important to work on the climate to accept discussions around financial wellness. However, like all things, we should never force someone to discuss something that makes them uncomfortable.

Examples and Case Studies

- A new study by Princeton University puts a figure on happiness: [Time Magazine- Figure on Wellness \[1\]](#)
- Case studies on workplace wellness: [Financial Wellness Case Study\[2\]](#)

Wellness Challenges

- Set a monthly savings goal
- Attend a seminar for your company's retirement plan
- Pack a healthy lunch vs. eat out
- Create a budget
- Set a meeting and talk with your retirement advisor
- Donate to a meaningful charity if able
- Borrow a book from the library (digital or paper!)

Additional Resources

- [Financial Health Checklist\[3\]](#)- This checklist introduces you to ideas that you may not have thought of to create better financial health in your life, including renegotiating services like cable!
- [Free resources\[4\]](#): Budget calculator, Loan calculator, etc.- Having access to free tools can be the first step in assessing your financial wellness. This link contains many free tools for budgeting, debt repayment, planning and retirement.

Financial Wellness Powerful Practices

Examples of ways administrators and program leaders can support financial wellness:

Across all types of care and education programs, leaders can:

- Offer all new employees an opportunity to attend training regarding financial wellness
- Encourage financial wellness to start at hire/continue when transferring
- Develop a financial wellness program for employees
- Get involved with your local teacher's union regarding contract negotiations
- Pass information along to employees via multiple formats (hard copy, emails, videos, etc.)
- Offer education on budgeting, credit, protecting finances, lifetime earnings, cost of insurance, and saving
- Educate employees on student debt forgiveness and management of student debt
- Start a financial fitness campaign to help identify goals and give access to tools to reach goals
- Interview leadership and Teachers Union about importance of financial wellness and ideas about financial wellness
- Acknowledge that financial hardships may be experienced by educators and staff. Be aware of local supports, partnerships, and resources where they may seek assistance

Occupational and Intellectual Wellness

Finding work-life balance and satisfaction in your contributions and professional learning while being open to new ideas and experiences with a desire to increase understanding, improve skills, continually challenge yourself, and maximize creative potential.

Rationale

Occupational and intellectual wellness involve finding work that allows one to use their gifts and feel as though they're contributing to something bigger. Educators are called to their work to help shape the future of our workforce and world. It's also important that educators find work that provides opportunities which are consistent with their values, beliefs, and lifestyle.

Success in these dimensions look like:

- Learning because you want to – not because you are told to
- Setting boundaries in order to enjoy both work and home lives
- Learning through varied experiences – reading, writing, sharing and exploration
- Observing what is around oneself
- Listening & Questioning
- Staying current with world affairs/news by reading books & newspapers
- Exposing oneself to new experiences (e.g. arts, theater)
- Staying interested in community activities
- Expanding the knowledge of others
- Developing value in creativity, curiosity and lifelong learning

Examples and Case Studies

Butler University's College of Education developed a guide titled "Talent, Personnel and Professional Development" that assists administrators in recruiting, retaining, and providing professional development to incoming and current staff members. For specific examples on creative recruitment ideas, ways that administrators can improve listening skills, and build trust with their staff click [here\[1\]](#).

Wellness Challenges

- Connect with a coworker you don't have a relationship with
- Make a list of all the reasons you became an educator
- Learn something new everyday
- Write down something that goes well daily
- Be intentional about [work life balance\[2\]](#) and figure out what it means to you

Additional Resources

- [The 8 Dimensions of Wellness\[3\]](#)- Easy read with a great definition of occupational wellness with links that offer insight to making work more meaningful and managing workplace stress
- [Continuum of Becoming an Anti-racist Multicultural Organization\[4\]](#)- A chart to help guide discussions and thoughts on race issues in the workplace
- [Signs of and Ways to Improve\[5\]](#)- Signs of occupational wellness as well as a quick and easy list of ways to improve occupational wellness

Occupational and Intellectual Wellness Powerful Practices

Examples of ways administrators and program leaders can support occupational and intellectual wellness:

Across all types of care and education programs, leaders can:

- Create a culture of vulnerability-based trust (i.e. educators feel comfortable sharing challenges and are supported by leadership and colleagues)
- Create a culture of continuous quality improvement through all initiatives
- Provide professional development that is meaningful and relevant to educators
- Consider engaging educators in developing processes where staff can work collaboratively to support student learning (i.e. Professional Learning Communities)
- Build relationships with staff and provide affirmations regularly
- Continuously scan to determine if and when educators are getting “burnt out” and support them through their challenges
- Consider providing opportunities for staff to get together outside of work to increase morale in thoughtful ways
- Support staff in their personal endeavors (e.g. hobbies, family events, etc.) and promote a work-life balance
- Support volunteer activities (e.g. allot paid time off specifically for volunteering)
- Model healthy work life balance by setting out-of-office messages, resist sending weekend emails, and praising employees who take time off for themselves or to be with their family.
- Consider formal and informal ways to recognize and appreciate staff in meaningful ways.
- Encourage educators to understand their own implicit biases and the ways those biases may impact their work. Project Implicit has a free Implicit Association Test (IAT) to assess attitude and beliefs on a variety of topics.
- Intentionally put in work around moving toward an anti-racist organizational framework. Here is a good list of organizational self-assessments
- Develop the tools to offer culturally competent care/education

Physical Wellness

*A state of **physical well-being** is not just the absence of disease. It includes lifestyle behavior choices to ensure health, avoid preventable diseases and conditions, and to live in a balanced state of body, mind, and spirit.*

Rationale

Why is this dimension of wellness important?

Physical wellness is more than just nutrition, or exercise, but a mentality that encourages self-care of the physical being. This may look vastly different from person to person. An individual might value more sleeping hours, while another might prioritize meal preparation that fuels their day. Physical wellness encompasses body movement, illness prevention, stress, consumption of nutrient dense foods and beverages, but most importantly, understanding the synergy of when and what your body needs.

What does this mean for overall wellness?

Perfection is the opposite of wellness. Physical wellness is the ebb and flow of honoring your body by not just serving your needs, but understanding your wants. Knowing your physical self is not punishing yourself for eating something sweet, drinking 8 glasses of water, or getting an individual's optimal level of sleep. It is progress towards honoring your body, in the way that creates healthy behavior sustainability and respect for yourself.

Examples and Case Studies

MSD of Pike's Assistant Superintendent, Dr. Larry Young, brought in team members of Indiana Department of Health (IDOH) to discuss changing their annual employee walking challenge. Rather than cancelling the series which had proven to be successful, but dated, MSD of Pike Township Schools task force C.R.E.W (Champions of Recreation, Exercise, and Wellness) utilized wellness marketing to re-brand the challenge to "[Walk Around the World](#)"[1]. This gave new life to the existing infrastructure by allowing

employees to be active in their desired manner and gain mileage to meet the distance of the selected country through all forms of [physical activity](#)[2].

Wellness Challenges

- [Plant Power](#)[3]: So if real food is the medicine, what is the dose? If you have made efforts to improve your diet but have not seen many results (changes in weight, blood sugar, blood pressure, blood fats, etc) then perhaps you need a bigger dose? Consider trying a whole-food, plant-based diet for a month to see if you get better results.
- [Move Your Way](#)[4]: Set your own weekly goals, choose the activities you want to do, and get personalized tips to help you stay motivated. When you're done, print your plan or share it with friends and family. So make your plan — and then get moving!
- **Hydration Station:** Label your water bottle with hour increments to hold yourself accountable! You can even suggest more water to be added to vending machines, rather than high calories, sweetened beverages.
- **Sleep:** Encourage your staff to seek out opportunities to better understand their sleeping habits like reading [Why We Sleep](#)[5] utilizing a [sleep diary](#)[6] or incorporate a [sleep cycle](#)[7] tracker to your routine.
 - [No Sweat by Dr. Michelle Segar](#)[8]
 - [Physical Activity Guidelines](#)[9]
 - [Healthy Teachers Program](#)[10]
 - [Walking program](#)[11]
 - [Build a Cookbook](#)[12]
 - [Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics](#)[13]

Physical Wellness Powerful Practices: Physical Activity

Examples of ways administrators and program leaders can support physical activity:

Across all types of care and education programs, leaders can:

- Insert protocol for walking breaks when educators need a minute to self-regulate
- Encourage the use of accountability buddies for physical activity goals
- Build time into staff meetings for stretching and movement
- Actively model the importance of physical activity and build language into your wellness policy that support these practices
- Allow use of fitness and recreation spaces to benefit staff wellness
- Host once a week “Teacher PE”
- Create a one mile indoor walking track and post the map around the setting
- Engage staff to create meaningful opportunities for movement
- Host a morning dance party for students and yourself
- Seek out grant opportunities for alternative seating
- Encourage walking meetings when possible
- Active transportation to and from school
- Cultivate relationships with community and fitness centers to support educator physical activity
- Utilize apps that align with your movement goals such as Charity Miles, Blogilates, Johnson and Johnson 7 Minute Workout, or Nike Training App

Physical Wellness

Physical Wellness Powerful Practices: Nutrition

Examples of ways administrators and program leaders can support nutrition:

Across all types of care and education programs, leaders can:

- Promote healthy vending options
- Encourage hydration breaks as much as possible
- Formulate a healthy meeting policy
- Host “saladbration” potlucks
- Utilize wellness promotion and marketing about nutrition topics
- Use the free Healthy Teachers Program as a professional development opportunity
- Create inclusive and accepting culture around food choices
- Promote collaboration with Dietitians from all settings such as community organizations, hospital networks, and Food Service
- Have a weekly recipe sharing or garden swap between educators
- Make break room an enjoyable place for teachers to eat
- Provide guidance and opportunities for employees to benefit from a school garden

Physical Wellness Powerful Practices: Breastfeeding Mothers

Examples of ways administrators and program leaders can support breastfeeding mothers:

Across all types of care and education programs, leaders can:

- Understand the benefits of breastfeeding
- Provide consistent breaks for nursing mothers to align with their pumping schedule
- Have a meeting with a mother coming back to work to see how you can support her during this transition
- Create a designated and comfortable lactation space for breastfeeding employees that include photos
- Design a breastfeeding-friendly policy
- Research opportunities for proper handling and storage
- See list of items for an ideal [lactation space](#)^[14]

Physical Wellness Powerful Practices: Sleep

Examples of ways administrators and program leaders can support sleep:

Across all types of care and education programs, leaders can:

- Encourage boundary setting for taking work home
- Utilize sleep logs or activity trackers to track hours asleep
- Promote nighttime routine best practices
- Encourage use of bluelight glasses
- Encourage physical activity as a complement to sleep
- Use a bedtime journal exercise
- Utilize meditation practice and apps such as CALM to assist in your practice
- Engage community partners in professional development on sleep
- Avoid sending emails and tasks that require action after work hours. It may be convenient for the administrator but keep teachers that don't "disconnect" from technology easily from truly recharging
- Participate in National Sleep Awareness Week (who doesn't love a PJ party?)

Social Wellness

Having healthy, nurturing, and supportive relationships that foster genuine connection with colleagues in a way that is inclusive to all.

Rationale

Social wellness plays a critical role in an individual's overall health. Social wellness provides support which enhances the quality of life and provides a buffer against adverse life events.

Success in this dimension happens when an individual has meaningful relationships that they can count on in their lives. These relationships can be personal or work-related. Success in this dimension helps strengthen the other wellness dimensions. Humans need quality social interaction in their lives to achieve overall wellness.

Social wellness is not a “one-size fits all” domain. It is crucial to find various ways to enhance the capacity for connectedness in those that find social interaction as stressful.

It is important for educational leaders to facilitate conversations and provide space where educators can critically examine their own implicit and explicit biases that affect the relationships educators have with both students and colleagues. Educators have control over how they view themselves, their students, the school community, the world, and how they act on their perspectives. Social wellness cannot be achieved without the close consideration of personal views, assumptions and perspectives that influence one's social-awareness. [\(CASEL, 2018\)\[1\]](#)

Examples and Case Studies

Butler University's College of Education developed a guide titled “Talent, Personnel and Professional Development” that assists administrators in recruiting, retaining, and providing professional development to incoming and current staff members. For

specific examples on creative recruitment ideas, and ways that administrators can improve listening skills, and build trust with their staff visit Butler's guide [here\[2\]](#).

Wellness Challenges

- Sponsor or organize healthful, social events throughout the year where employees can interact and build relationships outside of their work responsibilities.
- Highlight backgrounds and experiences that make each educator unique.
- Offer all employees a personality assessment such a Myers-Briggs, Gallup, etc. to build communication and support with each other and leadership.
- Host monthly, healthy potlucks and encourage employees to eat with each other.
- Create a “Gratitude Tree” to express appreciation among employees.
- Conduct a pre and post test for educators on their own social and emotional knowledge, awareness, and skill using this [self-assessment\[3\]](#) created in alignment with Indiana's SEL competencies.

Additional Resources

- [Myers-Briggs Assessment\[4\]](#)
- [Gallup Strength Builder Assessment\[5\]](#)

Social Wellness

Social Wellness Powerful Practices

Examples of ways administrators and program leaders can support occupation and intellectual wellness:

Across all types of care and education programs, leaders can:

- Create and administer a survey to assess the current social climate of the building.
- Create opportunities to build meaningful relationships with new staff and existing staff.
- Know your staff's individual situations and respect people's preferences and personalities.
- Know your staff's individual "Language of Appreciation" and ensure to use their preferred language.
- Provide opportunities for employees to build healthy relationships outside of the work environment (i.e. interest groups who have social events on a recurring basis: weightlifting, yoga, knitting, hiking, euchre, etc.)
- Encourage team collaboration as much as possible through consistent professional learning communities.
- Create a culture of care. A Culture of Care is a theory that states schools and workplaces should put more importance on relationships than curriculum when determining their institutional purpose. It encourages one-on-one relationships.
- Help new employees integrate effectively through teacher mentoring programs.
- Praise employees for their hard work and provide meaningful, continuing, and positive encouragement.
- Provide opportunities for teachers to observe each other with the sole purpose of providing positive feedback as well as learning innovative ideas that could be implemented in their own classrooms. A member of administration would cover the observing teacher to reduce the stress of having to conduct the observation during prep.
- Create friendly and inviting collaborative work spaces.
- Start a stress circle (create a safe space employees can vent while creating specific guided rules so everyone feels comfortable)
- Support use of social media to demonstrate connection and diversity of interests, not as an escape
- Encourage administrators to have educators "find their person" in order to feel safe in all environments
- Build off of existing work on Indiana's Social Emotional Learning Competencies for K-12 students using this [social and emotional educator self-assessment\[3\]](#)

Spiritual Wellness

Seeking meaning and purpose in life.

Rationale

Whereas religion focuses on a set of shared beliefs, spirituality can be thought of as an individual journey. From a leadership perspective, this can be one of the most difficult to discuss. Though one's spiritual wellness can certainly be rooted in religious practices and beliefs, spiritual wellness means something different for every person. It is understanding and having a clear definition of what's important in life and the values that one strives to live by. Spiritual wellness affects all the other dimensions. Spiritual wellness creates a balance between body and mind. Success in this dimension could be a sense of peace with oneself or a strong sense of purpose in daily activities.

Examples and Case Studies

Herron High School, an Indianapolis public charter high school that uses a classical education approach holds a Faculty Symposium every spring. On this day, the administration team conducts a professional development that has their educators reflect back on the “why” they became educators. Each year the symposium is held at a location that allows for educators to choose various activities that speak specifically to them. For example, the 2019 symposium was held at Newfields where educators could participate in painting courses, or self-reflect on a walk in the gardens, or gaze at the beautiful art. The Symposium is intended to help rejuvenate educators during an extremely stressful time of the year.

Wellness Challenges

- Facilitate volunteer opportunities for employees.
- Hold Yoga classes for staff and employees.
- Seek out community partners willing to create mindfulness challenges that encourage employees to practice meaningful mindfulness practices regularly.
- Create a 21-day gratefulness challenge that encourages employees to list what they are grateful for.

Additional Resources

- [The Power of a Teacher\[1\]](#) by Adam Saenz
- [The Happiness Lab\[2\]](#) by Dr. Laurie Santos

Spiritual Wellness Powerful Practices

Examples of ways administrators and program leaders can support spiritual wellness:

Across all types of care and education programs, leaders can:

- Encourage staff to practice mindfulness by providing meditation rooms and quiet places in the building for employees to reflect.
- Have staff fill out posters or papers that have them reflect on their purpose or meaning. Do this at the beginning of the year and have the teachers keep in a safe place in their spaces to return to during the year.
- Create mindfulness calendars for staff and employees to track their mindfulness progress. Consider the use of emails to remind or prompt staff.
- Create an outdoor space for educators to use during their prep time or before or after school for educators to get fresh air and reflect.
- Encourage staff to enroll in the Science of Happiness Course through the Indiana Department of Education
- Provide professional development on the benefits of mindfulness for students and how that transcends into the teaching profession
- Plan for experiences in nature that allow educators to connect outside the school building
- Consider the schedules/calendars for spiritual events (e.g. If many staff attend church Wednesday evenings, avoid scheduling a staff meeting during this time)
- Continually stay focused on the organizational mission, vision, and values to provide a sense of satisfaction and meaning for staff

References and Links from Dimensions of Wellness

Emotional Wellness

Resource links from one pager:

- [1] <https://ideas.ted.com/your-5-day-gratitude-challenge-from-ted/>
- [2] <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1rC8wcQxGUvtLcbQ52RvyyDEGOdfGBQI4/view?usp=sharing>
- [3] <https://thrivingschools.kaiserpermanente.org/school-employees/breakroom/>
- [4] <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Xaob9ld-V7OiYdanUKP5hE5lCfLW3Ocq/view?usp=sharing>
- [5] https://drive.google.com/file/d/1SzNpvRy_cH5ncxCYQIGWVpxpd2-XbHWf/view?usp=sharing
- [6] https://www.coursera.org/learn/managing-emotions-uncertainty-stress?ranMID=40328&ranEAID=TnL5HPStwNw&ranSiteID=TnL5HPStwNw-kDKmrOrKcQ0GBtpm06mv8Q&siteID=TnL5HPStwNw-kDKmrOrKcQ0GBtpm06mv8Q&utm_content=10&utm_medium=partners&utm_source=linkshare&utm_campaign=TnL5HPStwNw
- [7] <https://drive.google.com/file/d/18zFsDyf7HiF7Hw3OlfGnFOSVu9AkiYHz/view?usp=sharing>

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NIH Emotional Wellness Checklist:

<https://www.nih.gov/sites/default/files/health-info/wellness-toolkits/emotional-wellness-checklist.pdf>

OEA Choice Trust, *Fostering School Employee Health, Well-Being and Resilience*:

<https://oeachoice.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Framework-of-Proven-Strategies-and-Best-Practices.pdf>

Kaiser Permanente Thriving Schools

<https://thrivingschools.kaiserpermanente.org/school-employees/social-emotional>

The Power of a Teacher by Dr Adam Saenz

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- [2] <https://www.thehappy.md.com/blog/bid/285708/work-life-balance-planning-formula-1-1-53>
- [3] <https://www.goodtherapy.org/blog/8-dimensions-of-wellness-where-do-you-fit-in-0527164>
- [4] https://philanos.org/resources/Documents/Conference%202020/Pre-Read%20PDFs/Continuum_AntiRacist.pdf
- [5] <https://spokane.wsu.edu/wellness/occupational-wellness>

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- [3] <https://thrive.kaiserpermanente.org/care-near-you/northern-california/redwoodcity/21-day-plant-power-challenge>
- [4] <https://health.gov/MoveYourWay/Activity-Planner>
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- [6] <https://www.sleepfoundation.org>
- [7] <https://www.sleepcycle.com>
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- [10] <https://www.wholekidsfoundation.org/healthy-teachers>
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- [12] <https://www.myplate.gov/myplate-kitchen>
- [13] <https://www.eatright.org>
- [14] <https://hr.umich.edu/benefits-wellness/work-life/lactationresources/lactation-room-setup-guide>

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<https://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/basics/index.htm>

CDC Breastfeeding Resources:

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<https://www.cdc.gov/workplacehealthpromotion/index.html>

The Sleep Foundation Resources:
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Lactation Space:
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Spiritual Wellness

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