



## SAFER SCHOOLS AND CAMPUSES **BEST PRACTICES CLEARINGHOUSE**

### - Lessons from the Field -

## Promoting Staff Wellness in the Wake of COVID-19 and Beyond

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*Wednesday, May 18, 2022 | 3:00 – 4:00 PM ET*  
*Transcript*

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**Tim Duffey:**

Good afternoon, and welcome to today's Lessons from the Field Webinar, Promoting Staff Wellness in the Wake of COVID-19 and Beyond. On behalf of the U.S. Department of Education, we're pleased you've joined us today. In fact, some 700 people have registered for this webinar and we expect more of them to be joining us as we kick off here in the opening moments and welcome to all of you who have logged in early. My name is Tim Duffey. I'm a training specialist at the National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments, or NCSSLE. NCSSLE is funded by the Office of Safe and Supportive Schools within the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education.

To learn more about NCSSLE and to access a range of resources that address school climate, and conditions for learning, we encourage you to visit our website, to give you a sense of what the website looks like and the content it contains. Here we share an image of our homepage on the right side of your screen, along with some of our most popular products on the left. We also share the latest resources and events coming out from the field via social media. Please follow us there. That will be posted in the chat for you to access as well. Please know it also that materials that you'll see today, including the slides, all reference resources and a recorded version of this webinar will be available on the event webpage within this website. In fact, some items including the slides and speaker bios have already been posted to the site. Please also note that you can access previous lessons from the field sessions by visiting the webinar series' home webpage rather, which is also listed here on this slide and also will be posted into the chat for your reference.

Before I review the agenda and introduce today's speakers, I want to quickly review information shared by those of you who registered for the webinar to

provide a sense of who's joined us today. You'll see that there was a virtual tie among three categories that we offered you when you registered. Other roles were very close to state educational agency staff and student support personnel, were the top three vote getters. The other category includes a wide variety of individuals, including state and local Public Health Department staff, variety of program directors and managers, community based organizations and state level education staff.

After completing this introduction which is listed as item one in our agenda, we'll be kicking off today's event with a brief welcome from the Department of Education. And then we'll hear from Melissa Fahrenbruch at the CDC and Dr. Kris Scardamalia, for grounding in today's topic of supporting staff wellness. Those are items three and four on this agenda. The bulk of our time today will be facilitated panel discussion with practitioners highlighting the innovative strategies they have employed to address staff wellness, which is item five. And then we'll close with important announcements and final comments by 4:00 PM Eastern Time today.

As you can see on this slide, we're joined today by subject matter experts in this area, as well as practitioners with knowledge and experience implementing staff wellness approaches for themselves, and their teams or staff. You'll have a chance today to hear from each of them and as noted at the bottom of the slide, full speaker bios are available on the event webpage for your reference. It's now my pleasure and honor to introduce you, Miss Ruth Ryder, Deputy Assistant Secretary in the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education at the U.S. Department of Education, Ruth.

**Ruth Ryder:**

Thank you so much, Tim. And I want to also welcome all of you to today's webinar on behalf of everyone at the Department of Education, especially our secretary, Miguel Cardona. All of us here at the department are intensely aware of the challenges educators, parents, and caretakers, as well as students have faced throughout this pandemic. The past few years have presented obstacles in education, most of us would never have dreamed of. What has been equally obvious to us at the department however, are the many effective strategies educators have employed in responses to the pandemic. To showcase those effective efforts, the department established the Best Practices Clearinghouse whose web address will be posted in the chat box for your access. Through the Clearinghouse, the department continues to provide resources for communities, schools, educators, and families as we work together to support the needs of all students and staff in the aftermath of the pandemic.

Please consider sending your best practices to the Clearinghouse. As an extension of the Clearinghouse, this lessons from the field webinar series has been part of our effort to highlight the effective tools, techniques, and strategies employed by everyday practitioners to address the challenges of the pandemic, to strengthen the resilience of students and to provide meaningful support to staff. Throughout the series, we have addressed a variety of high priority topics facing American educators in this challenging time. You can

access recorded webinars from the series at the website now being shared in the chat box.

This session is another opportunity to provide information and strategies that will inform your daily practice. Today, we turn our attention to the topic of staff wellbeing. While numerous priorities remain in this pandemic focused time, one topic of really high priority in American education today is the health and wellbeing of staff. As we approach the end of the 21/22 school year, and we begin the process of anticipating the academic year to come, we offer this chance to pause and reflect on what can be done in a system wide fashion to promote wellness within the staff ranks. Thank you again for being here to consider strategies others have used to address staff wellbeing. If you have additional strategies, strategies to share, please send them to the Best Practices Clearinghouse at [bestpracticesclearinghouse@ed.gov](mailto:bestpracticesclearinghouse@ed.gov).

Again, we'll post that in the chat box. Please make note of it and let us know what you are doing to support staff health in meaningful and productive ways. Our work is stronger together, and we all benefit from sharing effective strategies. I hope we hear from many of you following today's session. So thank you for your participation today and for all you do every day to strengthen our schools for staff and students alike. Back to you, Tim.

**Tim Duffey:**

Thank you, Ruth. Thank you both for your leadership in planning this webinar series and for your comments today as well. They really helped to ground us in the commitment that the department has made to address efforts to support the wellbeing of all educators nationwide. So thanks again so much for joining us. Our next speaker is Melissa Fahrenbruch. She is lead health education specialist at the CDC's National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. So I'll turn it over to you, Melissa.

**Melissa Fahrenbruch:**

Thank you, Tim. And good afternoon, everyone. I'm Melissa Fahrenbruch, and I'm excited to speak with you all today on this important topic. A run survey fielded in early January, 2021, found that nearly one quarter of teachers indicated a desire to leave their jobs at the end of the school year. Almost twice as common as insufficient pay. As a result, teachers levels of stress and burnout have been high throughout these unusual pandemic times. This is why CDC Healthy Schools and the society for public health education are currently working on updating the school employee wellness guide with a suite of tools and resources to compliment the guide. In 2018, in collaboration with the National Center of Chronic Disease Directors, the school employee wellness guide was created.

This guide provides a great starting point with tips and resources. Schools can provide an employee wellness program for staff that includes healthy eating and physical activity services. When staff model these healthy behaviors, they can also reinforce with students. Additionally, supporting school employee wellness programs can improve staff retention in productivity, decrease employee absenteeism and decrease employee healthcare costs. A slide of resource links

is available at the end of my presentation, where you can access and download the so guide.

These are the additional tools that will be updated and included in the so guide for example, model policies, how to integrate so in school settings, simple starter guides, how to facilitate community relations, tip sheets, mental health resources, and training materials. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Division of Population Health, also funds NACDD to utilize CDC workplace health tools and resources, specifically the new Work@Health program to compliment, amplify and expand state based efforts to engage employers in building effective, comprehensive, evidence-based workplace health programs. Work@Health is an evidence based program that trains employers to develop and implement health promotion strategies to reduce chronic disease and injury risk and improve productivity in the workplace. Work@Health, also certifies Train-the-Trainer and Master Trainers to deliver the work at health curriculum and technical assistance to employers.

The states that are highlighted in yellow are currently funded via our state school, health cooperative agreement. They have received COVID-19 supplement dollars that can be used to implement wellness programs statewide. Most school employee wellness initiatives do start small, perhaps with one exercise class, but do expand over several years. Districts and schools are encouraged to take steps that work best for their situation. What is feasible to advance employee wellness programs and to build their initiative over time. Choosing a few employee wellness activities and implementing them is more beneficial than developing a comprehensive plan that's never put into action. CDC Healthy Schools grantees continue to review and implement school health action plans to enhance wellness programs and related practices that support helpful behaviors for students and education professionals. For instance, Louisiana partners with Children's Hospital of New Orleans ThriveKids program, to ensure school nurses have access to a team of medical experts through a dedicated hotline for school wellness and virtual care. Massachusetts conducts communities of practice in youth mental health first aid trainings to support school wellness communities, using evidence-based models for supporting students and staff with social, emotional and mental health needs.

North Carolina conducts virtual and in-person wellness trainings to districts throughout the state. We'll also be collecting additional successes as they complete their cooperative agreement. So be sure to visit the Healthy Schools' website for more successes and opportunities to find ideas to implement your wellness program. I've mentioned several resources in my presentation, so be sure you check out all these great resources on the CDC Healthy Schools' website and our Division of Population Health site for the work site scorecard. Thank you so much for this opportunity and I'll turn it back over to Tim.

**Tim Duffey:**

Thank you, Melissa. Great grounding in some of the realities of COVID-19's impact on educators today and I really greatly appreciate your referencing those resources from the CDC that will provide support to the wellbeing of educators

nationwide. CDC has been a great partner in this webinar series and we appreciate your being with us today. Let's turn next to hear from Dr. Scardamalia, it's my pleasure to introduce Kris to you. She provides technical assistance to grantees supported by our center, NCSSE, and is a core faculty at the National Center for School Mental Health at the University of Maryland's School of Medicine. Kris, I'll turn it over to you.

**Kris Scardamalia:**

All right. Thank you, Tim. And just a huge thank you to inviting me today. I'm always excited when I get to talk to people about supporting educators. I was a school psychologist for many, many years, and that is absolutely the foundation of my love of this work. But it's been a rough couple of years, right? And as I start talking about self care and wellbeing and how we can support our educators, I'm reminded of some recent remarks. Brianna Ross is a Maryland teacher of the year, and she was honored at the White House back in April, so just not even a month ago.

And in an interview, she described what it's been like this year. And I want to read you some of the remarks that she had. She said, "This is hard, hard, hard, hard work that we are doing. And it is thankless. It is often a thankless job, even when you're a teacher of the year. One of the things I've been talking a lot about with teachers is it's not about this idea of self care, but self preservation. What can we do to preserve ourselves? Because the work that we are doing is so important and so valuable, but it's also really exhausting."

And I think these remarks really capture the conversations that we need to be having today. We talked about self care a lot before COVID and there was really good there, but these days, self care itself, just the phrase has started to feel a bit prickly because we're putting the onus on the individual. When we know that the situation itself is extraordinarily difficult. I don't know who among us could go through the last two years, do it just fine, not really impact it. So I think this idea of self preservation is a great starting place.

And when we talk about focusing on the individual, we are missing that bigger picture. And I appreciated the remarks earlier, Ruth Ryder mentioned needing system wide supports. So where I want to focus today is really talking about organization wellbeing. What does it mean for an organization to support their employees top to bottom, right? And how different might our staff retention, our staff morale, all kinds of things that go on our school building, might this look different? If we were to look at staff wellness, do the same triangle that's at the thinking of our MTSS, right? Our PBIS, our comprehensive school, mental health frameworks, these are things we're super with. Can we bring that to self well being work? So here is our familiar triangle, right? And we're used to seeing this as far as school supports. But if we think about this from an organizational perspective, tier one really describes work climate.

This is what everybody experiences, this is the foundation of what our day to day looks like. And it is in fact, universal. We can think about tier two, being maybe groups within our organization that have particular needs maybe at

particular times. One thing we try to stress with students is there's no such thing as a tier two student, right? There's tier two services that our students might occasionally need or often need. But people move up and down these tiers, depending on what's going on. So a tier two group in your school might be a group that for some particular reason is having even more difficulty. I think of a lot of the mental health clinicians that I'm talking to recently, where they're in areas of such shortages, that they're so overwhelmed by need and have very little help, even though their organizations are trying to get them the help they have, they may have a particular need.

We may have certain teaching teams that are missing folks. Half of the fourth grade team is out, or we need to hire kindergarten teachers or whatever it is, there's groups that may have particular needs. And then at times we're going to have individuals that are either in crisis or nearing crisis. And there's really specific points of intervention that become crucial in our systems. So much like our students, right? We're making some of the same, maybe we should call them missteps that we often do their students. We're all this attention at tier three. And it makes sense on some level, because we know there's high needs at tier three. That's why somebody's receiving a tier three service. But we also know that if we turn to tier one and we attend to the foundation, and we attend to the climate, fewer people are going to rise into the tier two ranks and then into the tier three ranks.

So we've got to pay our most attention at that system level, that organization level. And then as we go up, certainly want to maintain the attention, but let's not forget about universal supports. So that all sounds good. But when I say organization wellbeing in reference to schools, what exactly does that mean? When I talk about an individual, it's like, oh yeah, I need to be happy with my job and I need to be feeling pretty healthy and I need to have sleep and good nutrition, all sort of stuff. But organizations are people. So what do we mean by organizational wellbeing? And there's really some two ways we can look at it. It's what is the organization doing to support its staff in their own self care, self preservation strategies? And that's a piece of it as we'll see. But we can also think about organizations as having their own wellbeing, the health of an organizational entity.

And when we understand the factors that impact organizations broadly and then filter down to their employees, we can start to understand where intervention might make sense. So how do you figure out where to start, what all of this needs? In collaboration with, excuse me, with the Central East Mental Health Technology Transfer Center, the University of Maryland School of Medicine and the Georgetown MedStar University, we have been developing an organizational tool. And what you see here is the foundation of that tool. And this helps organizations take stock about what's working and what's not working. To get here, we come to literature and we look for what are all of the factors out there that impact employee wellbeing and even extending out into, okay, what do we know, health retain employees? What do we know impacts employee morale?

And so we did this big scan of all of the literature. We were able to combine a bunch of stuff and certainly some things come up over and over again. And then we took that information and we filtered it through feasibility. So there's some things that we know really impact systems, but that we also know organizational leaders can't change. One of the examples that frequently comes up is we know Medicare reimbursement rates can be a big deal. They can have a lot to do with health services are provided and what we're able to do within our organizations, can a principal or a district superintendent reasonably change reimbursement rates. No that can't happen. So things like that, we took out of the measure so that we're very focused on as an organizational leader, what might you be able to do to support your staff and to change the culture or work climate in your organization. Want to go into each of these, just to give you a snapshot of what we mean by each one.

And just as a reminder, this slide deck will be available for you tomorrow after this presentation. So I have this here for you to refer back to, and I want to just touch on each area fairly quickly. Work, climate, environment. This is the physical space, things like is the building well lit. Does it feel good to walk into. Then also the emotional environment is bullying tolerated, is harassment tolerated? Do you have signs everywhere about bullying policies, but at the end of the day, it doesn't feel like much is done. Input, flexibility and autonomy. We need to have a sense of control in our lives, autonomy in our jobs. So as organizations are trying to figure out, "What do I do about all of this?" Are you asking your employees turns out we kind of know what we need, right? Teachers know what their students need, teachers know what they themselves need.

And often have lots of ideas, lots of good ideas about how to fix things. So we're asking for input, are we using that input? And do I have a degree of flexibility, reasonably to get what I need during the day? That third area, professional development and recognition, do I have the training, the tools, the resources that I need to be able to do my job? And what I do with the job or when there's those milestones, is there recognition within the organization? The last one on this slide, organizational and supervisory support really speaks to that relationship of employee supervisor. And this is not administrative supervision. Are you getting your deadlines, do you have your paperwork in? Do I have an opportunity to sit down with a supervisor and talk about how work is going for me?

What is stressing me? What do I need? What would be helpful? What would change? Do I have an opportunity to talk about where I'd like to be in my career in a couple of years? What's my life dream to always be in third grade? Maybe I'd like to work toward being a fifth grade teacher at some point or moving into specialty area. Is what I'm doing really feeding what it is that I like about my job? And then we can look at the last four areas. You'll see self care is an area here, but this is the focus of what is the organization doing to support individuals in pursuing their own self care, self preservation strategies and

helping to provide resources, training, space, time, support for employees to actually engage in those self care practices.

You'll see here, the next areas, diversity, equity, inclusion, and access. We had talked about threading this throughout our inventory and landed on the sense that this is important enough. It needs to be its own domain. So are all of my employees feeling valued, honored that their perspectives are seen. And the last two here, purpose and meaningfulness and in professional quality of life really speaks to my values aligned with what I'm asked to do at work. Are my principles in alignment with my work? And when they're not in alignment with my work, there's a sense of moral injury. Might have started to hear that term a little more often. And it's important to know that and to make some shifts where possible. All right, on the next slide here, you see, this is the tool I was talking about. This is a clickable link, and we'll also provide that in chat. And then in the materials, if you're interested, this is the tool itself you can go in. We have all kinds of stuff for individuals. That's the individual provider side.

And then on the organization side, you'll have access. And this is all free, public domain to assess your organization. I do want to note that when I say assess your organization, we have assessment that go out to all of the employees and the employees provide feedback. And then the organization gets a report saying, "Hey, here's how you're doing in each of these domains." We want to leave you today with some additional resources. And we've got a couple slides of those. You'll notice on this first slide, the top resource, the one that's listed first, I want to say it's the primary, but we talk about resources and needs money, sometimes comes up. So there's a nice guide here on how you can leverage some of that federal COVID funding specific to student and staff wellbeing.

Excuse me, here we see again, some really great resources, but I want to draw your attention to the middle one here, the classroom wellbeing information strategies for educators, implementation support series. This is a great webinar series. That again is in the public domain. All of these things that we're providing are free and accessible. And then on our last resource slide here, you'll see this phrase, moral injury coming up a bit more often. And again, this is where we're finding that for some educators, principals and values are slightly out of alignment with what they're being asked to do.

We can think about teachers who during the heat of COVID were having to really prompt parents to bring their students back into the school. Even knowing that students were nervous about that, parents were nervous about that, and that my principles, my values might not be an alignment here. So some great resources to dig into, I hope that you check out the tool and find some utility in that. Again, I just want to say thank you for inviting me to be here. I always appreciate the opportunity to talk about this and to do whatever we can to help support our educators because they are doing an amazing job. And what often feels and seems like impossible circumstances.

**Tim Duffey:**

Thanks so much, Kris, really a depth of really important information there that will assist schools and districts in providing a really comprehensive response to wellness of staff. You help to remind us that staff wellbeing is much more than breathing techniques although those can be incredibly important some days I remember the days that's precisely what I needed. And thanks too for the referencing such great resources that'll support the work of folks moving forward. And just a reminder that those links to those resources are being posted in the chat as we move along. So we've come to that time in the session where we want to turn to the panel. So joining me on screen shortly will be four subject matter experts from the field. Greg Hickey is a mental health specialist and a large education service center in Texas. Omowale Crowder, is a social emotional support specialist at Columbus City Schools.

Julie May is an intervention specialist at Lakewood City Schools. And Azalea Tang, will be joining us. She's a social worker at Westerville City Schools in Ohio. And just to give you a bit of grounding in the context for these folks on this screen, you'll see a quick glance at some of the demographic details for the districts or service areas in Greg's case, in which they operate. So it'll give you idea of the scope and the variance from Greg's work and that large educational service center where they serve 183 schools in total. To Omowale's support of two specific high schools. Julie's district of 12, Azalea has 22 schools in her district. She serves one high school as a social worker.

You'll learn more about the specific level of responsibility of each of these speakers as we conduct the panel. But we hope this information helps to ground you with some sense of where it is from which they operate. So with that, Greg, Omowale, Julie, Azalea invites you to join us on screen and unmute your line so we can discuss a few questions here about what your experiences have been like and around staff wellness. So welcome everybody. Thanks for being here.

**Julie May:** Thanks for having me.

**Greg Hickey:** Yeah. Thanks for having us.

**Tim Duffey:** Of course.

**Omowale Crowder:** Thank you.

**Tim Duffey:** So I'll rotate who responds to questions here as we go along the first one I'm going to direct, first of all to Greg, if you don't mind, Greg, and in a couple of minutes, tell us a little bit about what it is you've been doing to support staff wellness in your setting. How have you engaged staff in those efforts? And if you have an opportunity to talk a bit about what's started it, what sparked this work in your service area? How did you approach it and any information about how it's morphed or evolved over time? So go ahead.

**Greg Hickey:**

Absolutely. Thank you, Tim. From the outset of the COVID pandemic, I knew that our mental health team would have to approach staff wellness from the standpoint that not every educator struggle is going to be able to be traced back to a mental wellness or a mental health problem, per se. Often, as we've talked about today, it's a systemic wellness issue. And so what this is going to require is for leadership at the local state and federal level to listen very well, to what educators are going through and make adjustments. And I appreciate that focus today. But when it is a mental health issue, when a stressor becomes a mental wellness issue, our staff at the ESC have had to do better about developing very clear pathways for our educators in the region. So I have to brag on our ESC staff across the board.

They've always been great at validating teacher struggles, rather than just helping with technical issues. They are always willing to lend an ear, let educators vent. And I think that we need more of that. We have had to develop very close relationships with our community mental health providers show up to community events, involving mental health. So showing up to mental health coalitions, suicide prevention coalitions, and meeting those providers out in the community and developing those clear pathways. And so benefit of being in a small and rural community in Texas is that we have many of our mental health providers, leadership cellphone numbers at hand. So when we have an educator who's struggling, they can reach out to us and we can discreetly get them the help that they need. So I highly recommend that everybody on the call today develop those relationships with leaders in the community who can help with those very real mental health issues.

The other thing that we've had to rethink and approach differently is the staff wellness training. As a professional development organization, we get a lot of requests for that. So in order to shift the focus from surface level self care activities, what I have tried to do is develop training that focuses on more practical cognitive behavioral interventions that one can use with themselves to prioritize their life stressors and recognize the difference between the need for a mindset shift, which is sometimes necessary and a situational shift and in a national teacher shortage. I know that can be scary to think about, especially when we have many educators looking at leaving the profession. But in addition to that, giving some examples of how to set boundaries for yourself, what the language of boundary setting looks like, and also who to advocate to and where to do that advocacy. So promoting advocacy for ourselves in the profession is what I tend to focus on.

**Tim Duffey:**

Awesome. Thanks Greg, so much for that. This is very important and like real time information from what you all are doing in the field. Julie, would you mind saying a little bit about your efforts to work on staff wellness and how you've engaged staff in that?

**Julie May:**

Sure. Thanks, Tim. At Lakewood, I was fortunate enough to be two years ago on a committee, trauma response committee that had started right before the pandemic and the summer before the 2020/2021 school year, we realized very

quickly that we were going to need to find ways to not only support our students through this global trauma situation that we were all experiencing, but also our staff. And so the way that we first came up to support our staff was to hold weekly meetings that were small meetings, as a safe space for our team, sorry, our teachers and other educators to come and learn wellness activities, talk on various topics and then also learn mindfulness tools to use. So when we're looking at the pyramid that Dr. Scardamalia, sorry. I know I just did not say that correctly, but that was she was talking about Dr. Kris.

And I look at thing about the pyramid. So how are we going to support our students by first supporting our staff? So I do think that staff wellness and student wellness are so interconnected and promoting both then fuels the other. And so in our group, we meet weekly and we start out with a check in where teachers and other educators come and talk about how they're feeling, rate their stress on a scale. And then we do a breathing activity. And then we have some focus that we think might be helpful for the group. We did follow, there's the Compassion Resilience Toolkit, which is a free resource online. And we used that to guide our work. And then we allowed teachers time to talk about challenges and other stressors that they were experiencing. So their voice was heard. And then other group members were able to understand they weren't alone in the things they were experiencing.

And we closed with a relaxation tool. So the idea was to give a safe, supportive space, to allow educators to come and learn tools and then use them in their life, in their classroom. And just basically to support them personally and professionally, that still is happening. We did that on Zoom at first and then now, do that after school. I personally have held some staff professional development about mindfulness practices, how to bring that to your classroom, but how mindfulness really starts with you. And so the idea that putting your own oxygen, air mask on first is so helpful, beneficial, and needed before we can help our students. And a lot of times teachers don't have time in their day to take care of themselves and take a minute. So how do you work that in, what might be helpful to do to start your day or end your day? And then the district offers a program called vitality, which tracks, it's an interactive and personalized wellness program. And then we've done many different like staff meetings, running various mindfulness practices to help our staff.

**Tim Duffey:** Awesome. Julie, thank you so much for providing those examples of the kinds of things you're doing in your system. Omowale, let's check with you next about the two high schools you've been working in and what kinds of efforts you've been undertaking.

**Omowale Crowder:** Thank you. So my schools were a bit different, one school focused on equity and the other one focused on student trauma. And in the beginning, I'm through a grant and we started about three years ago and in the beginning we focused on student trauma, but there were some pieces missing. And as more data came, became available, we started to focus on teacher wellness because an unregulated teacher cannot regulate a student. So we began to encourage

teachers to give feedback on their wellbeing or culture and climate and school policy. And we do that through our Panorama Survey districtwide we measure the SEL competencies in our students and our teachers and our parents. So basically we made a shift from the students to the teachers because something wasn't working with our students. Now in our school with equity, where equity was a focus.

There is a slight change within their system. Their system is very autonomous. They receive a lot of teacher input, incidentally, they report less incidences of stress, but ironically in the school where we focus on trauma, teachers complained of micromanagement. They complained that they felt things were being done to them, decisions were being made for them, and they really didn't have any input really that was really listened to in crafting what our school looks like. So in that school, when we did our measurements, teachers experience way more stress, more frustration, according to our data. And so the shift was to look at systemically, how could we change this system so that it includes more teacher input so that they feel that this is our journey and not a journey that we are placing on them. So once we started with that approach, we were able to get more feedback.

**Tim Duffey:**

Excellent, great examples of what you've been doing and information you've been seeing from that, which we'll talk about. We'll talk about impact in just a few minutes. But first I want to turn to Azalea, Azalea, tell us about the work that you've been undertaking as a school social worker there to support the staff and staff wellness.

**Azalea Tang:**

Sure. Thanks, Tim. And thanks for having me. Just for some context, I am a social worker. There's a team of us in the district about 10 of us, which are really fortunate to have in addition to our school counselor team. So with that, I think we're able to really spread out and get a real pulse on what's going on in our buildings. And those relationships, again, that have been mentioned are super key. And teachers were letting us know that they were really struggling. So during COVID, we just put our heads together. And the informal process we tried to formalize and made a menu board for teachers, offered some professional development, went and just talked with them and crowdsource our own skills on some level. So my background is I'm a certified yoga instructor and we also contract with great organization called the Youth Yoga Project, which is mainly designed for our students, but actually they offer a lot of staff training and support as well.

So it's kind of an awesome opportunity for staff to also practice some wellness skills and bring that into their classroom. So for myself, I offered three different sections of just many movement breaks, surveyed teachers who were interested, they signed up, we worked with their schedules and met digitally and were able to build community throughout the pandemic and yeah, just move together and also just became an informal space for them to air out whatever was going on for them. So with our team, each person took on what interested them or what they felt their strength or gift was to offer. And we

were able to cobble together something for our staff. So that, and with that, we also continue to survey our staff. And I think because of the pandemic we have really realized that, yeah, what people have been saying, "If you don't feed the teachers, the kids."

So we have to really put a lot of intention and thoughtfulness there and find those, yeah, structural changes. So it's been really good to continue those conversations with teachers. And yeah, it was hard to ignore the need that was bubbling up during the pandemic and continues to, I think in some ways this year. This school year was even more difficult for our teachers than the previous two. And that really says something for education. So that's a little bit about what we have done so far and just really grateful to have that team approach.

**Tim Duffey:**

Yeah. Well, and it sounds like, as you said, you were able to crowdsource internally from the resources that exist within your staff to support the staff, even at that all staff level that Kris spoke to earlier. So thank you. Thank you for that. My second question goes to impact, so Julie, if you don't mind, I'd like to start this one, throw this one to you first. What have you seen being the impact of your efforts and how have you been able to assess that? And you may have spoken to some of that a little bit earlier, but if you don't mind touching on that again.

**Julie May:**

Yeah. Thanks, Tim. I think overall one thing about Lakewood is that I see us as a progressive district who has a lot of partnerships with mental health professional agencies in the area and they are in our schools. And so that started before the pandemic, but I think we've really seen a need for that and actually we have more of a need than the multiple resources that we have for our students. But having those providers and some of them sit on the team of people that run the, we call building connections, building connections with ourselves and with each other and with our students, the team that meets weekly, we've seen growth in professional and personal self-awareness in our attendees. So creating language. So the first way to communicate information is to be able to label it and your feelings is to be able to label it.

And so I personally have seen our staff be able to grow in self-awareness so that they know when to use tools and then know where to go, to find resources, to gain those tools if they don't have them already. We've created bonds, I think between the members that have attended each building has a building connections committee. And it looks different at every building. And I think that's really created a bond, not only between staff members at each building who meet and discuss the challenges and the achievements we've had this year, but then also between the actual members that attend themselves. And I've also seen an overall growth in our district awareness, all from top to bottom, just a need for staff support and the push to create ways to have staff feel supported and more connected, which we're all saying, I know is so imperative at this point. And so finding ways to start small, but then also have it grow throughout the district.

**Tim Duffey:** Great. Julie, thank you so much. And next I'll throw the question to Omowale. So Omowale, you mentioned, I think something earlier about some of the tracking you do for information, but what more can you tell us about what impact you've seen and how you assess that?

**Omowale Crowder:** Well, the change is really in our culture. Teachers are no longer shamed about talking about their mental state. They can talk about it freely. It's part of the conversation. And they're also using our measurement tools for social, emotional wellbeing. Whereas in the beginning, it was only for our students. Now, our district includes it for the teachers. In terms of the classrooms, I'm also part of the Youth Yoga Project, and we have more teachers signing up for that project to do yoga and movement in class. And not only are they teaching it, they are participating in it. So when I do our breathing processes in class, our teachers join me, and I encourage them to, I say, "This is not just for the students." And when they've had a rough day, they talk about how the breathing has helped them.

And part of the way that I've manage it, measure it also with our Panorama data is the rate in which teachers use that tool. There's a higher participation rate actually in the school that doesn't enjoy their autonomy because they want their voices heard. Now, initially that wasn't the case. The tool didn't have credibility. Now, the tool has more credibility and teachers are really voicing their concern. And once they voiced their concern, administration listened, they didn't acknowledge it, but administration listened, included teachers in the polling, in the process of climate. And we're trying to get that more into our routine. So we've seen impacts in far as the culture and their mindset and how they think of mental wellness.

**Tim Duffey:** Excellent, excellent examples of both the impact you're seeing and how you're getting that. And so Azalea, your turn, but what impacts are you seeing among your staff and how are you assessing that?

**Azalea Tang:** Yeah, thanks. I'm actually inspired to hear about the Panorama use with adults because we use that survey as well, but I haven't thought about looking at the data for our staff members. So that's really awesome to pick up on. We built surveys as well and continue to make space, within my building, we offered a building specific level survey because we are facing some unique climate challenges right now in our building. So we're definitely continuing to make room for those conversations. I would say the biggest impact that I'm seeing is that culture shift, like that's being talked about that stigma is slowly being changed. So it takes a really, really long time to break down, but I really do see that because our mental health specialists and counselors are more visible and people can see that we're doing that work and that we really care.

They are coming forward more and more with what they're going through. And the more that they practice that muscle, the more they practice vulnerability that grows. And so we just really encourage that on our end and try to make ourselves very available and offer those really practicable tools and strategies

and push into their classrooms or check in with them at the end of the day. So just for the strengthening of those relationships, which it can sometimes be hard to measure with data, is a felt sense thing. But I really feel that with the number of adults coming to find us that there is positive momentum. So, yeah.

**Tim Duffey:** Great, thank you. Greg, lateral to you. What impacts are you seeing in ESC, excuse me, 15?

**Greg Hickey:** So at ESC 15, while we have an undertaken a full scale study of the impact of our wellness in initiatives on educators, like many that have spoken already, when we do gather educators at our training center here in San Angelo, Texas, or we go out to their district and we either provide coaching or do workshops. What I like to do at least when I do this kind of work is make sure that we take time to talk about how they are doing emotionally, give them a chance to vent about those things that have them troubled. I like to operate our workshops and what I call the Las Vegas policy. What happens in a said in this room stays in this room and you can almost see them relax immediately when they're able to just get some things off their chest, knowing that we at the level that we are at are not connected to their chain of command, but we can take that information back and use that to inform leadership about some of the things going on in the schools and how they can help.

So the impact there is you get some immediate feedback from them that this is helpful. Of course, we evaluate every workshop and training that we do, every professional development that we provide. And we can take that and see how these things are working. And overall that feedback has been positive. I have spoken earlier about making sure we develop pathways to care. And one of the things that I do is keep a running log, not just of the students that we assist in connecting to care, but also the staff. So that I know this is who I need to follow back up with. So an encouragement to leadership, either at the local level or regional level, wherever you are at, if you do some consultations, you want to document that.

So you can remember what work you did, but also you know who you need to follow back up with so that you don't lose track of them. You can see whether or not those resources you provided are working. Sometimes they do not work well. And we got to go back to the drawing board, that way you don't have educators or students falling through the cracks. So that information is really valuable to us.

**Tim Duffey:** Great. Excellent. Well, thank you everyone for addressing that question. I'm keenly aware of the ticking clock. So I'm going to, we do have a couple of additional questions I want to get to you. Maybe if we can try to reduce our response time on these last two to about a minute each that'll help us end right on time. So the next one, if first of all, to you Omowale, is what would you say your top lesson learned is so far? And do you anticipate this work will be sustained moving forward?

**Omowale Crowder:** Yeah, so the top lesson was that each wellness initiative or lack thereof can be traced to a system. With social, emotional learning, it's about building community and doing things with, and in my school where they have autonomy, our team there is levels ahead. Actually, our wellbeing is more because both schools have a pretty good anchor on this topic, but my other team experiences way more wellness and mental health. So it's adjusting the system. And moving forward, there are a lot of resources in our district that have been dedicated to SEL and wellness. We have a whole department, Wellness Department that does amazing things in our district. So I do anticipate next year, having more resources for SEL, as I advanced to a regional position to have more resources for my schools.

**Tim Duffey:** Excellent. That's great news Omowale. Thank you. And Azalea, how about for you? What's your key lesson learned and do you anticipate that this will be carried forward this effort?

**Azalea Tang:** Yeah, I think for me, it is really just the expansion of my own personal role as a mental health specialist in a building to serving students to the wholistic building. And I guess the nice thing about being a social worker is that it's a still relatively new field in schools and which it's great that it's being increasing across the nation and people are seeing the need for it. But I think my big lesson is yeah, just really trying to be inclusive of everyone's wellness and making that a part of my role and seeing how we can make that sustainable and also advocate for that on that structural level. Like we've been talking about.

**Tim Duffey:** Excellent. Thank you. Right. And Greg, about you.

**Greg Hickey:** If I could have done one thing differently at the outset of the pandemic to reference that major national trauma that we're still living through, I would've conducted a far more in depth needs assessment of what staff needs are. And at the regional level, I believe I had the resources to do that, but I think we were also focused on process, the process that affected student learning, that we didn't pay enough attention to the staff wellness. So I would've started and led with that in the beginning and going forward, I think we can do better by continuing to assess their needs as we continue to live through some of these changes that we've experienced over the past couple of years. So that to keep it short, needs assessment, needs, assessment, needs assessment. We need to keep coming back and asking them what's going to work best for them and meet those needs.

**Tim Duffey:** Great awareness to have, and an important reminder about the urgency of that and that how important that can be to our efforts. So we haven't heard from Julie yet about lesson learned. So Julie, what would you say your key lesson learned has been?

**Julie May:** I think our key lesson has been learning about the importance of time and how being relevant to this and looking at staff schedule and how do we make resources and support available during times when teachers are able to use it.

And it is a difficult thing to figure out because we all have different responsibilities and our schedules are all different. So I would look at creating more opportunities for staff to engage in activities that they find supportive and times that they feel that would be supportive for them. So I echo Greg as far as thinking about staff needs, but then also being able to be provided time and resource and be able to access the professional development or the support group or whatever's out there. We can offer things to teachers all day, but if they don't have that time to take, to use it, then they won't be able to.

**Tim Duffey:** Right. Right. Good, thank you. So in the challenge of time, I'm going to invite you each to in just a sentence or two, could you let us know what gives you the most hope as you continue your work and Azalea, we'll start with you first.

**Azalea Tang:** It gives me hope that, again, that stigma piece is slowly shifting. More people are speaking out. I think more leaders are making it a priority to incorporate staff wellness and culture as something that they care about moving forward. So-

**Tim Duffey:** Great.

**Azalea Tang:** ... that's great to see.

**Tim Duffey:** Great. Yeah, indeed. Greg.

**Greg Hickey:** So I find a lot of hope in this concept of resiliency, but it's something that we often get wrong. It's not the ability to bounce back. It's the ability to bring in adverse experiences into our narrative into a healthy way and make sense out of them and meeting people where they are and to meet the hope lies and watching educators learn to meet students where they are in the process and meet them with individualized supports. We see a lot of that in our region and it gives me hope.

**Tim Duffey:** Yeah. Great. Good. So good to hear, Julie?

**Julie May:** Thanks, Tim. What gives me hope is that these conversations about staff and student wellness are occurring in so many different places in that even though the pandemic has been in essence, it's been a negative, very negative experience, but I think it's shone a light on areas in which have needed attention for so long. And so my hope is that we can create more staff and student opportunities for wellness and to not only to take care of themselves, but to take care of each other.

**Tim Duffey:** Wonderful. Thank you very well said, Omowale.

**Omowale Crowder:** What gives me hope? Two things. I want to say what Julie said, the conversation is happening at high levels, and we have the resources that are backing up the conversation, that's the key. Conversation and the resources.

**Tim Duffey:**

Listen, folks, this time went much too fast for me. I'd love to have another 20, 30 minutes with you to explore some additional questions, but kudos to you for what you're doing. Thank you so much for your time today. I greatly appreciate it. Thank you to each and every one of you. And I know our participants have gained a great deal of insight from the work that you are all doing. So thank you for that. As we close up, thank you all for hanging in with us to the, just past the hour here. As we close, we want to again, remind you about the feedback form that will pop up automatically as you close Zoom, but also there's a link to it on screen now. Let us know what topics and formats work best for you to receive information like we discussed today so that we can continue to provide quality information in a way that's really accessible.

And again, just a reminder that today's presentation will be posted and archived on our website. And so feel free to reference that to other people that you may know who might want to access it or listen into the information that was shared. So with that, thank all of our presenters for the excellent information that was shared during today's session. And also to thank all of you some 400 strong, I think at our peak for your being here and listening into the information.

The Zoom Room will be left open for another five minutes. So you can click the feedback link or provide us with input or any questions that you might have. Our next Lessons from the Field Webinar will be conducted on June 15th, and we'll focus on community violence interventions. So watch for that announcement coming soon, and we hope you'll join us then. Again, thank you, I greatly appreciate your time today and thanks for all you do to continue to keep our students and staff in safe, supportive learning environments. Hope to see you in a future session. Thanks everyone.