

ABSTRACT

Cheryl A. Baggett, IT'S ALMOST LIKE I HAVE A TRAUMA RESPONSE WHEN I WALK IN THIS BUILDING: THE IMPACT OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL AND WELLNESS FRAMEWORK ON THE WELL-BEING OF TEACHERS (Under the direction of Dr. Travis Lewis). Department of Educational Leadership, May, 2024.

Student well-being is connected to teacher well-being. Prioritizing teacher wellness is not only beneficial for teachers, but has far-reaching implications for the quality of education, student outcomes, and the overall health of our education system. Addressing teacher well-being as a systems-level problem may result in identification of scalable practices for educators to equitably address their social-emotional and mental health needs. This inquiry centered on the implementation of a Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) and wellness framework and an examination of its impact on educator well-being within an Eastern North Carolina school district. Three schools (elementary, middle, and high) were identified to serve as pilot locations. Across this district, there were varying initiatives to support the social-emotional and mental health needs of staff in some schools. However, there was not a collective district focus with an established framework to consistently provide these supports.

An explanatory sequential mixed-methods design was incorporated. Quantitative data was collected through the use of a survey instrument. Focus groups and individual interviews were employed for qualitative data to further explain the results of the quantitative data. Purposeful sampling was utilized for the selection of inquiry participants to ensure the staff engaging in the focus groups and interviews were classroom teachers. Inquiry participants identified potential practices that may alleviate some workplace obstacles, while positively impacting their job satisfaction and overall well-being. Inquiry participants confirmed that having access to wellness resources and support is important for addressing stress and emotional well-being among educators. While each intervention was well-received, the collective response

emphasized the importance of school teams having the autonomy to make decisions regarding the selection of wellness interventions tailored to the specific needs of their staff and school cultures, and the timing of when these interventions would be implemented. Participants identified as significant to their well-being the following conditions: being a part of a supportive and cohesive school community; the necessity of providing educators with a deeper understanding of the factors that impact the social-emotional and mental health of students and the connection to being an effective classroom educator; and the impact of positive school leadership practices.

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BUILDING: THE IMPACT OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL
AND WELLNESS FRAMEWORK ON THE WELL-BEING OF TEACHERS

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Teams make you better than you are, multiply your value, enable you to do what you do best, allow you to help others do their best, give you more time, provide you with companionship, help you fulfill the desires of your heart and compound your vision and effort. -John Maxwell

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In March 2020, North Carolina Governor Roy Cooper, announced the decision to close all North Carolina Public Schools due to the novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. As the impact of COVID-19 disrupted typical school operations and everyday life activities, this significant event brought to light a more expansive need to address the social-emotional learning (SEL) and mental health needs of our student and adult populations. SEL is the pathway through which all young people and adults “acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions, achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions” (Greenberg et al., 2016, p. 1). While social-emotional learning (SEL) and associated interventions are not a new concept, there is an increased necessity to establish a knowledge base that enables our children to enhance their skills in effectively managing relationships and emotional experiences (Elias, 2019). Educators play a vital role in our schools by providing essential instructional services, acting as primary influencers in developing social skills, and guiding students to achieve their maximum academic potential and as future contributing members of society (Allen & Kelly, 2015; Greenberg et al., 2016). Considering this level of responsibility, teachers and other educators inherently assume the role of facilitators in implementing social-emotional learning practices. They play a crucial part in establishing a robust foundation for social-emotional, mental health, and wellness supports within their school campus.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the expectations for teachers increased significantly due to state and district initiatives aimed at improving student performance and achievement (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Greenberg et al., 2016; Lever et al.,

2017). The requirements of a standard school year frequently compel teachers to extend their efforts into extended workdays and weekends. Consequently, the teaching profession has become progressively more demanding, physically and mentally exhausting. Based on a nationwide survey, 46% of teachers indicate experiencing elevated daily stress levels (Gallup, 2014). This data represents the highest rate of daily stress among all occupational groups, sharing the same percentage with nurses and surpassing that of physicians, who report a 45% daily stress rate.

Carroll et al. (2021) recognized that the demands and work responsibilities expected of teachers have now been intensified by the unforeseen social-emotional and mental health demands triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic. These additional expectations could impact the instructional efficacy of our teachers and possibly their decision to stay employed in our industry. An estimated 44% of teachers in public and private schools are expected to leave the teaching profession within five years of entry (Ingersoll et al., 2018). The Public School Forum of North Carolina, a public schools advocacy non-profit, established a greater sense of urgency our schools must place on addressing the support for the educators of our children. This proclamation came in response to the universal need to reduce teacher attrition and the effects of a global pandemic on our students and teachers. As noted by the Public Schools Forum of North Carolina (Fox et al., 2022), the pre-existing shortage of teachers is being exacerbated by the pandemic:

The ability to recruit and retain high quality teachers is critical, but North Carolina continues to experience considerable challenges in most grade levels and subject areas.... Teacher shortages are expected to be dramatically exacerbated

with the pandemic that has left many educators feeling unsafe teaching in person in the classroom (p. 5).

Research has affirmed that student well-being is connected to teacher well-being. The level of awareness a teacher has about their own social-emotional skills coupled with their capability to manage their personal well-being needs are closely connected to student performance and classroom success (Hoffman & Miller, 2020; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Jones & Doolittle, 2017; Lucas et al., 2020). Elementary school teachers exhibiting signs of depression and elevated stress levels might create classroom environments that are suboptimal for student learning, potentially leading to a decline in overall academic performance among students (McLean & Connor, 2015). “Teachers who report greater feelings of burnout early in the school year have more behavior problems with students in their classrooms” (Greenberg et al., 2016, p. 5). Furthermore, an examination of more than 78,000 students from 5th-12th grades, across 160 schools, revealed that teachers demonstrating greater levels of engagement in their work yielded better academic results among students (Gallup, 2009; Gordon, 2010; Greenberg et al., 2016). The repercussions of prolonged and substantial stress on teachers can adversely affect the academic performance of their students and reduce the sense of connection that students have with their classroom and school (Hoglund et al., 2015).

This dissertation in practice examined the development and implementation of a Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) and wellness framework within an Eastern North Carolina school district. Within the scope of this inquiry, the impact of this implementation on teacher well-being will be explored more deeply within an elementary, middle, and high school. There is the potential to identify scalable practices when classroom educators are provided with explicit resources and strategies to support their unique well-being needs. The structure for this district

initiative is aligned with the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) District Implementation Framework. CASEL recognizes that transformative SEL practices offer a way for adults to reflect on how their own social and emotional competencies, and the policies and practices that they put in place, may create more productive learning environments and improved developmental outcomes for all individuals (Bridgeland et al., 2014).

Background of the Inquiry

According to Jones and Kahn (2017), students who have a healthy connection to their schools are more likely to work effectively with their peers and adults across relationship building, problem-solving, setting and achieving goals, and ultimately have a higher likelihood of achieving their full potential. Furthermore, research can substantiate that students experience academic, personal, and long-term successes when provided with high-quality opportunities for social and emotional development (Jones & Kahn, 2017). These individuals are more likely to complete high school, attend and complete college, establish positive relationships with their families and work colleagues, have better health (mental and physical), diminished criminal conduct, and have an overall better connection to society and as a citizen (Jones et al., 2015).

Schonert-Reichl (2017) emphasized the importance of educators possessing social and emotional competencies and the influence these competencies have on the teaching and learning process. Moreover, the research conducted by Bracket et al. (2010) highlighted that when educators possess the skillset to regulate their own emotions effectively, it increases the probability of them assisting students in developing similar emotional regulation capabilities. This underscores the interconnectedness between teachers' emotional competencies and their potential to positively impact students in fostering emotional regulation skills. These educators

also conveyed increased job satisfaction and a feeling of personal accomplishment, factors that can contribute to improved productivity, decreased absenteeism, and enhanced long-term retention. School districts have the opportunity to broaden their understanding based on the lessons learned from the pandemic. These insights underscore the importance of educators being recognized for their holistic value as instructional leaders within our schools. “Until schools fully attend to adults' social-emotional needs—parallel to those of students—educators will continue to engage in superficial recharge activities, and turnover will persist” (Rodman et al., 2021, p. 55).

The focus of this inquiry will center on the implementation of a district SEL and wellness framework and the impact on educator well-being. Within this school district, there were schools with varying initiatives in place to support the social-emotional and mental health needs of staff and students. However, there was not a collective district focus with an established framework to consistently provide these supports across all school campuses. Addressing teacher well-being in an equitable manner may result in a synchronized identification of resources for educators to address their social-emotional and mental health needs. According to CASEL (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL], 2019), wholly meeting student needs means we need to ensure our educators are whole first. It is essential to establish healthy environments where adults experience engagement, safety, support, and meaningful challenges. Furthermore, the implementation of systemic wellness practices may lead to more equitable relationships and increased educational opportunities for the students across this school district.

Context of the Inquiry

This dissertation in practice will examine the development and implementation of a Social-Emotional Learning SEL and wellness framework within an Eastern North Carolina

school district. This inquiry will also explore the influence of such a framework on teacher well-being when teachers are provided with explicit social-emotional learning and mental health supports to address their individual needs.

Lily Valley County Schools (a pseudonym) is located in Eastern North Carolina in Freesia County (also a pseudonym). Freesia County has a population of 78,784 people; 61% are urban, and 39% are rurally located (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). The racial composition of Freesia County is 46% White, 38% Black/African American, 11.45% Hispanic/Latino, 3.4% Other, 1.14% Asian, .3% Native American, and .01% Pacific Islander (see Figure 1). The median income for a household in the county was \$33,116, and the median income for a family was \$41,551. Males had a median income of \$30,364 versus \$21,997 for females. The per capita income for the county was \$17,102. About 13.80% of families and 18.50% of the population were below the poverty line, including 24.70% of those under age 18 and 21.30% of those aged 65 or over. This county has the largest manufacturing base in Eastern NC, with five major life-science manufacturing facilities, and is considered an employment center for many surrounding counties. The leading industry sectors by employment are: manufacturing; accommodation and food services; healthcare; and public administration.

Lily Valley County Schools has 10,372 students and 1,880 staff members. The district is comprised of 25 schools which are 13 elementary, 5 middle, 1 alternative school, 3 traditional high schools, 2 early colleges, and 1 virtual academy. As of the 2022-2023 school year, student enrollment consisted of 4,549 elementary students, 2,440 middle school students, and 3,383 students at the high school level/early college level. The ethnic distribution of this student population is comprised of 44.89% Black, 27.84% White, 22.73% Hispanic, and 4.54% other (see Figure 2).

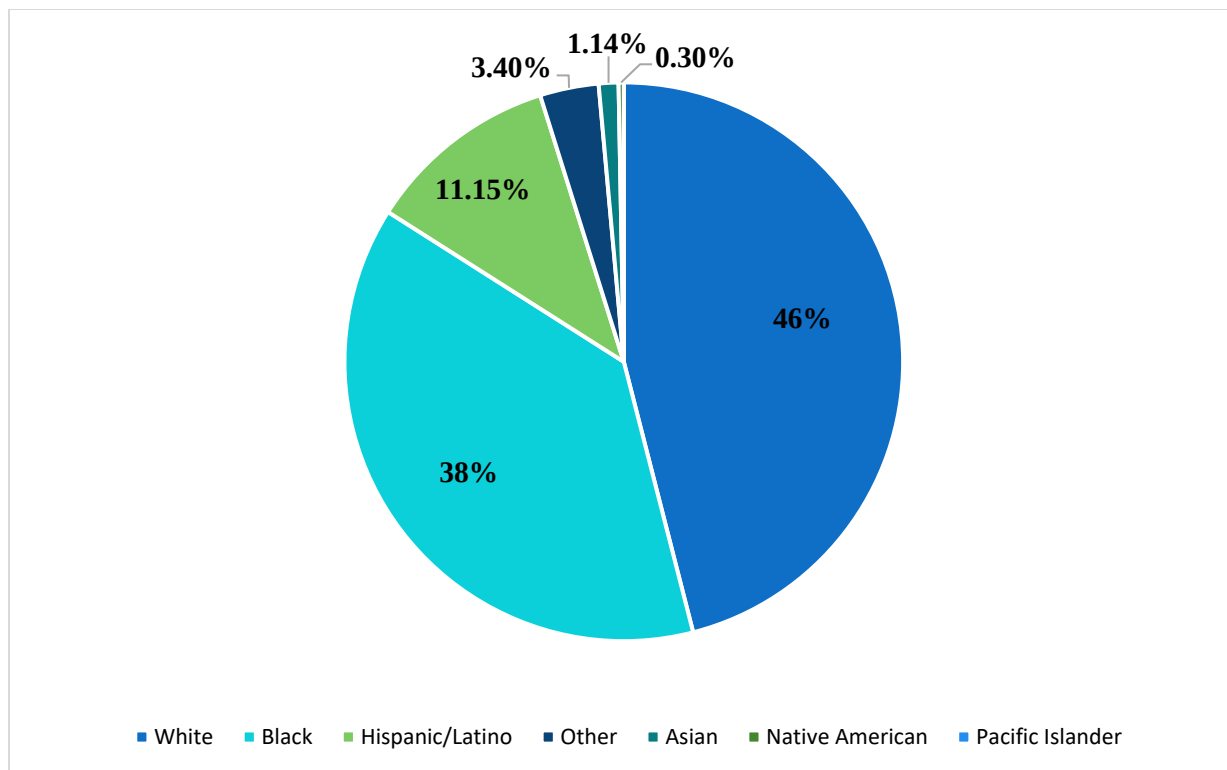


Figure 1. Freesia County racial composition, 2021.

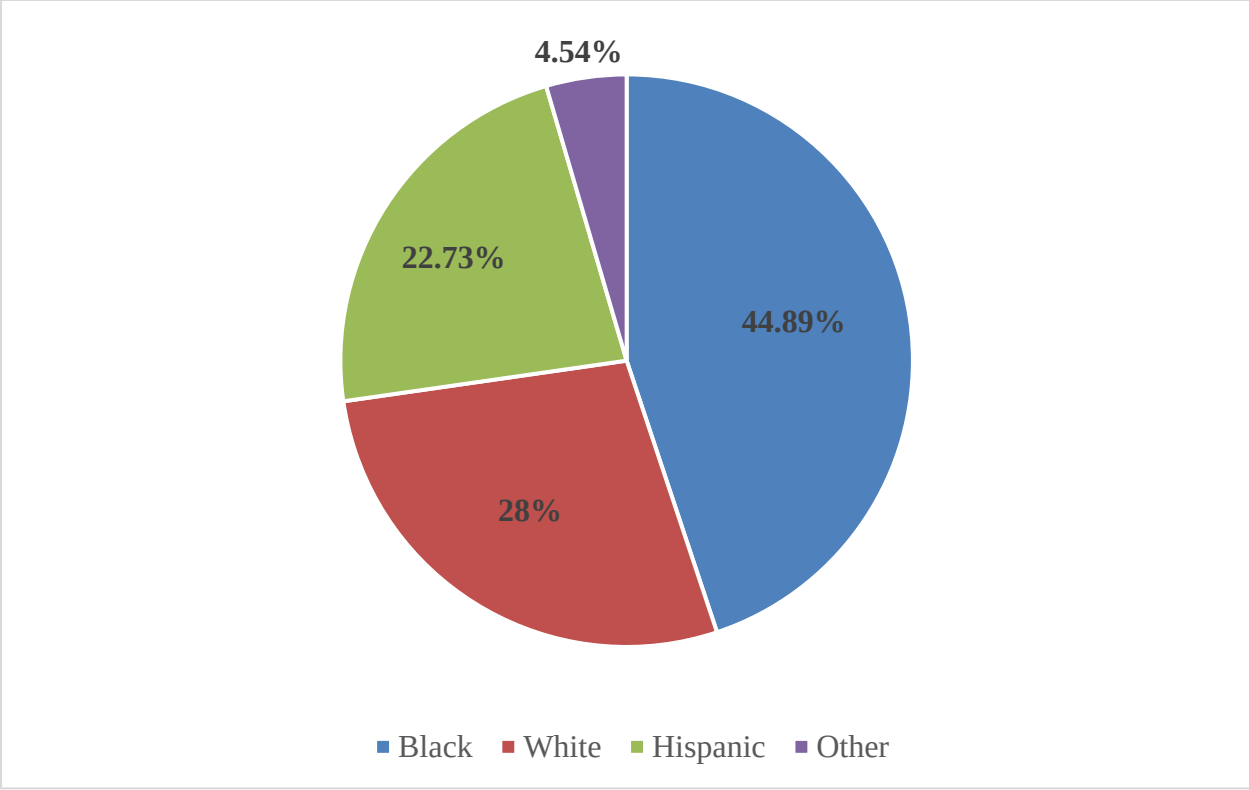


Figure 2. Freesia County Schools student ethnicity, 2022.

Academic Profile

The North Carolina (NC) School Report Cards' (n.d.) website contains a data dashboard for each school district and individual schools. Information within report cards include the school performance grade, students' academic growth, how prepared students are when they enter a school, and several other measures. School Report Cards also provide items such as the grade range, the average class size, the number of teachers, the qualifications and experience of the teaching staff, the resources available in the school library, and other statistics. It does not provide information about special programs or initiatives at a school or the unique qualifications of its staff. Every district and charter school receive an A-F letter grade based on 80% of the school's achievement score, which is calculated using a composite method based on the sum of points earned by a school on all of the indicators measured for that school, and 20% on students' academic growth, which compares the actual performance of the school's students to their expected performance based on a statewide statistical model (North Carolina School Report Cards, n.d.) (see Figure 3). Academic growth is a measurement of how much a student has learned. It is determined by measuring expected progress against actual progress. North Carolina places students in one of three growth categories: did not meet expected growth, met expected growth, or exceeded expected growth. Growth expectation is based on the average amount of academic growth for all students across the state. Growth levels for a district or school are based on the average amount of academic growth for all students in that school or district. Growth can be measured for specific subjects and grades, and these measurements can be combined to create an overall growth measure across subjects and grades (North Carolina School Report Cards, n.d.). If the students, on average, grow academically more than expected, then the growth level exceeds the expected growth. If, on average, they did not grow academically as much as

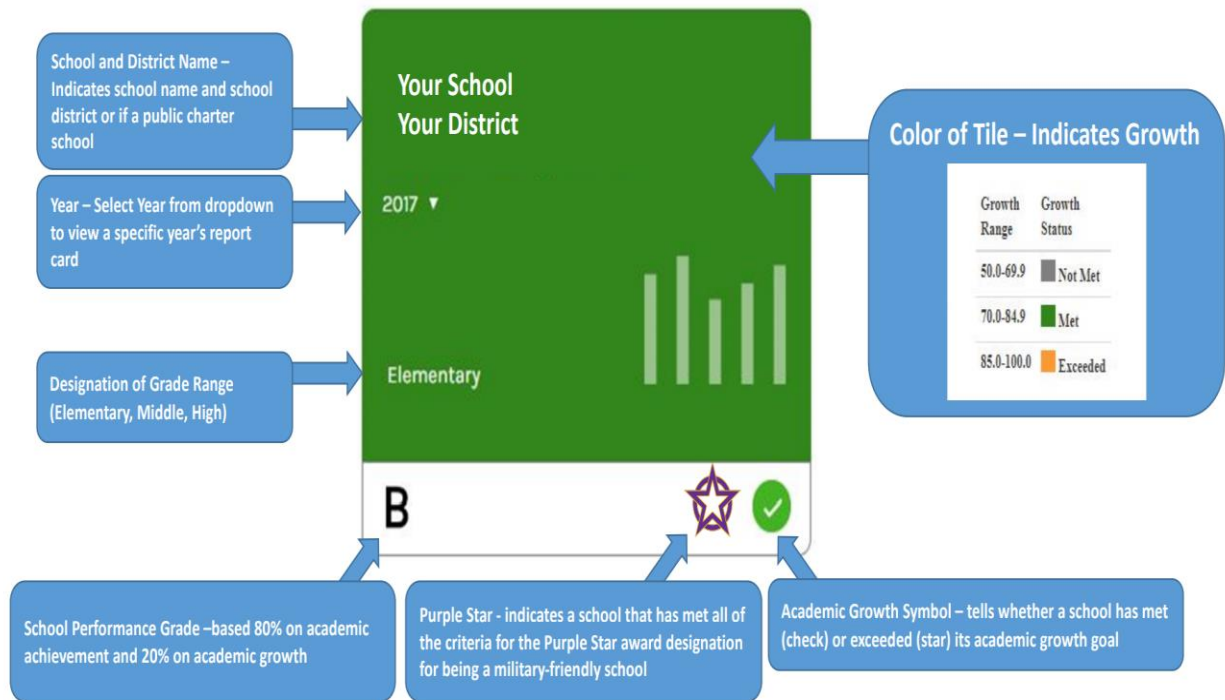


Figure 3. NC School Report Card infographic, 2022.

expected, then the level did not meet expected growth. The letter grades are computed on a 15-point scale (85-100=A; 70-84=B; 54-69=C; 38-53=D; <37=F) (NC School Report Cards, n.d.).

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Lily Valley School district experienced academic increases across the 2015-2016, 2016-2017, and 2018-2019 school years. The school growth status and overall school performance grades indicate an increase in the number of schools that met or exceeded growth and a decrease in the number of schools with performance grades of “D” or “F” (NC School Report Cards, n.d.) across these school years. Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the U.S. Department of Education, and the North Carolina General Assembly waived requirements for reporting the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school-level accountability model and school performance grades, including achievement and growth. The 2021-2022 school year resulted in all elementary schools exceeding or meeting growth, an overall increase in the number of all schools exceeding or meeting growth, and a slight increase in the number of schools receiving a “D” or “F” school performance grade (see Table 1). The district employs 1,880 full-time staff members, of which 827 hold certified positions (teachers, counselors, social workers, etc.) and 1,053 are classified (teacher assistants, clerical, bus drivers, etc.) positions. Lily Valley County Schools also employs 559 part-time staff, of which 431 are active substitute teachers.

North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions (NCTWC)

The North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions (NCTWC) survey is an anonymous statewide survey of teachers and other licensed, school-based educators to assess teaching conditions at the school, district, and state levels. The survey is conducted once per year on a biannual basis and the primary purpose is to capture the voices of educators (NCTWCS, n.d.). The 2021-2022 school year marked the eleventh administration of a teaching conditions survey in NC. The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction and the North Carolina State Board

Table 1

School Growth Status by School Year – Performance Grades, Lily Valley County School District

School Year	School Growth Status				School Performance Grades		
2015-‘16	Exceeded	4 schools	17 %		A	1 school	4.2 %
	Met	8 schools	33 %		B	3 schools	12.5 %
	Not Met	12 schools	50 %		C	7 schools	29.2 %
					D	11 schools	45.8 %
					F	2 schools	8.3 %
2016-‘17	Exceeded	8 schools	32 %		A	1 school	4.0 %
	Met	8 schools	32 %		B	2 schools	8.0 %
	Not Met	9 schools	36 %		C	11 schools	44 %
					D	8 schools	32 %
					F	3 schools	12 %
2017-‘18	Exceeded	11 schools	44 %		A	2 school	8.0 %
	Met	9 schools	36 %		B	7 schools	28 %
	Not Met	5 schools	20 %		C	9 schools	36 %
					D	7 schools	28 %
					F	0 schools	0 %
2018-‘19	Exceeded	9 schools	36 %		A	3 school	12%
	Met	7 schools	28 %		B	5 schools	20 %
	Not Met	9 schools	36 %		C	12 schools	48 %
					D	3 schools	12 %
					F	2 schools	8.0 %
2019-‘20		**Data not	reported	COVID-19	Pandemic**		
		Data not	reported	COVID-19	Pandemic		
2020-‘21							
2021-‘22	Exceeded	14 schools	52 %		A	1 school	4.0%
	Met	6 schools	22 %		B	6 schools	22 %
	Not Met	7 schools	26 %		C	10 schools	37 %
					D	7 schools	26 %
					F	3 schools	11 %
2022-‘23 (2 schools closed 21- 22, virtual academy not included)	Exceeded	9 schools	39 %		A	3 schools	13%
	Met	11 schools	48 %		B	3 schools	13 %
	Not Met	3 schools	13 %		C	14 schools	61 %
					D	2 schools	9 %
					F	1 schools	4 %

of Education have indicated a sustained commitment to listening to educators and reforming schools to create the working conditions necessary for student and teacher success.

The Lily Valley County Schools NCTWC survey data is represented for 2018, 2020, and 2022 school years (see Appendix C). This cumulative data reflects that district-wide there are solid instructional practices, support, and leadership based on the high percentage of favorable survey responses for the categories of Time, Facilities and Resources, Teacher Leadership, School Leadership, Professional Learning Opportunities, Instructional Practices & Supports, and Equity, which is a new category as of the 2020 NCTWC survey. Overall, Lily Valley County Schools was above or compatible with the state average across a majority of these indicators for the 2018, 2020, and 2022 NC Teacher Working Conditions surveys.

Panorama Social-Emotional Learning Screener

Panorama Education is an independent education technology company that partners with schools and districts to support student literacy and social-emotional learning (SEL). It is not affiliated with any particular academic or legal philosophy. Schools and districts use Panorama technology to gather feedback from students, families, and educators about teaching, learning, and school climate. The use of this SEL universal screener is one component of a comprehensive balanced assessment system. The data can be utilized to analyze and identify school-wide strengths and areas of need; students who need additional support; set the stage for prevention, and to identify student risk factors. The Panorama SEL screening components are aligned with the CASEL core competencies (Panorama Education, n.d.).

Lily Valley County Schools implemented the use of the Panorama SEL screener with all K-12 students in the fall of 2021. A second survey was administered in the spring of 2022. The Panorama SEL survey captured student SEL data across: (1) Skills and Competencies - the

social, emotional, and motivational skills that help students excel in school, career, and life; (2) Supports and Environment - the environment in which students learn, which influences their academic success and social-emotional development; and (3) Well-Being- students' positive and challenging feelings, as well as how supported they feel through relationships with others.

The district SEL-mental health team evaluated the survey topics available through Panorama: challenging feelings, emotion regulation, growth mindset, positive feelings, self-efficacy, self-management, social awareness, supportive relationships, classroom effort, grit, learning strategies, and social perspective-taking. The team identified the topics that would be a beneficial starting point for this district to measure for the K-12 students. The SEL topics selected for K-2 students were: (1) Emotion Regulation – how well students regulate their emotions; (2) Social Awareness - how well students consider the perspectives of others and empathize with them; (3) Classroom Effort - how much effort students exert in key behaviors that correspond to successful learning and course performance; (4) Self-Efficacy - how much students believe they can succeed in achieving academic outcomes; (5) Self-Management - how well students manage their emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in different situations (Panorama Education, n.d.). The surveys for K-2 students were completed by teachers and based on how these educators perceived their students' social-emotional learning skills.

The SEL topics selected for 3rd-12th grade students were: (1) Supportive Relationships - How supported students feel through their relationships with friends, family, and adults at school; (2) Self-Management - how well students manage their emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in different situations; (3) Social Awareness - how well students consider the perspectives of others and empathize with them; (4) Self-Efficacy - how much students believe they can succeed in achieving academic outcomes; and (5) Emotion Regulation - how well

students regulate their emotions (Panorama Education, n.d.). These surveys were administered directly to students to complete independently.

The surveys were administered in October 2021 and again in March 2022. The data across both grades K-2 and 3-12 indicate areas of growth and areas where students need additional interventions and support (see Table 2). The K-2 data reflects that teachers' perceptions of their students indicate favorable growth within the categories of classroom effort, self-efficacy, and self-management. A continued focus and support will be necessary for the competencies of emotion regulation and social awareness. The data for 3rd-5th grade indicates slight growth in the categories of supportive relationships and self-efficacy. The categories of self-management and social awareness remained flat, and emotion regulation demonstrated a slight decrease; this data indicates these are areas for continued focus and support for these students. The data set for 6th-12th grade students reveal slight growth with supportive relationships and emotion regulation. Social awareness and self-efficacy remained flat, and the category of self-management experienced a slight decrease. It will be beneficial to provide these grade levels with continued interventions for these categories.

School Inquiry Sites

Three schools were identified to serve as research pilot locations as part of this inquiry. The selected schools are Magnolia Elementary, Sunflower Middle School, and Rosedale High School (all pseudonyms). Magnolia Elementary, Sunflower Middle, and Rosedale High School are in a direct feeder pattern to one another on the eastern side of this school district. As a result of the school feeder patterns, these schools serve approximately the same students and families. Teachers at each of the three school inquiry sites will be provided with the opportunity to participate in the district educator SEL survey and focus groups across two phases of this

Table 2

*Panorama SEL Survey: Fall 2021 to Spring 2022 Student Response Data*K-2nd Grade Students:

Assessment Timeframe	Emotion Regulation	Social Awareness	Classroom Effort	Self-Efficacy	Self-Management
Fall 2021	72% (favorable)	63% (favorable)	56% (favorable)	50% (favorable)	44% (favorable)
Spring 2022	71% (favorable)	62% (favorable)	60% (favorable)	43% (favorable)	48% (favorable)
Percentage of Change	-1%	-1%	+4%	+7%	+4%

3rd – 5th Grade Students:

Assessment Timeframe	Supportive Relationships	Self-Management	Social Awareness	Self-Efficacy	Emotion Regulation
Fall 2021	88% (favorable)	67% (favorable)	67% (favorable)	57% (favorable)	47% (favorable)
Spring 2022	89% (favorable)	67% (favorable)	67% (favorable)	56% (favorable)	46% (favorable)
Percentage of Change	+1%	0%	0%	+1%	-1%

6th – 12th Grade Students:

Assessment Timeframe	Supportive Relationships	Self-Management	Social Awareness	Self-Efficacy	Emotion Regulation
Fall 2021	81% (favorable)	67% (favorable)	58% (favorable)	41% (favorable)	45% (favorable)
Spring 2022	82% (favorable)	69% (favorable)	58% (favorable)	41% (favorable)	46% (favorable)
Percentage of Change	+1%	-2%	0%	0%	+1%

inquiry. The qualitative data from the focus groups will be beneficial to provide the first-hand perspective of teachers, while further examining the identified themes and patterns from the educator SEL survey data. The qualitative data from the focus groups will be critical in shaping a district plan to enhance educator mental health and well-being that will be most meaningful to the educators in this district.

Magnolia Elementary

Magnolia Elementary School (MES) has approximately 225 students and serves kindergarten through 5th grade. MES is a Title I school and is rurally located in the eastern part of this school district. Information from the NC School Report Card indicates that 41.3% of students attending this school are economically disadvantaged. The student demographics consist of 43% Hispanic, 30% White, 23% Black, and 4% two or more races.

This school has maintained solid student achievement performance and high growth data over the last several school years. Beginning with the 2015-2016 school year, the school achieved a school report card grade of “B” and exceeded expected growth; 2016-2017 resulted in a report card grade of “C” and exceeded expected growth; 2017-2018 resulted in a report card grade “B” and exceeded expected growth, and 2018-2019 resulted in a report card grade “B” and exceeded expected growth; and 2021-2022 resulted in a report card grade “B” and exceeded expected growth. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this data was not reported for the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school years.

Sunflower Middle

Sunflower Middle School (SMS) has approximately 330 students and serves grades 6th through 8th grades. SMS is rurally located in the southern part of this school district. Information from the NC School Report Card indicates that 34.3% of students attending this school are

economically disadvantaged. The student demographics consist of 35% White, 33% Black, 30% Hispanic, 2% two or more races, and .003% Asian.

This school has experienced uneven student achievement performance and growth data over the last several school years. Beginning with the 2015-2016 school year, the school achieved a school report card grade of “D” and did not meet expected growth; 2016-2017 resulted in a report card grade of “D” and did not meet expected growth; 2017-2018 resulted in a report card grade “C” and exceeded expected growth, 2018-2019 resulted in a report card grade “C,” did not meet expected growth, and 2021-2022 resulted in a report card grade of “D,” and did not meet expected growth. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic this data was not reported for the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school years.

Rosedale High

Rosedale High School (RHS) has approximately 700 students and serves grades 9th through 12th. RHS is located in the southeastern part of this school district in a rural setting. Information from the NC School Report Card indicates that 43.2% of students attending this school are economically disadvantaged. Student demographics consist of 49% Black, 27% Hispanic, 20% White, 3% two or more races, .008% Asian, and .0014% Pacific Islander.

This school has increased student achievement performance and growth data over the last several school years. Beginning with the 2015-2016 school year, the school achieved a school report card grade of “D” and did not meet expected growth; 2016-2017 resulted in a report card grade of “C” and did not meet expected growth; 2017-2018 resulted in a report card grade “B” and exceeded expected growth, 2018-2019 resulted in a report card grade “C” and exceeded expected growth, and 2021-2022 resulted in a school report card grade of “C” and exceeded

expected growth. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this data was not reported for the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school years.

Data from the NC Teacher Working Conditions (NCTWC) Survey in each of these pilot schools reflects that across the survey years of 2018, 2020, and 2022 the cumulative data reflects that there are solid instructional practices, support, and leadership based on the high percentage of favorable survey responses for the categories of Time, Facilities and Resources, Teacher Leadership, School Leadership, Professional Learning Opportunities, Instructional Practices & Supports, and Equity (new category as of the 2020 NC TWC survey). The data in Table 3 reflects the retention data for each of these schools in the category of “Overall, my school is a good place to work and learn.”

Students from all three inquiry sites participated in the Panorama SEL district survey in the fall of 2021 and the spring of 2022. Data across all three school inquiry locations indicate both positive growth and areas of opportunity. K-2 student data indicates growth in supporting students with emotion regulation, social awareness, classroom effort, self-efficacy, and self-management. Data for 3rd-5th and 6th-8th students indicate additional SEL supports, and interventions are necessary across all assessed categories. The survey for high school students indicates positive growth across the topics of supportive relationships, social awareness, self-efficacy, and emotion regulation; the survey topic of self-management had a small decrease. See Table 4 for Magnolia Elementary’s Panorama survey data. See Table 5 for Sunflower Middle’s Panorama survey data. See Table 6 for Rosedale High’s Panorama survey data.

Statement of the Focus of Practice

This dissertation in practice centered on the implementation of a district SEL and wellness framework within Lily Valley County Schools and an examination of its impact on

Table 3

NCTWCS Category “Overall, My School is a Good Place to Work and Learn”

School	NCTWC 2018	NCTWC 2020	NCTWC 2022
Magnolia Elementary	84.0%	100%	94.0%
Sunflower Middle	89.0%	96.0%	89.5%
Rosedale High	82.0%	87.0%	90.0%

Table 4

Magnolia Elementary School Panorama Survey Data

K-2 Students:					
Assessment Timeframe	Emotion Regulation	Social Awareness	Classroom Effort	Self-Efficacy	Self-Management
Fall 2021	74% (favorable)	71% (favorable)	65% (favorable)	52% (favorable)	53% (favorable)
Spring 2022	76% (favorable)	70% (favorable)	70% (favorable)	59% (favorable)	58% (favorable)
Percentage of Change	+2%	-1%	+5%	+7%	+5%
3 rd -5 th Students:					
Assessment Timeframe	Supportive Relationships	Self-Management	Social Awareness	Self-Efficacy	Emotion Regulation
Fall 2021	88% (favorable)	67% (favorable)	70% (favorable)	48% (favorable)	42% (favorable)
Spring 2022	82% (favorable)	63% (favorable)	66% (favorable)	45% (favorable)	39% (favorable)
Percentage of Change	-6%	-4%	-4%	-3%	-3%

Table 5

Sunflower Middle School Panorama Survey Data

6th-8th Students:

Assessment Timeframe	Supportive Relationships	Self- Management	Social Awareness	Self-Efficacy	Emotion Regulation
Fall 2021	80% (favorable)	63% (favorable)	54% (favorable)	38% (favorable)	38% (favorable)
Spring 2022	79% (favorable)	64% (favorable)	53% (favorable)	37% (favorable)	39% (favorable)
Percentage of Change	-1%	-1%	-1%	-1%	+1%

Table 6

*Rosedale High School Panorama Survey Data*9th-12th Students:

Assessment Timeframe	Supportive Relationships	Self- Management	Social Awareness	Self-Efficacy	Emotion Regulation
Fall 2021	79% (favorable)	71% (favorable)	55% (favorable)	36% (favorable)	43% (favorable)
Spring 2022	81% (favorable)	70% (favorable)	58% (favorable)	40% (favorable)	48% (favorable)
Percentage of Change	+2%	-1%	+3%	+4%	+5%

educator well-being. Across this district, there were varying initiatives to support the social-emotional and mental health needs of staff and students in some schools. However, there was not a collective district focus with an established framework to consistently provide these supports. Addressing teacher well-being as a systems-level problem may result in a synchronized identification of resources for educators to equitably address their social-emotional and mental health needs. Furthermore, the implementation of systemic SEL practices may lead to more equitable relationships and increased educational opportunities for the students across this school district.

The plan for implementation originated in Lily Valley County Schools (WCS) during the late summer of 2020. Under the leadership of the District Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) Coordinator, a team was created specifically to develop support for the social-emotional and mental health needs of students, staff, and community stakeholders. The original team was comprised of school counselors and administrators from the elementary, middle, and high school levels, a school psychologist, nurse, behavioral specialist, social worker, an executive director with instructional services, the executive director for exceptional children, and an assistant superintendent with administrative services.

The work for this team was aligned with the North Carolina SEL & Equity Project Partnership Agreement. This Partnership Agreement is part of the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction's (NCDPI) Project AWARE (Advancing Wellness and Resiliency in Education)/ACTIVATE (Advancing Coordinated and Timely Interventions, Awareness, Training, and Education) (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, n.d.a.). Project AWARE/ACTIVATE addresses the three tiers of mental health - promotion, prevention, and intervention - through a continuum of education, universal screening, and appropriate services

and support for all students in response to varying levels of need. Project AWARE/ACTIVATE aims to provide NC students in grades PK-12 with access to universal screening and supplemental support based on behavioral or psychological measures of school engagement using evidence-based practices within the classroom and school settings.

North Carolina's Project AWARE/ACTIVATE began as a collaboration between the NC Department of Public Instruction and the NC Department of Health and Human Services Division of Child and Family Well-Being to develop a comprehensive plan of activities, services, and strategies for connecting youth and families to mental health services in three NC pilot school districts in order to develop sustainable strategies that can be scaled statewide to enhance mental health supports and services within schools (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, n.d.a.). NCDPI has expanded support beyond the original three district pilots to include social and emotional learning (SEL) professional development and coaching for all Public School Units (PSU). The expansion of this initiative serves to foster the systemic implementation of SEL as a primary path to achieving the State Board of Education's goals around equity, including the elimination of opportunity gaps for all students. Lily Valley County Schools entered into an agreement to develop an implementation plan to provide SEL support in an equitable manner across all schools in this district. NC Department of Public Instruction works in partnership with interested PSUs and outlines the goals and responsibilities within the NC SEL & Equity Project Partnership Agreement (see Appendix D).

Inquiry Guiding Questions

This inquiry focused on the implementation of a district SEL and wellness framework and an examination of its impact on educator well-being. The questions guiding this inquiry are as follows:

1. What impact does a comprehensive wellness initiative have on teacher well-being?
2. Which components of a comprehensive wellness initiative do teachers perceive as having a positive influence on their well-being?

The data collected from this inquiry was utilized to identify the resources, strategies, and supports that are necessary in order to effectively impact, improve, and sustain teacher well-being in Lily Valley County Schools.

Overview of Inquiry

This inquiry utilized a mixed-methods research design in order to thoroughly answer the guiding questions. Mixed-methods research is an approach to inquiry which integrates collecting both qualitative and quantitative data. It involves the use of philosophical assumptions, the use of qualitative and quantitative approaches, and the mixing or integrating of both approaches in a inquiry (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Within a mixed-methods approach, this inquiry utilized improvement science in order to thoroughly evaluate the inquiry's guiding questions.

Improvement science is a method of problem-solving based on ongoing research, education, and rapid cycle testing of change ideas; this process yields effective and time-sensitive input for system changes (Perry et al., 2020). Improvement science takes a more problem-centered approach to address a problem or situation, by performing rapid tests of change that will guide a scholarly practitioner to “learn fast and implement change well” (Perry & Zambo, 2019, p. 158). Stakeholders impacted by the identified problem, are invited to work together to understand how to improve performance and results using improvement science (Bennett et al., 2018).

Inquiry Partners

This dissertation in practice revolved around the implementation of a district SEL and mental health framework within Lily Valley County Schools and an examination of its impact on educator well-being. The plan for implementation of this SEL and wellness framework

originated in late summer of 2020. Under the leadership of the District MTSS Coordinator, a district SEL-mental health team was created specifically to identify resources and develop support for the social-emotional and mental health needs of students and staff. The original team was comprised of school counselors and administrators from the elementary, middle, and high school levels, a school psychologist, nurse, behavioral specialist, social worker, executive director with instructional services, the executive director for exceptional children, and an assistant superintendent with administrative services.

The early work of the team involved creating a Request for Proposal (RFP) process and evaluating proposals from therapeutic agencies interested in providing school-based mental health services for students district-wide. This process resulted in two agencies being selected to provide these services. Additionally, the team made a recommendation to revise how the student services function was managed in the district. For approximately nine years, the student services functions were fragmented into counselors, nurses, psychologists, and social workers with each group being led by varying district leaders. The district SEL-mental health team strongly recommended there be a cohesive student services department led by a student services director. The recommendation was received and accepted by district senior leadership, changes were made to the district organizational structure, and an executive director of student services was hired. The collaborative inquiry partners for this inquiry will be comprised of members from the district SEL – Mental Health team, more specifically the district MTSS coordinator, the executive director, student services, the executive directors of elementary and secondary education, the district superintendent, and teachers/staff at Magnolia Elementary, Sunflower Middle, and Rosedale High. Engagement with the district SEL-mental health team will take place during bi-monthly meetings. All information shared and created during these meetings will

be captured with a formal meeting agenda and notes reflecting the content of each meeting. Collaboration with the superintendent, associate superintendent (human resources), and assistant superintendents (administrative & instructional services) will take place as the need arises.

Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning Framework

The blueprint for this district initiative is built around the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) District Implementation Framework and Theory of Action (ToA). The mission of the CASEL organization is to help make evidence-based social and emotional learning (SEL) an integral part of education from preschool through high school. The CASEL District Implementation Framework and Theory of Action are organized across four key components: (1) Build Foundational Support and Plan; (2) Strengthen Adult SEL Competencies and Capacity; (3) Promote SEL for Students; and (4) Practice Continuous Improvement (CASEL, n.d.a). This inquiry will center primarily on component 2: Strengthen Adult SEL Competencies and Capacity, while also taking into consideration the necessity to build a solid foundation for a successful district implementation.

Research has emphasized the critical role of educators' social and emotional competencies and their profound impact on the intricate dynamics of teaching and learning (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). This highlights the significance of educators possessing not only academic expertise but also a strong foundation in social and emotional skills to create a positive and effective learning environment. CASEL recognizes that transformative SEL offers a way for adults to reflect on how their own social and emotional competencies, and the policies and practices they put in place, may ultimately increase educational equity, and provide more equitable learning environments for all students. For districts to leverage SEL and create equitable and thriving classrooms and schools, all adults must take on the responsibility of

fostering learning environments that promote students' sense of engagement and belonging. Furthermore, districts must deliberately foster in adults the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary for this form of critical examination and collaborative action to tackle the underlying causes of inequities (Jagers et al., 2018). A more thorough examination of this conceptual framework will be evaluated within the literature review of Chapter 2.

Definition of Key Terms

Burnout - a form of emotional exhaustion that occurs from long-term job-related stress and is especially common among educators (Jennett et al., 2003).

CASEL - Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning. CASEL is a national organization with a focus on advancing the development of academic, social, and emotional competence for all students (CASEL, 2020).

Educational Equity - the belief and practice of ensuring that every student is treated in a fair and just manner, providing the necessary allocation of resources for the success of every student, and eliminating discriminatory barriers to full participation and opportunities for every student (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, n.d.a.).

Equitable Learning Environments – respond to the diversity of a school or classroom community, intentionally create rich opportunities for student action and reflection, attend to young people's psychological experience of learning and develop their feelings of competence, connectedness, and purpose (Farrington, 2020).

North Carolina Multi-Tiered System of Support (NC MTSS) - is a school improvement framework which encompasses academic, behavioral, and social-emotional instruction and support. NC MTSS employs a systems approach using data-driven problem-solving to maximize growth for all (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, n.d.a.).

Relationship skills - The ability to establish and maintain healthy and supportive relationships and to effectively navigate settings with diverse individuals and groups (CASEL, n.d.b.).

Responsible decision-making - The abilities to make caring and constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions across diverse situations (CASEL, n.d.b.).

Self-awareness - The abilities to understand one's own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior across contexts (CASEL, n.d.b.).

Self-Efficacy - An individual's belief in their capabilities to exercise control over events that affect their lives, to produce expected performance, and to influence others (Song et al., 2020).

Self-management - The ability to manage one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations and to achieve goals and aspirations (CASEL, n.d.b.).

Social awareness - The ability to understand the perspectives of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and contexts (CASEL, n.d.b.).

Social-emotional learning - the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (Greenberg et al., 2016).

Assumptions

For the purpose of this inquiry, it was assumed that the district SEL-mental health team would be objective collaborative inquiry partners throughout the exploration and review of barriers and opportunities to improve teacher well-being. Another assumption within this inquiry was that the identification of resources to support teacher mental health and social-emotional

needs would lead to equitable distribution and access to these resources for all teachers within Lily Valley County Schools. There are schools with varying initiatives in place to support the social-emotional and mental needs of staff and students. However, there was not a collective district focus with an established framework to consistently provide these supports across all school campuses. I entrusted the school administrators would stay employed at their respective locations, remain fully engaged across this inquiry, and allow necessary access to their teaching staff. Furthermore, there was an assumption that there is a connection to a more positive and productive school climate when efforts are made to improve teacher well-being and sense of belonging. It was also assumed that when teachers are provided with training and tangible resources to support the social-emotional needs of students, there would be a resulting improvement in teacher well-being. Finally, it was assumed that all participants in this inquiry will respond candidly and with integrity across surveys and participation in focus groups.

Scope and Delimitations

The focal point of this research inquiry was to examine the impact on teacher well-being as the result of a district-wide implementation of a social-emotional learning and wellness framework. The school district for this inquiry consists of 25 schools which include three traditional high schools, two early colleges, five middle schools, thirteen elementary schools, one alternative learning center, and one virtual academy. The scope of this inquiry focused on classroom educators from three schools in this district. I worked in partnership with lead administrators from the participating school inquiry sites for all aspects of this inquiry including teacher surveys and focus groups. The results of this inquiry may identify scalable practices within this district and for similarly situated school districts. Both students and teachers may benefit when classroom educators are provided with explicit strategies to support their unique

social-emotional health and well-being needs. The scope of this inquiry was centered on an elementary, middle, and high school aligned within a district feeder pattern to one another. These schools share students with similar demographics and socio-economic backgrounds which potentially could impact the outcomes for future studies replicated at other schools due to the unique dynamics and differences of these learning environments being aligned as feeder schools.

Limitations

My relationship as a member of the district SEL-mental health implementation team and as a previous lead administrator at one of the schools included in the inquiry may result in a potential limitation that necessitates acknowledgment. It was my goal to identify viable strategies and resources to improve teacher well-being. In order to support my efforts in leading an inquiry with limited biases on my part while actively incorporating the perspectives of others, I worked in partnership with my inquiry partners to analyze outcome data from teacher surveys and focus groups. These inquiry partners were also intricately involved in the selection of resources and strategies to support teachers' social-emotional health and sense of well-being. Furthermore, I led and conducted focus groups at all three school inquiry site locations in partnership with my collaborative inquiry partners.

A potential limitation was that administrative changes at any of the schools during the course of this inquiry could significantly influence the findings. It was also recognized that it was outside my control the level of participant engagement and influence at these school locations. In order to support engagement with these administrators, I communicated with them on an ongoing basis, and provided them with advance information on the involvement of their teachers. Providing communication and a plan of action in advance equipped these administrators with the information, a timeline, and the activities their teachers would participate in across this inquiry.

It is also important to note that this inquiry was occurring during the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, there may have been variables outside my control that potentially impacted the data outcomes and participant involvement. I recognized that advance planning was necessary to ensure the timeline of this inquiry remained intact as much as possible. It was also recognized should any classrooms or schools at any of the school inquiry locations need to move to remote learning or close, the process for implementation of this inquiry would need to be altered to include the timeline of teacher involvement while also identifying an alternate plan, such as a virtual process to maintain the integrity and timeline of this inquiry; however, such actions may significantly impact the data collected and related findings.

Significance of Inquiry

This dissertation in practice examined the development and implementation of a Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) and wellness framework within an Eastern North Carolina school district. The effects of this implementation on teacher well-being was explored within the context of this inquiry. Various programs were in place in some schools in this district to assist the mental and social-emotional needs of both staff and students. When classroom teachers are given clear tools and tactics to assist their particular well-being needs, there is the potential to find qualitative and quantitative data outcomes and scalable district practices.

There was, however, not an established blueprint or collective district focus to consistently provide educators with this support. Addressing teacher well-being as a systems-level problem may result in a synchronized identification of resources for educators to equitably address their social-emotional and mental health needs. Research has illuminated the importance of educators' social and emotional competencies and their profound influence on the teaching and learning processes (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). This underscores the importance of educators

not only having academic expertise but also a solid grounding in social and emotional skills to establish a positive and effective learning environment. Moreover, Bracket et al. (2010) discovered that when teachers possess the capability to regulate their emotions, there is an increased probability of assisting students in developing the capacity to more effectively regulate their emotions. Meyers et al. (2015) noted the significance of collaboration with families, educators, and students when implementing SEL practices as a school-wide approach. Establishing a basis for school-wide Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) necessitates a learning environment that prioritizes the identification of high-quality resources, essential structures, and ensuring students have access to pivotal SEL learning initiatives (Mart et al., 2015). When collaboration and assistance for implementing SEL is provided at the district level, there is a heightened sense of community among key stakeholders, and school administrators have an enhanced opportunity to effectively maintain social-emotional learning and instructional initiatives (CASEL, 2015; Meyers et al., 2015).

Advancing Equity and Social Justice

Introducing systemic social-emotional learning practices may result in more equitable relationships and expanded educational opportunities for students throughout this school district. SEL researchers, practitioners, and advocates have consistently stressed that all students, irrespective of economic status or geographic location can derive benefits from opportunities for social and emotional development (Atwell & Bridgeland, 2019). CASEL and other advocates have consistently challenged that children from all backgrounds and demographics tend to benefit from SEL (Jones & Kahn, 2017; Mahoney et al., 2018). As identified by Jagers et al. (2018), every student brings their distinctive identities, strengths, values, lived experiences, and culture to their classroom and school environment. Leveraging SEL to nurture all students can

lead to better outcomes for all groups. While social-emotional learning initiatives cannot independently accomplish all the tasks needed to achieve equitable outcomes for all students, the commitment to equity has consistently been a core principle of SEL practices and standards (Shriver & Weissberg, 2020). Additionally, CASEL advocates for programs that aim to assist students and teachers in constructing robust, respectful relationships based on an understanding of both similarities and differences. Additionally, it is proposed that these programs encourage the critical examination of the underlying causes of inequity and the development of collaborative solutions to address community and social issues (Jagers et al., 2019).

Advances in Practice

Educators join the education field with aspirations to have a lasting influence on students; however, they exit the profession prematurely in their early careers at alarming rates (Gray et al., 2017). An estimated 44% of teachers in public and private schools are estimated to leave teaching within five years of entry (Ingersoll et al., 2018). An Australian study also noted that one-third of educators indicated they were planning on leaving the profession within their first ten years of teaching, and about 25% more planned to leave within two years of the study (Arnup & Bowles, 2016). Educators experiencing burnout often display higher levels of frustration, frequent absenteeism, and typically have less effective classroom management skills. These factors contribute to student apathy and overall decreased academic achievement (Gibbs & Miller, 2014).

The results of this inquiry may identify scalable practices within this district and for similarly situated school districts. Both students and teachers may benefit when classroom educators are provided with explicit resources and strategies to support their unique well-being needs. Studies have emphasized the significance of teachers' social and emotional competencies

and the connection to teaching and learning outcomes (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). Furthermore, Bracket et al. (2010) discovered that when teachers possess the ability to regulate their emotions, there is an increased likelihood of assisting students in more effectively developing their ability to understand and manage their emotions. These teachers also reported increased satisfaction with their work and a sense of personal accomplishment, factors which can lead to increased productivity, a decrease in absenteeism, and increased retention longitudinally.

The implementation of a district SEL and wellness framework within Lily County Schools may result in several productive outcomes in line with supporting teacher well-being. There was not a collective district focus to consistently provide educators with resources and strategies to address their unique mental health and SEL needs. Addressing teacher well-being as a systems-level problem may result in a synchronized identification of resources for educators to equitably address their social-emotional and mental health needs. This increased spotlight on teacher well-being may support an overall improvement in teacher morale which can be connected to an increase in instructional productivity, a higher rate of self-efficacy when delivering SEL supports for students, and positive outcomes for improving the dynamics and intricacies of school climates. Improving educator well-being may also be connected to more robust teacher recruitment efforts while also decreasing the attrition rate for teachers in Lily Valley County Schools. Furthermore, the implementation of systemic SEL practices may lead to more equitable relationships and increased educational opportunities for the students across this school district. The scope of this inquiry was centered on teachers and schools at the elementary, middle, and high school levels and may provide meaningful outcomes, realizations, and practices that can be utilized in similarly situated school districts.

Summary

This dissertation in practice centered on the implementation of a district SEL and wellness framework within Lily Valley County Schools and an examination of its impact on educator well-being. There were some schools in this district with varying initiatives in place to support the social-emotional and mental needs of staff and students. However, there was not an established district framework to consistently provide these supports. Addressing teacher well-being as a systems-level problem may result in a synchronized identification of resources for educators to equitably address their social-emotional and mental health needs. Furthermore, the implementation of systemic SEL practices may lead to more equitable relationships and increased educational opportunities for the students across this school district.

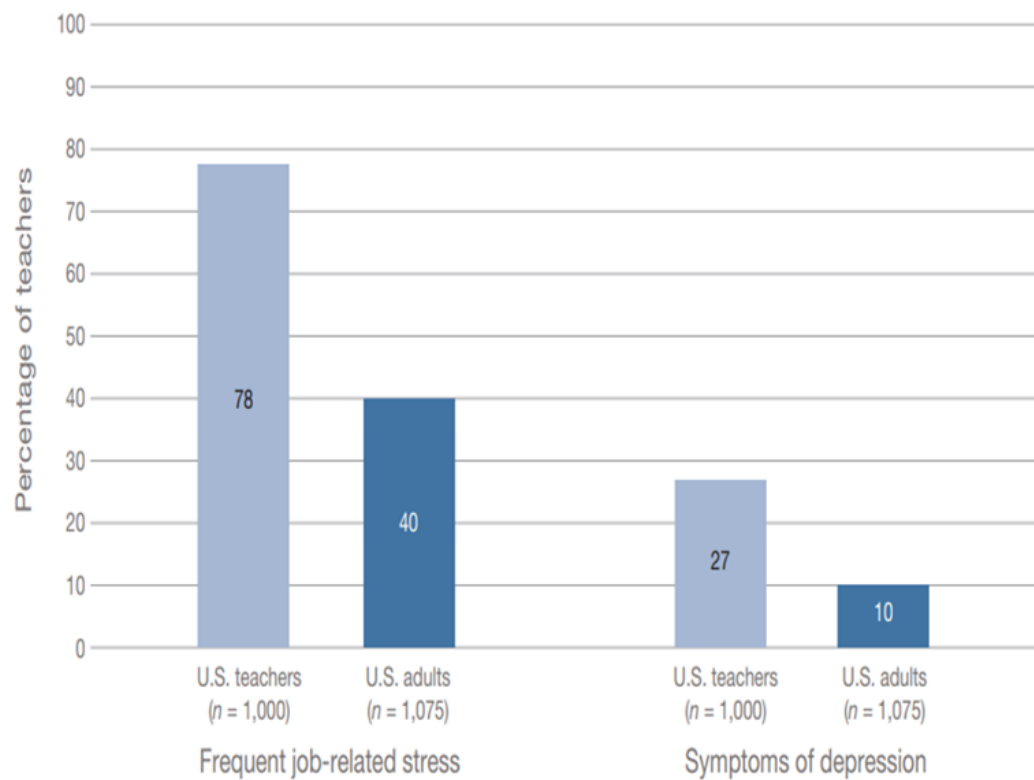
The blueprint for this district initiative was built around the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) District Implementation Framework and Theory of Action (ToA). The mission of the CASEL organization is to help make evidence-based social and emotional learning (SEL) an integral part of education from preschool through high school. The CASEL District Implementation Framework and Theory of Action is organized across four key components: (1) Build Foundational Support and Plan; (2) Strengthen Adult SEL Competencies and Capacity; (3) Promote SEL for Students; and (4) Practice Continuous Improvement. The information shared in Chapter 2 is framed around research that highlights the significance of providing educators with equitable access to social-emotional learning, mental health support, and well-being resources. This inquiry aimed to demonstrate the critical components necessary when planning the implementation of a district SEL-mental health framework when addressing teacher well-being. Chapter 3 outlines the methods of inquiry through a mixed-methods approach based on improvement science. Chapter 4 outlines the results

of the data collection processes for both phases of this inquiry, and Chapter 5 includes a summary of my research findings and illustrates the connection to the literature.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The focus of this inquiry centered on the implementation of a district SEL and wellness framework and the connection to educator well-being. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the expectations for teachers increased significantly due to state and district initiatives aimed at improving student performance and achievement (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond., 2017; Greenberg et al., 2016; Lever et al., 2017). A survey conducted pre-pandemic by Gallup (2014) found teaching to be one of the most stressful careers. Another survey conducted by the Rand Corporation (Steiner & Woo, 2021) noted that a much higher percentage of teachers reported frequent job-related stress and symptoms of depression than the general adult population (see Figure 4). Since March 2020, educators have encountered working conditions that have been altered and influenced by the pandemic, making the teaching profession even more challenging (Cardoza, 2021; Kraft et al., 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has brought attention to and intensified numerous preexisting challenges in our education system. These challenges encompass unequal access to resources such as the internet, obstacles in effectively engaging students and families, an increased demand for supporting student well-being, and heightened job-related stress for teachers (Steiner & Woo, 2021).

The structure for this chapter is framed around research that highlights critical components when planning for the implementation of a district social-emotional learning and wellness framework; the significance of providing educators with social-emotional learning strategies, well-being supports; and identifying teacher-led measures for equitable access to SEL resources for our students and the connection to educator's overall wellness. As outlined in Chapter 1, research supports the need for SEL practices to not operate in isolation, but to be embedded across all practices and content areas within our schools (Shriver & Weissberg, 2020).



Note. (Steiner & Woo, 2021).

Figure 4. Job-related stress and symptoms of depression among teachers and among the general U.S. adult population.

The advantages of social and emotional learning underscore the notion that an educational approach emphasizing social and emotional development produces positive outcomes for students, adults and our school communities (Atwell & Bridgeland, 2019). Due to the relationships created with their students and the amount of time spent with them, teachers and other educators naturally emerge as crucial partners in integrating social-emotional learning techniques. They play a pivotal role in laying the groundwork for effective social-emotional and wellness support in their classrooms (Cardoza, 2021; De Stasio et al., 2017; Jones & Kahn, 2017).

Research has underscored the significance of teachers' social and emotional competencies and the connection to the teaching and learning process (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). Bracket et al. (2010) discovered that when teachers possess the ability to regulate their emotions, there is an increased likelihood of assisting students in more effectively developing their ability to understand and manage their emotions. These educators also expressed heightened job satisfaction and a sense of personal achievement, elements that can contribute to enhanced productivity, reduced absenteeism, and increased long-term retention. Addressing teacher well-being as a systems-level problem may result in a synchronized identification of resources for educators to equitably address their social-emotional and mental health needs. As shared by Patricia Jennings, professor of education at the University of Virginia, “If you want to support student mental health and well-being, you have to support teacher well-being and mental health because they are inextricably linked” (Will, 2021, p. 2).

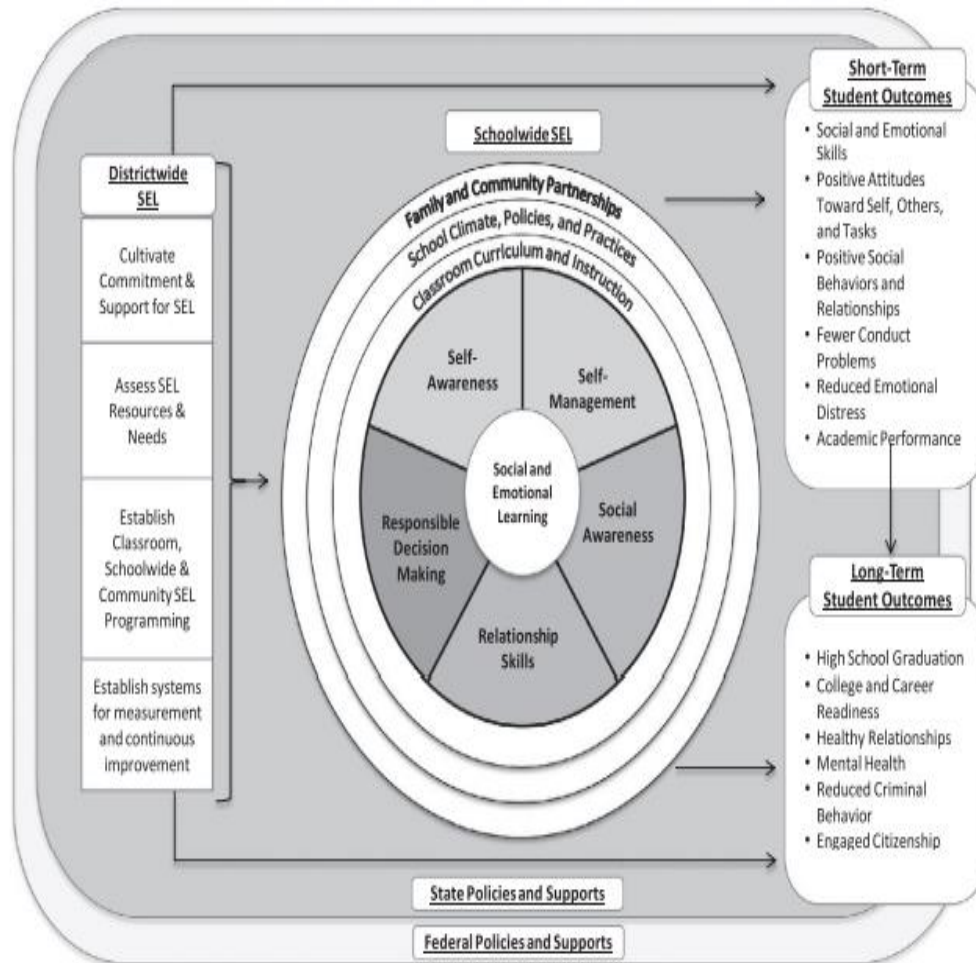
Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Framework

The conceptual frameworks supporting this inquiry are the CASEL Social Emotional Learning (SEL) Framework (CASEL, 2020) and the CASEL District Implementation

Framework and Theory of Action (CASEL, 2020). The CASEL SEL Framework creates a foundation for applying evidence-based social-emotional learning strategies. Social and emotional learning (SEL) is an integral part of education and human development and is defined as the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions (Weissberg et al., 2015).

CASEL maintains that SEL can address various forms of inequity and empower young people and adults to co-create thriving schools and contribute to safe, healthy, and just communities. Social and emotional learning is crucial for the long-term success of students, both within and outside of school, and it deserves deliberate and sustained attention across K-12 education (DePaoli et al., 2017; Dusenbury et al., 2015). Moreover, Durlak et al., (2017) recognized that when social-emotional learning is a priority within in a school, there is an enhancement in student-teacher relationships, a reduction in classroom management challenges, an improvement in instructional effectiveness, and a decrease in teacher exhaustion.

In 2015, Roger Weissberg and fellow researchers identified five core intrapersonal, interpersonal, and cognitive competencies that are interrelated and reflect the cognitive, affective, and behavioral domains of SEL (see Figure 5). The set of five core clusters of social and emotional competencies are: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. These competencies are now known as “The CASEL 5” (2020). Jones and Kahn (2017) contend these competencies are thought to facilitate students’ academic performance, positive social behaviors, and social relationships;



Note. (Weissberg et al., 2015).

Figure 5. Conceptual model illustrating system-wide SEL in educational settings.

reduce behavior problems and psychological distress; and help to prepare young people to succeed in college, work, family, and society. Hawkins et al. (2016) acknowledged the necessity of proactive services to address and prevent behavioral health challenges in our youth. According to Hawkins et al. (2016), it has been identified that behavioral health problems can be prevented. These researchers also emphasized the urgency for the fields of healthcare, education, child psychiatry, child welfare, and juvenile justice to collaboratively address the pressing needs of our youth. This collaborative effort, marked by intentional coordination, focus, and planning across these disciplines, can ultimately reduce behavioral health problems.

The CASEL District Implementation Framework and Theory of Action (ToA) was selected as a result of the work Lily Valley County Schools is completing in partnership with the North Carolina Public Instruction SEL and Equity Project. The ToA developed by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) serves as a blueprint for implementing systemic SEL in schools and districts. CASEL has collaborated with numerous school systems throughout the United States with initiatives aimed at implementing SEL practices, resulting in positive outcomes with these districts (Kendiroza & Yoder, 2016). The implementation of SEL competencies are connected to positive outcomes with students' academic performance, social behaviors, and relationships during their time in a K-12 education and ultimately create better citizens. Empowering our youth with these fundamental competencies not only leads to a decrease in behavioral issues and psychological distress but also enhances their readiness for success in various aspects of life, including improved family relationships, higher education, professional endeavors, and greater involvement in their communities (Elias, 2019; Jones & Kahn, 2017).

CASEL suggests that social-emotional learning practices should be integrated throughout every facet of a school district, encompassing instructional and classroom practices, central office operations, and collaborations with community partners. SEL serves as a unifying element that aligns district priorities, influencing central office staff, school leaders, teachers, students, and families (CASEL, n.d.a.). Based on research by Taylor et al. (2017) and Wiglesworth et al. (2016), students who participated in SEL initiatives saw greater gains in social-emotional learning competencies and academic performance in comparison to students who did not have access to these learning experiences.

The CASEL District Implementation Framework and Theory of Action is organized across four key components: (1) Build Foundational Support and Plan; (2) Strengthen Adult SEL Competencies and Capacity; (3) Promote SEL for Students; and (4) Practice Continuous Improvement. This inquiry centered primarily on component 2: Strengthen Adult SEL Competencies and Capacity, while also taking into consideration the necessity to build a solid foundation for a successful district implementation and the critical connection of adults having the capability to provide effective SEL supports for students. As of 2016, the American Institute for Research (AIR) was in the fifth year of evaluating district-wide implementation of SEL into core activities of eight large urban school districts utilizing the CASEL implementation framework. Based on research, AIR (Kendiroza & Yoder, 2016) reported that districts improved each year in implementing key SEL activities. Three of the measured districts showed consistent gains in school climate; four of six measured districts showed improvement in third graders' social and emotional competence; and, across the eight districts, GPA improved in four and discipline improved in six. However, other student outcomes, such as middle and high schoolers'

social and emotional competence and student attendance, had not shown significant change as of that report (Kendiroza & Yoder, 2016).

CASEL Competencies – “The CASEL 5”

Roger Weissberg and fellow CASEL researchers (2015) previously identified five core intrapersonal, interpersonal, and cognitive competencies that are interrelated (see Figure 6). These competencies reflect the cognitive, affective, and behavioral domains of SEL. The set of social and emotional competencies are: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. These competencies are now known as “The CASEL 5” (2020) Research sustains that The CASEL 5 can be taught and applied at various developmental stages from childhood to adulthood and across diverse cultural contexts. Many school districts, states, and countries have used the CASEL 5 to establish preschool to high school learning standards and competencies that articulate what students should know and be able to do for academic success, school and civic engagement, health and wellness, and fulfilling careers (CASEL, 2020) (see Table 7).

SEL Foundational Support

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is an integral part of education and human development and is defined as the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions (Weissberg et al., 2015). There has been considerable interest in the impact of social and emotional learning (SEL) in education during the last three decades, with conclusive evidence that SEL is an essential component for learning and success in life (Weissberg & Cascarino, 2013). Over twenty years



Note. (CASEL, 2020).

Figure 6. CASEL's Five Dimensions of Social & Emotional Learning.

Table 7

The CASEL 5 Competencies & Descriptors

Competency	Description	Application
Self-Awareness	The abilities to understand one's own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior across contexts. This includes capacities to recognize one's strengths and limitations with a well-grounded sense of confidence and purpose.	• Integrating personal and social identities • Identifying personal, cultural, and linguistic assets • Identifying one's emotions • Demonstrating honesty and integrity • Linking feelings, values, and thoughts • Examining prejudices and biases • Experiencing self-efficacy • Having a growth mindset • Developing interests and a sense of purpose
48	Social Awareness	The abilities to understand the perspectives of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds, cultures, & contexts. This includes the capacities to feel compassion for others, understand broader historical and social norms for behavior in different settings, and recognize family, school, and community resources and supports. • Taking others' perspectives • Recognizing strengths in others • Demonstrating empathy and compassion • Showing concern for the feelings of others • Understanding and expressing gratitude • Identifying diverse social norms, including unjust ones • Recognizing situational demands and opportunities • Understanding the influences of organizations/systems on behavior
Self-Management	The abilities to manage one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations and to achieve goals and aspirations. This includes the capacities to delay gratification, manage stress, and feel motivation & agency to accomplish personal/collective goals.	• Managing one's emotions • Identifying and using stress- management strategies • Exhibiting self-discipline and self-motivation • Setting personal and collective goals • Using planning and organizational skills

Table 7 (continued)

Competency	Description	Application
Relationship Skills	The abilities to establish and maintain healthy and supportive relationships and to effectively navigate settings with diverse individuals and groups. This includes the capacities to communicate clearly, listen actively, cooperate, work collaboratively to problem solve and negotiate conflict constructively, navigate settings with differing social and cultural demands and opportunities, provide leadership, and seek or offer help when needed.	• Communicating effectively • Developing positive relationships • Demonstrating cultural competency • Practicing teamwork and collaborative problem-solving • Resolving conflicts constructively • Resisting negative social pressure • Showing leadership in groups • Seeking or offering support and help when needed • Standing up for the rights of others
Responsible Decision-Making	The abilities to make caring and constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions across diverse situations. This includes the capacities to consider ethical standards and safety concerns, and to evaluate the benefits and consequences of various actions for personal, social, and collective well-being.	• Demonstrating curiosity and open-mindedness • Identifying solutions for personal and social problems • Learning to make a reasoned judgment after analyzing information, data, facts • Anticipating and evaluating the consequences of one's actions • Recognizing how critical thinking skills are useful both inside & outside of school • Reflecting on one's role to promote personal, family, and community well-being • Evaluating personal, interpersonal, community, and institutional impacts

ago, Elias (2001), an avid researcher and contributor to the field of SEL, noted that social-emotional learning offers educators, families, and communities' relevant strategies and practices to better prepare students for "the tests of life, not a life of tests" (p. 4).

Research studies have found that the implementation of SEL practices is essential for successful learning and life skills for our students (Durlak et al., 2015). Additionally, there is evidence supporting the teachability of social-emotional learning skills, the measurability of their effects, and their positive impact on students' academic achievement, involvement in their communities, the likelihood to make healthier choices, in addition to helping them develop more positive life outcomes (Durlak et al., 2011; Hawkins et al., 2016). Developing social-emotional learning (SEL) skills has been demonstrated to forecast significant life achievements, such as graduating high school, pursuing post-secondary education, and attaining stable employment (Jones et al., 2015). Jones and Doolittle (2017) acknowledged that social and emotional learning can be cultivated in schools, enabling students to enhance their capacity to integrate cognition, emotions, and behavioral conduct more cohesively. As a result, these students experience more favorable outcomes, personally and academically. Researchers have also recognized that deliberate and systematic incorporation of social-emotional learning practices, extending from preschool through high school, holds the potential for significant advantages for our students (Berman et al., 2018; CASEL, 2017; Jones & Kahn, 2017; Weissberg et al., 2015).

Because of the considerable time children are in attendance and connected with their schools, teachers and other educators naturally become key collaborators in incorporating SEL practices and establishing a strong foundation for social-emotional and wellness supports (Cardoza, 2021; De Stasio et al., 2017; Jones & Kahn, 2017). Social-emotional learning can establish a seamless connection across child development, classroom management, preventive

measures, and continued investigation of the brain's role in fostering self-awareness, empathy, and social cognitive development (Durlak et al., 2015). Schonert-Reichl et al. (2017) acknowledged that if educators lack awareness of their own social and emotional development and are not adequately trained in effective SEL instructional practices, they are less likely to provide an educational environment that fosters success for students in academics, careers, and life choices.

SEL has become more widely accepted as a component of education. In a 2014 national survey of teachers, 95% of respondents said that SEL is teachable; 97% said that SEL can benefit students from all socioeconomic backgrounds (Gallup, 2014). Jones and Kahn (2017) contend that every form of learning is intricately connected to social and emotional attributes. It will become imperative to incorporate discussions about social-emotional competencies when addressing instructional practices, preventive measures, academic achievement, and the overall culture and climate of schools. In the course of their development, children need to acquire the skills of forming connections with others and adapting their thoughts, feelings, and responses to different contexts. This developmental process is driven by the cognitive growth of the brain, which will be impacted as a result of the interpersonal and cultural frameworks children experience (Elias, 2019).

Meyers et al. (2015) emphasized the importance of engaging in collaborative efforts with families, educators, and students when introducing SEL practices on a school-wide level. Establishing a basis for school-wide social-emotional learning demands a school culture that prioritizes the identification of quality resources and ensuring students have access to pivotal SEL learning initiatives (Mart et al., 2015). When assistance for implementing SEL is expanded at the district level, a stronger sense of community is fostered among key stakeholders. This, in

turn, provides school administrators with an enhanced opportunity to maintain effective SEL and educational practices (CASEL, 2015; Meyers et al., 2015).

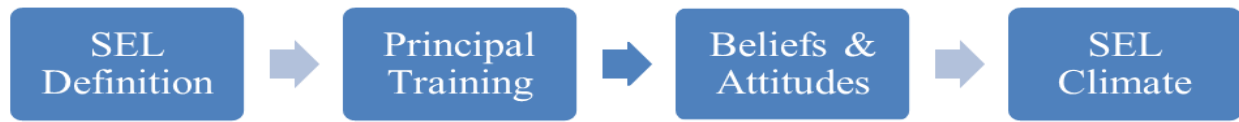
Educator SEL Competencies

Promoting social and emotional development in an educational setting includes not only enlarging the skills of students, but also that of the educators leading them. Overall progress with the implementation of these critical competencies will be impacted by the culture and climate of the school (Jones & Kahn, 2017). To improve academic and positive health outcomes for students, research has demonstrated the crucial role of school leaders in cultivating a culture that provides quality resources, clear expectations, and a continuum of support for each educator (Gimbert et al., 2021). A study conducted by Jones and Cater (2020) recognized the integral role that principals serve in creating a positive school climate and implementing social and emotional learning initiatives. Furthermore, when school leaders lead by example, model and exemplify the social and emotional behaviors that will support teachers in being more productive, while also supporting their efforts in managing their personal stress and potential burnout, this has the potential to enhance their dedication to their work, and foster a stronger sense of connection to their school (Gimbert et al., 2021; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017). In a study conducted by Jones and Cater (2020), all the principals recognized the significance of social-emotional learning. However, they faced limitations in comprehensively understanding the purpose of SEL or how it should be defined and implemented within a school setting. The outcome of this inquiry determined that principals' beliefs, attitudes, and experience with social and emotional learning may affect how SEL is incorporated into their school practices and climate. Bouchamma et al. (2014) observed that principals, guided by their perceived self-efficacy, may allocate a greater

significance to particular aspects of school leadership, encompassing instructional practices, managerial responsibilities, and the oversight of the school environment. Figure 7 illustrates how the beliefs and attitudes of principals were influenced by their insufficient comprehension of SEL. This gap in their understanding will hinder the effective integration of SEL into the core of all school practices and the broader school environment (Jones & Cater, 2020).

According to CASEL, social-emotional learning should extend throughout all facets of a school district, encompassing instructional and classroom practices, central office operations, and collaborations with community partners. SEL serves as a cohesive element that aligns district priorities, influencing central office staff, school leaders, teachers, students, and families (CASEL, 2020). Implementation of SEL is more challenging when there is not an organized plan coupled with a lack of leadership. Given that the majority of educational pressures revolve around academic accountability, school leaders can find it challenging to identify or recognize the way in which emphasizing social and emotional learning can prove advantageous (Jones & Cater, 2020). In order for SEL practices to be implemented effectively and sustained, the support of administration from principals, district staff, and superintendent will be an integral part of this process (Durlak & DuPre, 2008).

Educators have developed a deeper comprehension of the necessity to educate the whole child and while also eliminating obstacles to implement a more well-rounded focus within our classrooms and schools (Jones & Kahn, 2017). Jones and Kahn (2017) also recognize the connection of social and emotional competence, coupled with academic knowledge, as important for the future workforce with the life skills employers increasingly need and value (National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2016). The significance of equipping our educators with a more robust grounding in social-emotional learning strategies and resources has been



Note. (Jones & Cater, 2020).

Figure 7. Interaction of the definition of SEL and principals' training, beliefs, and attitudes with the integration of SEL.

demonstrated in numerous studies. The social-emotional competence of educators can influence classroom and school climate as well as student behavior (Greenberg et al., 2017). Social-emotional learning strategies directed at students may result in teachers having an enhanced sense of effectiveness and competence (Domitrovich et al., 2017).

As professionals charged with fostering student learning and well-being, educators in all positions should demonstrate social emotional competence (Gimbert et al., 2021). Students' long-term success both within and beyond school is contingent on social and emotional learning, underscoring the need for continual focus throughout pre-K to 12th-grade education (DePaoli et al., 2017; Weissberg et al., 2015). Mart et al. (2015) identified that creating a foundation of school-wide SEL requires a learning environment that places a priority on identifying high quality resources, necessary structures, and students having access to critical SEL learning initiatives. Moreover, an examination of classroom-based social-emotional learning interventions revealed that teachers who integrated social-emotional learning practices in conjunction with a positive behavior program, reported elevated levels of efficacy and personal accomplishment after one year. This contrasted with teachers in control classrooms and those implementing solely the positive behavior program (Domitrovich et al., 2015).

The National Practitioner Advisory Group (2019) observed a correlation wherein SEL standards connect student behaviors to research-based outcomes aimed at enhancing attendance, mitigating bullying incidents, decreasing suspensions, and minimizing discipline incidents in schools. Longitudinal research demonstrates the necessity for educators to lead the way with SEL initiatives, however, Gimbert et al. (2021) established there are limited studies on how to develop a solid foundation of social and emotional learning for the adults who work directly with our students in an educational setting.

When school leaders and other educators possess the expertise to make SEL a focal point throughout the school, there is an enhancement in the relationships teachers cultivate with their students, a reduction in classroom management challenges, improved instructional effectiveness, and a decrease in the emotional fatigue experienced by educators (Durlak et al., 2017). It has also been noted that educators' attitudes toward social-emotional learning may be influenced by their school culture in conjunction with their personal beliefs and aptitudes about SEL practices (Collie, 2017). Santoro (2018) identified the significance of teachers who demonstrated a higher self-awareness competency. These educators exhibited greater levels of enjoyment, optimism with the teaching profession, and experienced lower levels of burnout.

In contrast, when educators do not have access to adequate social-emotional resources and professional development to effectively manage emotional and behavioral challenges in their classrooms, children exhibit reduced levels of focus and academic outcomes. Consequently, these educators also encounter heightened emotional fatigue and discontentment (Schonfeld et al., 2017; Schussler et al., 2016). Ryan et al. (2017) contend that self-management skills are imperative in encouraging positive experiences and preventing burnout in educators. Educators who effectively regulate their emotions demonstrate lower emotional exhaustion, heightened job satisfaction, and an overall positive sense of well-being. Carlock (2011) identified the significance for educators to demonstrate the capacity to maintain effective classroom management practices coupled with appropriate self-management skills, may have a higher likelihood of establishing a more positive teaching environment and effective relationships with students and families. Additionally, Jones et al. (2013) recognized that educators who are effective with self-management tend to be more confident with their instructional practices and have a higher likelihood of creating a trusting and welcoming learning environment for students.

Social awareness involves taking the perspectives of others, empathizing and feeling compassion for others, understanding social norms, and recognizing resources and supports from family, school, and the community (CASEL, 2019). For educators, this involves being cognizant and respectful of each student's distinct personal and cultural experiences, demonstrating empathy, and modeling situational awareness when navigating diverse student interactions (Collie, 2017). Being socially aware is intricately connected to effective teaching, as it involves the capacity to consider and understand the perspectives of students, colleagues, and parents in the educational context. This awareness fosters a more empathetic and responsive approach, enhancing the overall teaching experience (Perry et al., 2015). Research confirms the connection and importance of the relationship building competency in the school environment. Schonert-Reichl (2017) conveyed the importance of educators creating a classroom environment based on compassion, consistent instructional routines, equitable practices for all students, and the connection to a more successful integration of SEL practices. Intentional and positive relationships serve as the foundation to robust partnerships among school staff, students, families, and community stakeholders. Durlak et al. (2017) distinguishes the power of effective relationships:

Relationship skills offer educators the tools they need to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships and to act in accordance with social norms. Competence in this domain involves communicating clearly, listening actively, collaborating, negotiating conflict constructively, and seeking help when needed (p. 7).

CASEL (2017) defines the dimension of responsible decision-making as the ability to make choices about personal or social interactions based on considerations of ethics, safety, social norms, and the evaluation of consequences. The ability to make effective decisions is

paramount to the role school leaders and all educators hold in our schools due to the multitude of decisions they make that impact the personal and academic outcomes of our students and their colleagues. An educator's capacity to make decisions in a thoughtful manner establishes a foundation for students to feel valued. Deliberate and carefully considered reflection helps educators ensure that each decision is considerate, informed, contributes to student learning, and aligns with the best interests of all stakeholders (Schoenfeld, 2011).

To assist educators in adequately comprehending social-emotional learning, it will be beneficial that they receive necessary professional development and sustained assistance before being tasked with implementing SEL in a classroom setting (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). When educators grasp their own proficiency and skills with social-emotional learning competencies, they are more likely to believe that all students have the capability to flourish and grow academically (Jones & Kahn, 2017). These educators tend to foster a learning environment with high expectations for all students and where their students experience a heightened sense of confidence that empowers them in their learning journey (Gimbert et al., 2021). Research extensively confirms that educators with advanced social-emotional learning competencies tend to cultivate more favorable relationships with students, exhibit more effective classroom management, and implement SEL initiatives targeted towards students with a greater consistency (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). Furthermore, Jones (2016) encourages school leaders to model and practice SEL competencies in order to increase the competence and capacity of their teams with embedding social-emotional learning strategies into daily school routines. Hardy (2018) suggests that school leaders establish social norms and subsequently establish a set of collaborative processes that foster intentional SEL interactions among school staff. “While school leaders cannot single-handedly champion SEL initiatives or serve as the sole catalyst for investing in

social-emotional development for every member of the school community, they do occupy a crucial position on school campuses” (Gimbert et al., 2021, p. 18). When educational leaders foster a culture built on trust and support for teaching and learning, educators have a greater confidence to embrace risk-taking, welcome constructive feedback, and exhibit a greater propensity to respond positively to recommendations directed at enhancing their instructional methods. This conducive environment cultivates a collaborative culture that promotes continuous improvement and innovation in educational practices, ultimately contributing to the overall advancement of the teaching and learning experiences for students and educators (Mahfouz et al., 2019; Oberle et al., 2016).

Educator Well-Being

Employee well-being is not a new concept to professional organizations. In the mid 1900s, a focus on employee well-being began to emerge. The World Health Organization (WHO) was one of the first entities to recognize the significance of well-being and connected it to employee productivity. In the definition of health, the WHO described it as a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being (Grad, 2002). Pendergast and Garvis (2014) recognized there is not a unilateral agreement on the definition of ‘well-being.’ In the last several years, a narrower focus on educator well-being has been studied by multiple researchers and in the context of multiple countries due to the significance of this topic. Cumming (2017) recognized the impact of mental health, job satisfaction, stress, and emotional exhaustion in early childhood educators. A correlation has been recognized between teacher well-being, school climate, and student outcomes. While school climate can impact teacher stress, prolonged teacher stress may also have repercussions on the overall dynamics of a school climate. Gray et al. (2017) identified

that high levels of staff absenteeism, early retirement, and turnover will directly diminish the environment and overall climate of schools.

Prioritizing the well-being of teachers should be a central concern for school districts and has been linked to both teaching effectiveness and student outcomes (Hascher & Waber, 2021). Due to the ample time teachers have access to their students, they are in the position to influence a more effective implementation of SEL practices while creating a solid foundation for social-emotional and wellness supports within their classrooms (Cardoza, 2021; De Stasio et al., 2017; Jones & Kahn, 2017). The advantages of social and emotional learning are extensively researched, and evidence indicates that an educational approach fostering social and emotional development produces positive outcomes for students, adults, and school communities (Atwell & Bridgeland, 2019).

Teachers and schools have worked to implement social-emotional and mental health supports in place for both students and staff. The outcome of these implementation efforts are often dependent on the level of expertise held by a school leadership team and possibly through unevenly distributed district initiatives. According to the National Institute of Mental Health (Polanczyk et al., 2015), numerous resources exist to facilitate the success of students; however, what remains unresolved are the frameworks to support teachers directly engaged with students having social-emotional and mental health needs.

Before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the demands on teachers escalated notably as a result of state and district initiatives focused on enhancing student performance and achievement (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Greenberg et al., 2016; Lever et al., 2017). The demands and responsibilities placed on teachers frequently necessitates these educators to extend their work hours and professional commitments into lengthier workdays and

weekends. Consequently, the teaching profession has grown progressively more demanding. Darling-Hammond (2001) reported over twenty years ago that a top reason for teacher attrition and dissatisfaction with the profession included stress and poor emotion management. According to a survey conducted by Gallup (2014), 46% of teachers report high daily stress during the school year. This is the highest rate of daily stress among all occupational groups, tied with nurses, also at 46%, and higher than physicians, at 45%. Teacher workloads and responsibilities have been burdened by the unforeseen social-emotional and mental health challenges stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic (Carroll et al., 2021). These added pressures could affect the job performance of our educators and potentially affect their decision to stay in their profession. Ingersoll et al. (2018) noted that an estimated 44% of teachers in public and private schools are estimated to leave teaching within five years of entry.

A 2021 survey from the RAND Corporation highlighted the impact to the teaching profession as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. This inquiry found that 78% of teachers said they experience frequent job-related stress and 20% of those surveyed are not coping well with that stress. Additionally, half of the teachers reported feeling burned out and 25% said they experience symptoms of depression. Elements influencing stress and contributing to teacher turnover encompass unequal access to resources, difficulties in engaging students, a heightened requirement for supporting student wellness, and the typical work-related stressors experienced by teachers in their roles. Since March 2020, teachers have experienced working conditions that have been shaped by the pandemic, intensifying the challenges within the teaching profession. (Cardoza, 2021; Kraft et al., 2020). A key finding from the 2021 Rand study revealed that “Nearly one in four teachers said that they were likely to leave their jobs by the end of the 2020–2021 school year, compared with the one in six teachers who were likely to leave, on average,

prior to the pandemic. Black or African American teachers were particularly likely to plan to leave” (Steiner & Woo, 2021, p. 5).

Interventions to Support Educator Well-Being

Addressing the well-being of educators can be an intricate and complex undertaking. Research corroborates the belief that strategies implemented to support teachers may not uniformly benefit them, both in terms of preventing and alleviating the impacts of burnout (Howson, 2016). Several factors can influence teacher well-being and resilience against burnout. Juggling the intricate demands of a classroom, addressing the social-emotional needs of students, navigating challenges in student and family relationships, managing dynamics of professional relationships, and navigating the school climate all play roles in either fostering or hindering a sense of healthy well-being and mental health among educators (Iancu et al., 2018).

According to the U.S. Department of Labor’s (2022) public education campaign to promote mental health-friendly workplaces, one in five Americans currently in the workforce suffers from a mental health disorder. The need for workplaces that are mental health-friendly will increase as America recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic. Seven out of ten employees (71%) say their company is more attentive to their mental health now than in the past, according to the findings of the American Psychological Association’s (APA) 2022 Work and Well-Being Survey. Employees definitely value this new focus. Eighty-one percent (81%) of survey respondents noted that when they search for future employment possibilities, they will look for companies that encourage and support the mental health needs of their employees (see Figure 8). Based on this survey, conducted by the Harris Poll, the supports receiving the highest ratings were flexible work hours (41%), a workplace culture that respects time off (34%), the ability to work remotely (33%), and a four-day work week (31%). 93% of those completing the survey

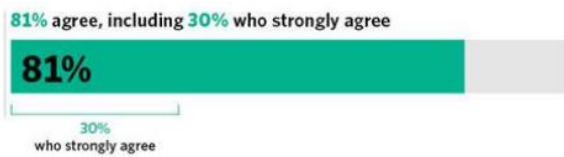
WORKERS VALUE EMPLOYER SUPPORT FOR MENTAL HEALTH



% OF WORKERS WHO BELIEVE THEIR EMPLOYER IS MORE CONCERNED ABOUT EMPLOYEES' MENTAL HEALTH THAN THEY WERE IN THE PAST:



% OF WORKERS WHO AGREE THAT HOW EMPLOYERS SUPPORT MENTAL HEALTH WILL BE AN IMPORTANT CONSIDERATION FOR THEM WHEN THEY LOOK FOR FUTURE WORK:



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% OF WORKERS WHO WANT THE FOLLOWING MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS FROM THEIR EMPLOYER:



Figure 8. APA's 2022 Work and Well-Being Survey.

reported that health insurance with coverage for mental health disorders is an effective mental health support. The survey data recognized only 11% of organizations have trained mental health staff onsite. However, employees with this resource in place, 94% reported it was an effective resource. Jones et al. (2019) identified dissatisfaction with pay as a factor influencing well-being. Additional survey findings from the APA 2022 study identified that 71% reported a negative impact of work on their psychological well-being due to their concerns that their compensation has not kept up with inflation. Thirty-seven percent (37%) of these respondents indicate they will look for a new job.

Research has also recognized the connectedness of workplace well-being to the positive relationships with team members and a sense of belonging (Jones et al., 2019). Jones et al. (2019) identified those educators who deeply understood their colleagues on a personal and professional level as beneficial to their workplace well-being. Blöchliger and Bauer (2018) established the presence of supportive and productive workplace relationships as a buffer to against stress and burnout. Effective teamwork, defined by shared professional philosophies, clearly defined roles, and collaborative efforts, has been recognized as a key factor in promoting robust workplace well-being (Nislin et al., 2016). Educators with cohesive professional relationships and a healthy sense of well-being have been found to improve the well-being of their colleagues (Costa et al., 2014). The influence of the heightened sense of well-being can “result in a cycle of positive energy within the classroom” (Jones et al., 2019, p. 10).

Hobson and Maxwell (2017) recognized the influence of the social connections that teachers have with their students, families of students, and their co-workers as the most significant factor enhancing and impeding their well-being. These researchers expounded on the quality of these relationships, productive or toxic, and the extent to which these dynamics can

factor into the overall well-being of educators. The burden on well-being is magnified when educators work in an environment where they lack a sense of belonging and perceive they are not valued or respected (Scott, 2019). Other research has indicated the impact of therapeutic interventions, such as mindfulness, focused on increasing a teacher's ability to manage stress and the complex dynamics of a classroom have been effective at reducing emotional exhaustion (Iancu et al., 2018).

The impact of school administrators on the level of support they provide their teaching staff and their overall influence on school climate has been connected to educator well-being and attrition (Boyd et al., 2011). "Teachers who are satisfied with the decisions and degree of support provided by school administrators show more positive attitudes regarding their occupation," (Grayson & Alvarez, 2008, p. 1,359). Further research has identified that by implementing effective leadership strategies, school administrators can enhance overall teacher well-being. This includes alleviating workload demands, aiding in the management of challenging relationships with families, offering tailored supervisory support to teachers, and increasing opportunities for autonomy (De Stasio et al., 2017).

SEL School and District Implementation

The CASEL Theory of Action serves as a blueprint for implementing systemic SEL in schools and districts. The components of this framework include: (1) Build Foundational Support and Plan; (2) Strengthen Adult SEL Competencies and Capacity; (3) Promote SEL for Students; and (4) Practice Continuous Improvement (see Table 8). Through a Collaborating Districts Initiative (CDI), CASEL has partnered with multiple school districts across the United States with SEL implementation efforts which have resulted in a positive impact across several different indicators (Kendiroza & Yoder, 2016). Outcome data from this inquiry reports

Table 8

CASEL SEL District Implementation, Theory of Action (CASEL, 2020)

Focus Area	Description
Build Foundational Support and Plan	Districts establish a foundation for SEL that is carried throughout the system. Key activities include developing and communicating an SEL vision, creating a multi-year plan for implementation, fostering collaboration across central office departments to ensure alignment, communicating about the district's commitment to SEL, and budgeting for resources and staffing to support full implementation.
Strengthen Adult SEL Competencies and Capacity	Supporting adults to practice, model, and implement SEL is a critical foundational step. Districts provide the resources and framework to do this by ensuring central office staff are well-versed in SEL research and best practices, and by providing professional learning and a work environment that supports adult SEL, cultural competence, and collective efficacy.
Promote SEL for Students	District-level coordination and support of SEL is critical to ensuring rich educational experiences for all students. By partnering with families and communities to develop standards and benchmarks for SEL learning, identifying and supporting evidence-based programs for teaching SEL, and integrating SEL into all district priorities (e.g. academics, discipline, student supports such as MTSS), the district ensures all students benefit from SEL.
Practice Continuous Improvement	Implementing SEL is an ongoing process that requires committed support from top leadership. Central to this effort is a commitment to continuous improvement of SEL implementation by collecting, analyzing, and acting upon SEL implementation and outcome data.

improved academic performance, behavioral outcomes, and school environments as a result of these CDI partners utilizing the CASEL Theory of Action framework components and strategies across several years (CASEL, 2020).

In 2015, researchers at Columbia University concluded that for every dollar a school spends on social-emotional learning programs, it sees an eleven-dollar return on its investment (Belfield et al., 2015). When schools foster students' academic, social, and emotional development, they equip students with fundamental competencies, increased resilience, and values necessary for postsecondary education, fulfilling careers, and serving as productive members of society (Jones & Cater, 2020). A study completed by Jones et al. (2015) found social and emotional competencies in early childhood were strongly associated with young adult outcomes in education, employment, need for public assistance, mental health, substance abuse, and criminal activity. While this data is encouraging, without broader district support, classroom SEL practices in isolation, can result in less productive outcomes (Ruby & Doolittle, 2010). Jones and Cater (2020) acknowledged the essential role that principals play in fostering a positive school climate, prioritizing their leadership efforts, and executing social and emotional learning initiatives. Encouragingly, when principals and teachers attempting to implement SEL are well supported by their district leadership, they have better outcomes (DePaoli et al., 2017).

Schools are natural communities for promoting SEL because children spend a significant portion of their time in school. Prior research has effectively demonstrated a correlation between well-executed SEL programs in schools and favorable social, emotional, behavioral, and academic results (Oberle et al., 2016). School-wide SEL strategies are needed in conjunction with classroom-based practices (Meyers et al., 2015; Weissberg et al., 2015). A comprehensive or "whole-school approach" underscores a school community where social-emotional learning is

embedded into all interactions and practices involving staff, teachers, children, and families (Meyers et al., 2015). Mart et al. (2015) observed that effectively implementing school-wide social-emotional learning necessitates essential resources and a supportive educational system that prioritizes the social-emotional needs of students. Systemic support provided at the district, state, or national levels, further equips school administrators to lead, implement and sustains SEL initiatives (CASEL, 2015; Meyers et al., 2015).

Wigelsworth et al. (2017) recognized that students exposed to high-quality social-emotional learning in the classroom exhibit enhanced academic performance, improved attitudes and behaviors, increased motivation to learn, deeper connections to school, and improved relationships with peers. Additionally, there were fewer instances of delinquent acts, discipline referrals and reduced emotional distress, including fewer reports of student depression, anxiety, stress, and social withdrawal. When students encounter diverse populations in a secure environment, meaningful and trustworthy relationships can form with individuals outside their family circle. Consequently, these students may have an increased likelihood to become responsible, compassionate, and knowledgeable citizens through their interactions within their classrooms and schools (Jones & Cater, 2020). It is also imperative that SEL is not treated as a separate learning track for marginalized students but is embedded with academic content (Shriver & Weissberg, 2020) while also embracing the external dynamics impacting our youth as they enter our schools:

Among the many things students can put in their lockers when they come to school, their emotions—and everything linked to them—are not among them. So, their fears, their worries, their lousy experiences on the way to school, their concerns about what awaits them after school, their history of failure in math, the biases they feel in the lunchroom,

the extra scrutiny they experienced on the way into school from going through metal detectors and how they are treated by certain security guards/school resource officers, the potential for deportation in members of the family that they won't know for certain did not happen until they got home—all of these do not go in the locker. These emotion-linked events affect students all the time, including in their classes. (Elias, 2019, p. 236)

The CASEL theory of action framework recognizes the necessity of a multi-tiered process which includes developing a clear SEL vision and long-term plan; conducting a needs and resources assessment so that financial and human resources can be aligned to support social-emotional learning; providing professional learning opportunities to all staff at school and district levels, especially those in central offices; developing SEL learning standards; adopting and implementing evidence-based SEL programs; intentionally integrating or aligning SEL into or with other district activities, such as academic instruction, student support, and discipline; and monitoring SEL implementation process and outcomes (Kendziora & Yoder, 2016). It is important to recognize that incorporating SEL practices into schools, or especially at the district level, will involve a process that could take three to five years and will be dependent on the history of initiatives, existing school resources, the dynamics of the school culture, and the access to ongoing implementation supports (Elias, 2019).

Regardless of where a school or district is with their SEL implementation efforts, it is critical for schools to evaluate their current practices, inventory SEL related resources, and better understand the culture and openness of making changes to current practices and structures (Elias, 2019). As noted in “Ready to Lead, A National Principal Survey on How Social and Emotional Learning Can Prepare Children and Transform Schools,” schools that are systematically implementing SEL, consistently have a high level of support from district leaders, teachers are

heavily involved, and more stakeholders are included in the process (DePaoli et al., 2017). The more systemic SEL is, the greater the outcomes (see Figure 9). Survey data about district involvement with SEL implementation shows that school-level leaders are more likely to have a plan for SEL implementation when district-level leadership places a high level of emphasis on the importance of incorporating SEL within instructional practices (DePaoli et al., 2017):

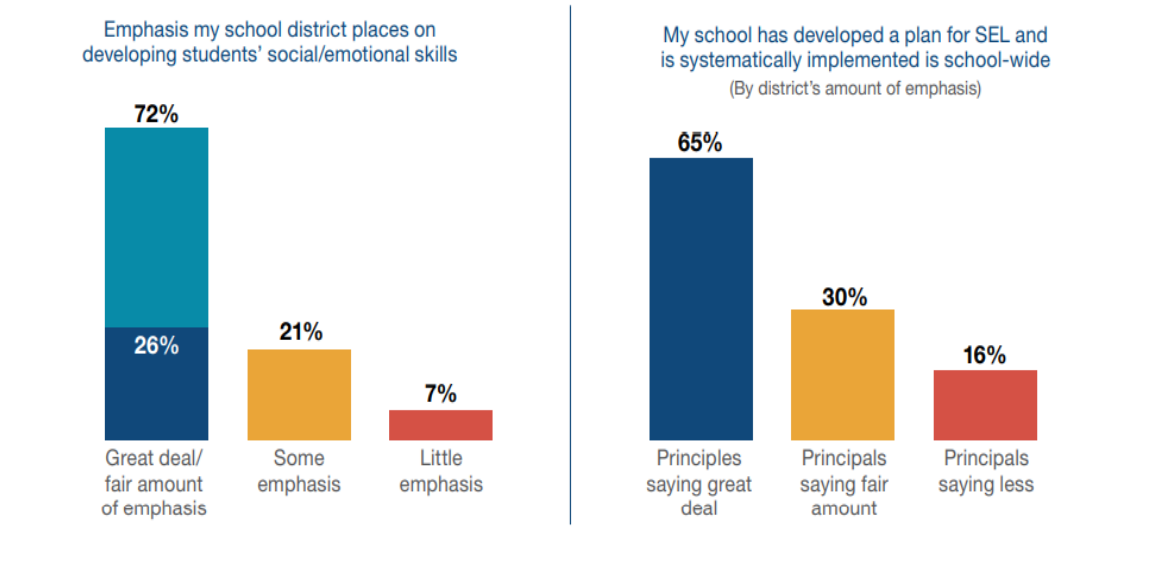
Seventy-eight percent (78%) of principals who said their district places a great deal of emphasis on SEL said that their teachers are well prepared to teach social and emotional skills, compared to just 21% of principals...Superintendents bolstered these findings, saying that when district leaders are invested in SEL, buy-in is greater and systemic implementation is more extensive (pp. 4-5).

Students having access to quality SEL strategies and resources can potentially have a longer-term impact on their future. Mahoney et al. (2018) believe that SEL initiatives are likely to have both immediate and longer-term benefits for young people, both in school and later life (see Figure 10). The researchers found that a teacher's rating of a kindergartner's social competence was associated with a student's increased likelihood of graduating from college and having a full-time job by the age of 25, and a decreased likelihood of being arrested. Research underscores the importance of cultivating social and emotional competencies in young individuals and their correlation with an increased likelihood of success in school, work, and life (Kendziora & Yoder, 2016).

Summary

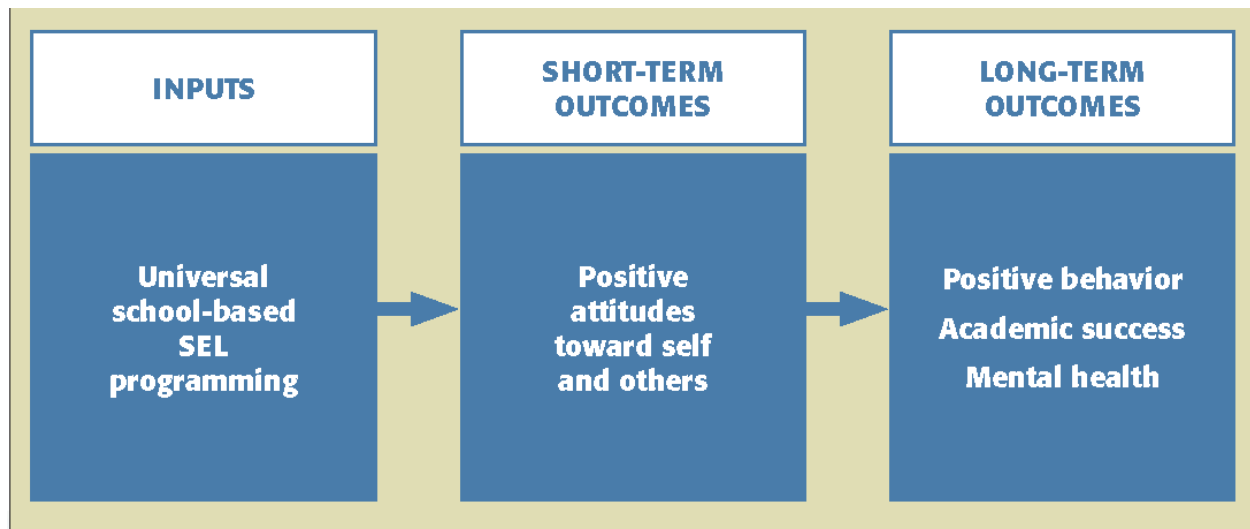
A review of the literature identified necessary and critical components when planning the implementation of a district SEL framework, the significance of providing educators with social-emotional learning and mental health supports and identifying teacher-led measures for equitable

■ District leadership plays an important role in driving SEL.



Note. (DePaoli et al., 2017)

Figure 9. Ready to Lead, a national principal survey on how social and emotional learning can prepare children and transform schools.



Note. (Mahoney et al., 2018).

Figure 10. SEL programming will have immediate and longer-term benefits for young people.

access to SEL strategies and resources for our students. Research highlights the need for SEL practices to not operate in isolation, but to be embedded across all practices and content areas within our schools. The benefits of social and emotional learning (SEL) are well-researched, with evidence demonstrating that an education that promotes social and emotional development yields positive results for students, adults, and school communities. Chapter 3 will provide the methodology used to lead this mixed-methods research inquiry. This chapter will evaluate the questions guiding this inquiry, the design of this inquiry, and the overall rationale for this inquiry.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS OF INQUIRY

This chapter focuses on the methodology used to identify the impact on teacher well-being when resources and strategies are explicitly provided to support the mental, social, and emotional health needs of educators in Lily Valley County Schools. This inquiry was conducted within three pilot school locations and occurred across a one-year period. In partnership with the collaborative inquiry partners, this investigation included an initial evaluation of available data, potential teacher well-being resources and preparation and implementation of a plan to collect and evaluate teacher feedback across this inquiry, and the development of a comprehensive district plan to provide equitable access of resources for all educators to address their unique social-emotional and mental health needs. In the following sections, the scholarly practitioner discusses (a) the inquiry design and rationale, (b) the context of the inquiry, (c) inquiry partners involved with this inquiry, (d) ethical considerations for leading this inquiry and the involvement of participants, (e) inquiry procedures utilized to collect data, (f) delimitations, limitations, and assumptions of this inquiry, (g) role of the scholarly practitioner, (h) and a summary of the inquiry methodology.

Inquiry Guiding Questions

The questions guiding this inquiry are as follows:

1. What impact does a comprehensive wellness initiative have on teacher well-being?
2. Which components of a comprehensive wellness initiative do teachers perceive as having a positive influence on their well-being?

Willis et al. (2019) acknowledged the stress and challenges teachers faced while managing the academic and well-being requirements of their students. Teacher well-being is connected to student well-being (Hoffman & Miller, 2020; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Jones

& Kahn, 2017; Lucas et al., 2020). The first research question determined the impact of the district wellness initiative and the connection to supporting teacher well-being. Historically, within this school district there has not been a data source to capture teachers' perception of their social and emotional health. Quantitative data from Panorama (Panorama Education, n.d.), a third-party survey instrument focused on the topic of well-being, was utilized as a frame of reference to establish baseline data. Teachers from across the district were offered the opportunity to participate anonymously in the teacher well-being survey. As an extension to the survey, teachers at the three school inquiry sites had the opportunity to participate in focus groups and individual interviews which examined their perceptions of teacher well-being and to identify potential strategies and resources to collectively support individuals.

The focus groups and interviews served as a platform to answering both research questions and provided teachers with a means to shape the district's wellness initiative. Kaufman and Diliberti (2021) recognizes that "teachers' feelings of connectedness with colleagues, support, and involvement in decision-making influence their satisfaction with teaching" (p. 7). The second research question was utilized to better understand which components of the district wellness initiative were making a difference in teacher well-being and to identify if there are other resources or strategies that should be evaluated for consideration. Research has recognized that when teachers are given the ability to provide input on school and district initiatives, they "feel more energized and supported" (Kaufman & Diliberti, 2021, p. 7). Chirico (2017) identified that assisting educators in navigating the intricacies of guiding and teaching students can be multifaceted and influenced by various factors, such as school leadership and systemic practices.

The qualitative data from these focus groups was critical in shaping a district plan to enhance educator mental health and well-being that will be most meaningful to the educators in this district. The data collected from this inquiry was utilized to identify the resources, strategies, and supports that are necessary in order to effectively impact, improve, and sustain teacher well-being on a continuing basis.

Inquiry Design and Rationale

The purpose of this research inquiry was to examine the impact on the social-emotional health and well-being of teachers when these educators are provided with explicit resources and strategies to support their unique social, emotional, and mental health needs. Carroll et al. (2021) acknowledged the prospect of positive results and a correlation to enhancing both teacher and student well-being when teachers are equipped with stress management strategies.

Developing a research plan involves determining the appropriate philosophical foundation, a research design aligned to this philosophical worldview, and the selection of procedures or methods of research which will provide the most productive outcomes for the inquiry (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). McMillan (2012) identified that educational problems are best investigated using the research methods most appropriate for that particular research situation. In order to investigate this inquiry topic, a mixed-methods research approach was utilized within an improvement science framework. Mixed-methods research is an approach to inquiry which integrates collecting both qualitative and quantitative data. It involves the use of philosophical assumptions, the use of qualitative and quantitative approaches, and the mixing or integrating of both approaches in a study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Within a mixed-methods approach, I utilized an explanatory sequential design which involved collecting quantitative data during the second and third phases of this inquiry, and then using a qualitative procedure, such as

focus groups and individual interviews, to further explain the results of the quantitative data also during the second and third phases of the inquiry (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Mertler (2022) recognizes the value of utilizing both qualitative and quantitative research methods, with both methods having strengths and areas of opportunity.

Qualitative research involves the use of data collection and analysis that is in narrative format, such as interviews, observations, and review of existing documents, to better understand a particular topic of interest, social or human problem (Mertler, 2022). The use of quantitative research supports the examination of the relationship among variables through the collection of close-ended data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The philosophical assumption most in alignment with mixed-methods research is based on a pragmatic worldview. Pragmatism as a worldview is focused on what works and identifying solutions to problems (Patton, 1990).

Implementation of this inquiry occurred across three phases and in partnership with collaborative inquiry partners (see Figure 11). Phase I took place in the spring/summer of 2022; Phase II occurred in the fall of 2022; and Phase III in the fall of 2023. Within a mixed-methods approach, this inquiry utilized improvement science in order to thoroughly evaluate the inquiry questions. Data in improvement science are "collected frequently, examined frequently, and acted upon swiftly to expedite learning about what works," in contrast to traditional research (Hinnant-Crawford, 2019, p. 51). Improvement science is a method of problem-solving based on ongoing research, education, and rapid cycle testing of change ideas; this process yields effective and time-sensitive input for system changes (Perry et al., 2020). Improvement science is specifically targeted to expedite learning through active and involved experiences by the scholarly practitioner. It takes a more problem-centered approach to improving a problem or improving a problem or situation, through performing rapid tests of change that will guide a

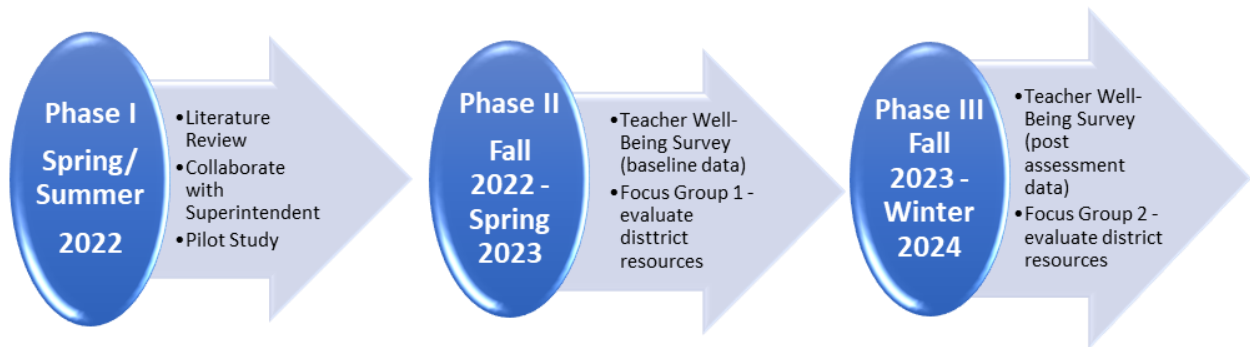


Figure 11. Teacher well-being inquiry timeline.

scholarly practitioner to “learn fast and implement change well” (Perry & Zambo, 2019, p. 158). Stakeholders impacted by the identified problem, are invited to work together to understand how to improve performance and results using improvement science (Bennett et al., 2018). Incorporating this research around an explanatory sequential design within an improvement science framework guided me in maintaining a focus on the overarching goals of the inquiry, identified if the selected teacher well-being interventions resulted in changes, and determined if the changes occurring were significant, impactful, and potentially resulting in long-term productive outcomes for teachers.

Context of Inquiry

Three schools within the Lily Valley County School district were identified as research pilot locations as part of this inquiry. The selected schools were Magnolia Elementary, Sunflower Middle School, and Rosedale High School (all pseudonyms). Magnolia Elementary, Sunflower Middle, and Rosedale High School are in a direct feeder pattern. As a result of the school feeder patterns, these schools serve approximately the same students and families. The selected schools are also representative of a typical school profile in this school district and were identified in collaboration with the district superintendent. Teachers at each of the three school inquiry sites were provided with the opportunity to participate in the district educator well-being survey and focus groups across two phases of this inquiry. The qualitative data from the focus groups were beneficial in providing the first-hand perspective of teachers, while further examining the identified themes and patterns from the educator well-being survey data. The qualitative data from the focus groups were critical in shaping a district plan to enhance educator mental health and well-being that would be most meaningful to the educators in this district.

The strategic plan for Lily Valley County Schools outlines a mission statement focused on creating a system-wide learning environment that provides each student opportunities for successful outcomes through a community partnership with key stakeholders. The strategic plan outlines four success indicators on which to build productive, welcoming, and rigorous educational experiences for all stakeholders: (1) Safe and Inviting Schools; (2) High Quality and Caring Professionals; (3) School-Home-Community Connections; and (4) Effective and Efficient Operations (see Figure 12). Included with each indicator are goals and strategies to address how this district will fulfill its mission, vision, and belief statements when it comes to educating students and supporting teachers. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, this district experienced academic increases across the 2015-2016, 2016-2017, and 2018-2019 school years. The school growth status and overall school performance grades indicate an increase in the number of schools meeting or exceeding growth and a decrease in the number of schools with performance grades of “D” or “F.” This district moved from a low-performing district in 2015-2016, to a district that was 7 percentage points from being in the top 20 public schools in North Carolina as of the 2018-2019 school year. This district also has cumulative data from the NC Teacher Working Conditions Survey (NCTWCS) to show across several years that there are solid instructional practices, support, and leadership based on the high percentage of favorable survey responses across all survey categories. Overall, this Eastern NC School District was above or in line with the state average across a majority of these indicators for the 2018, 2020, and 2022 NCTWCS (NCTWCS, n.d.).

While this district has academic and school climate measures to show positive momentum, it did not have a resource, or data source, to measure the collective social-emotional and mental health of their teachers. In a small number of schools there were some initiatives to

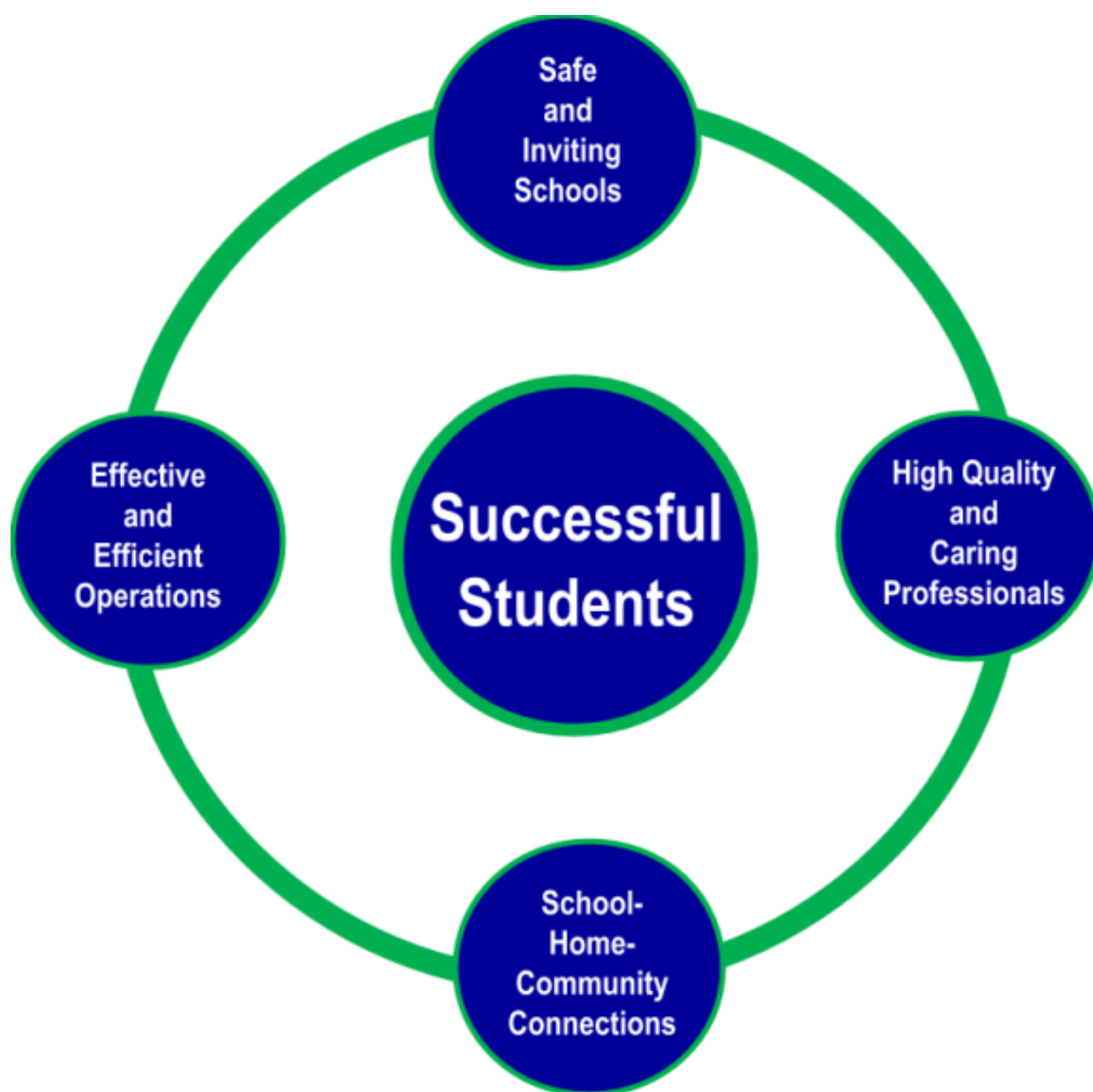


Figure 12. Strategic plan indicators, Lily Valley County School District.

support the social-emotional and mental health needs of staff and students. However, there was also the opportunity to develop a district framework of mental health interventions, well-being, social, and emotional supports for teachers at all schools. Addressing teacher well-being as systems-level problem may result in a synchronized identification of resources for educators to equitably address their social-emotional and mental health needs. Furthermore, the implementation of systemic wellness practices may lead to more equitable relationships and increased educational opportunities for the students across this school district.

Inquiry Partners

This dissertation in practice centered on the implementation of a district SEL and mental health framework within Lily Valley County Schools and an examination of its impact on educator well-being. The plan for implementation of this SEL and mental health framework originated during summer of 2020. Under the leadership of the district MTSS coordinator, a district SEL-mental health team was created specifically to identify resources and develop supports for the social-emotional and mental health needs of students and staff. The team originally was comprised of school counselors and administrators from the elementary, middle, and high school levels, a school psychologist, district mental health coordinator, behavioral specialist, social worker, executive director with instructional services, the executive director for exceptional children, and an assistant superintendent with administrative services. The team has now been modified to include the executive director of student services, and executive director of safety and administration (see Table 9).

The early work of this team involved participating in a Request for Proposal (RFP) process and evaluating proposals from therapeutic agencies interested in providing school-based mental health services for students in all schools' district-wide. This process resulted in two

Table 9

Collaborative Inquiry Partners

Position	Role
District MTSS Coordinator	Leads District Social-Emotional Learning-Mental Health Team; oversees district wellness initiative
Executive Director, Student Services	Implementation of this inquiry; Scholarly Practitioner
District Staff: Executive Director, EC; Executive Director of Safety Administration	Participate in implementation of district SEL-MH framework & wellness initiative
Administrators (high, middle, elementary)	Participate in implementation of district SEL-MH framework & wellness initiative
Counselors (high, middle, elementary)	Participate in implementation of district SEL-MH framework & wellness initiative
Mental Health Coordinator, Behavioral Specialist, Social Worker, Psychologist	Participate in implementation of district SEL-MH framework & wellness initiative

agencies being selected to provide these services. Additionally, the team made a recommendation to revise how the student services function was managed in the district. For approximately eight years, the student services functions were fragmented into counselors, nurses, psychologists, and social workers with each group being led by varying district leaders. The district SEL-mental health team strongly recommended that there be a cohesive student services department led by a student services director. The recommendation was received and accepted by the senior leadership team, the changes were made to the district organizational structure, and an executive director of student services was hired. The collaborative inquiry partners for this inquiry will be comprised of members from the district SEL-mental health team, more specifically the district MTSS coordinator, the executive director, student services, the executive director of exceptional children, the superintendent, senior leadership, and teachers at each of the three school inquiry sites.

Engagement with the district SEL-mental health team took place during bi-monthly meetings. All information shared and created during these meetings was captured with a formal meeting agenda and notes reflecting the content of each meeting. Collaborative inquiry partners were instrumental in the planning and implementation of initiatives, data collection and analysis for this inquiry. Collaboration with the superintendent and senior leadership team took place as warranted to further the progress of this inquiry.

Ethical Considerations

During the scope of this inquiry, the scholarly practitioner adhered to all expectations for conducting research as outlined by the Department of Educational Leadership at East Carolina University. Prior to engaging with inquiry participants, I completed all required modules through the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI). CITI provides individuals who are

conducting research access to a professional learning platform to ensure they are prepared, knowledgeable, and certified to address issues related to the ethical treatment of human participants across all components of an educational research inquiry (CITI, n.d.).

Prior to implementing the inquiry, I submitted a fully developed proposal to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at East Carolina University (see Appendix A). The purpose of the IRB is to protect the rights and welfare of individuals who are participating in the research. Upon receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board, I activated the inquiry and worked within the proposal guidelines across all phases of data collection. I took necessary steps to ensure that participants at each of the three school inquiry sites schools were fully aware of all components of this research inquiry. In partnership with school administrators, I met with eligible teacher participants at each of the inquiry school sites to share essential information about this research inquiry. At each initial staff meeting, a presentation was shared that provided an overview of the work being conducted by the district SEL and mental health team and how the data collected through this inquiry would inform the work of myself and the district team in identifying potential resources and strategies to support the well-being and social-emotional health of educators within this school district.

Additionally, potential inquiry participants were provided with information on the nature of this inquiry, potential research activities they could be involved with, the time obligation for these activities, potential risks, and possible benefits of this inquiry, and that their participation would be completely voluntary across all stages in the data collection process. Additionally, participants were ensured confidentiality around all data collection processes. According to Mertler (2022) it is imperative that inquiry participants “have a right to privacy” (p. 55).

Therefore, data collected across this inquiry included the use of pseudonyms for participants and their respective school locations.

Individuals who chose to participate in the inquiry were provided with an informed consent form (see Appendix B) which included my name, contact information, title of the inquiry, a description of the inquiry, the nature of their participation, assurance of confidentiality where appropriate, a reminder that participation is voluntary, indication of their agreement to participate through their signature, and an offer for a summary of the research findings at the conclusion of the inquiry. I remained highly accessible and available to all inquiry participants across all stages of this research inquiry.

Inquiry Participants and Recruitment Strategies

Purposeful sampling was utilized for the selection of inquiry participants to ensure the staff engaging in the focus groups were classroom teachers. Creswell (2005) recognizes the impact of intentionally selecting participants who possess the necessary information needed to thoroughly address an inquiry topic. Purposeful sampling was utilized at all three school inquiry sites. Three separate Google surveys were emailed directly to teachers at each of the pilot schools. Teachers at these schools were invited to participate in their school-specific focus group process through the completion of a Google survey. The survey included an overview of the information previously presented during staff meetings; the purpose of the focus group; the time commitment for the focus group; the dates and times to select for participation; and the location of the focus group.

Inquiry Procedures

This inquiry utilized a mixed-methods approach, within an improvement science framework, across three phases in order to examine a focus on improving educator well-being

and social-emotional health. Incorporating the framework of this research around improvement science helped me to maintain a focus on the overarching goals of the inquiry, identifying if the selected interventions resulted in change, determining if the changes occurring were significant, impactful, and potentially would result in long-term productive outcomes for educators across this district. Mertler (2022) emphasizes the outcomes for educational research should increase knowledge of the inquiry topic and where possible, identify opportunities and advancements for the targeted population.

The initial phase served as a platform to prepare for the launch of this inquiry. In this phase, I completed a review of the literature to identify examine the impact of improving educator well-being to include identification of potential interventions. I also shared an overview of this inquiry with the district SEL-mental health team who were also serving as collaborative inquiry partners. I worked in partnership with the district superintendent to identify the school inquiry sites that would be of typical representation for this district. I implemented a pilot study to examine the educator well-being survey questions and the administration process for this survey. During this phase, I also worked in partnership with the district MTSS coordinator to develop a presentation for district senior leadership to share the adult well-being survey questions, a timeline and an initial plan for the district wellness initiative. Within the first phase of this inquiry, I also secured approval from IRB before actively engaging with and recruiting participants.

Phase II of this inquiry involved the implementation of an educator survey utilizing an instrument created by Panorama Education. This survey captured baseline data on the topic of educator well-being. Following this survey, qualitative data was collected through focus groups conducted at each of the school inquiry sites. Phase III of this inquiry involved a second

implementation of the same educator well-being survey in order to capture post-assessment data. Inquiry participants were provided with another round of focus groups to capture their perspectives on the progress and opportunities with the district wellness initiative. This phase also included further data analysis and reporting with my collaborative inquiry partners and district senior leadership.

Phase I

Phase I of this inquiry was initiated in the spring of 2022 when I shared an overview of this inquiry with the district SEL-mental health team who were also serving as collaborative inquiry partners. Also, in the spring of 2022, I met with the district superintendent to discuss an overview of this inquiry, gain his approval, and to identify the schools to participate as school inquiry sites. In the summer of 2022, I collaborated with the principals of the three pilot schools to discuss the involvement of their educators in this inquiry, the district well-being survey, and focus groups. I also implemented a pilot study with a small segment of the research population.

Pilot Study

This step in the research process is critical to determine the potential effectiveness of the survey instrumentation, evaluate the validity of survey questions to the inquiry, and make revisions before implementation of the actual research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Mertler, 2022). In this pilot study, participants responded to the questions from the Panorama educator & staff survey that were selected for administration to all district staff in the fall of 2022. Participants in the pilot study included two instructional coaches (former classroom teachers), an exceptional children's teacher, a speech pathologist, two classified staff (instructional assistant, secretary, bus driver, custodian), two school-level administrators, and

one district-level administrator. Selected participants did not take part in any other aspect of this inquiry.

Participants were provided with advanced foundational information to understand the work of the district SEL-mental health team, how this survey fit into the overall district wellness implementation plan, and how the district team would utilize the adult wellness survey data to examine educator and staff well-being. The scholarly practitioner provided each participant with access to the educator well-being survey questions through a google form; all participants were able to complete the survey questions anonymously. At the conclusion of the educator well-being survey, each participant was provided with an additional survey to share their experience with the survey process, contribute their perspective of the work of the district SEL-mental health team, and provide other considerations our district should contemplate as we examined the well-being and mental health needs of educators and staff. The scholarly practitioner was accessible to each participant in the event they needed additional support or clarification about the pilot study process.

Senior Leadership Approval

During August of 2022, I worked in partnership with the district MTSS coordinator to develop a presentation for district senior leadership. This district had survey instruments in place to collect teachers' perceptions of their working conditions across the previous several years. However, there was not a procedure or an instrument in place to capture survey data on the social and emotional health of its educators. It was necessary to obtain permission and support from district senior leadership in order to distribute the educator well-being survey. It was also essential through this process to provide the survey focus areas, the survey questions, a plan for implementation of the survey, and a long-term plan for our district wellness initiative.

The initial presentation was shared with the assistant superintendent of instructional services who is the direct supervisor of the district MTSS coordinator and the researcher, as the executive director of student services, and the facilitator of this inquiry. With the assistant superintendent's understanding of the overall district wellness initiative, to include how this initiative aligned to the district vision and strategic plan, she presented this information during a senior staff meeting. Permission to move forward with the educator well-being survey was received in August of 2022. This information was shared at the next SEL-mental health team meeting to include plans for communicating and launching the survey.

Phase II

The work within Phase II assisted in answering the first research question, "What impact does a comprehensive wellness initiative have on teacher well-being?" This phase of the inquiry was implemented during the fall of 2022. The district MTSS coordinator led a presentation during the level-alike elementary, middle, and high school principal meetings. During these meetings, principals were provided with the vision of the district SEL-mental health team, the district SEL-mental health implementation plan, the survey focus areas, survey questions, a timeline for the survey, and how to communicate this information with the educators at their schools. The content of these presentations was built utilizing the presentation she and I created for the district senior staff presentation.

Well-Being Survey

Phase II of this inquiry gathered baseline data on the social-emotional health of educators through a survey, with the topic of "well-being" (see Appendix E). The survey was made available to educators at all 25 district schools for a two-week window in October of 2022. It was communicated to educators, through school-level principals, that participation in the survey was

optional and confidential. At the conclusion of the survey window, the survey data was analyzed to determine patterns specific to each school and as a district. The first step in this process was a data review session led by Panorama Education with school & district-level leaders. This session was virtual and provided time for evaluation of data and an overview on the resources provided by Panorama to address adult well-being. The educator well-being survey data was reviewed and shared during a district SEL-mental health team meeting. In partnership with the district MTSS coordinator and district SEL-mental health team, potential focus group questions for the school inquiry sites were developed as a result of the emerging patterns from the survey data.

School Inquiry Sites

After the educator well-being survey window concluded, I collaborated with the principals at each of the school inquiry sites to determine a plan for meeting with their staff to discuss the facilitation of focus groups at their respective school locations. These focus groups took place in the first quarter of 2023 and were utilized to gather educators' insight on the district-level and their school educator well-being survey data. The platform for these focus groups also included evaluating current district resources to support educator wellness and to collect feedback on potential other strategies and resources to be considered. The qualitative outcome data from the focus groups were instrumental in developing an initial district plan for resources and interventions to enhance the social-emotional health and well-being of educators.

I shared critical information with the teachers at each of the three pilot schools as part of a regularly scheduled staff meeting. At each initial meeting, a presentation provided an overview of the work being conducted by the district SEL and mental health team and how the data collected through this inquiry would inform my work and the district team in identifying potential resources and strategies to support educator well-being within the school district.

Information on the nature of this inquiry was offered along with the upcoming focus group interviews, the process to opt-in for participation in the focus groups, the time obligation, potential risks and possible benefits of this inquiry, and that participation will be completely voluntary across all stages in the data collection process. Additionally, participants were ensured confidentiality around all data collection through the use of pseudonyms for participants and their school locations.

First Phase of Focus Groups - Examination of Well-Being Supports

I facilitated separate focus group conversations at each of the three pilot schools. This process was completed in partnership with a non-district employee who is familiar with the content of this inquiry and is experienced in leading focus group sessions. Purposeful sampling was used to select teacher participants at the three pilot schools to participate in the focus group process (Creswell, 2005). Teacher participants were provided with an informed consent form prior to their participation in a focus group. The use of an informed consent form outlined what participants could expect across the inquiry, potential risks they may face, their involvement was voluntary, and their signature was an agreement to participate in the inquiry (Mertler & Charles, 2011) (see Appendix B).

During this focus group session, the concept of teacher well-being was evaluated to better understand how teachers perceive this concept and as it relates to their role as an educator. This platform was also used to examine the workplace demands on teachers, sources of employment stressors, and the strategies teachers used to manage their personal well-being. School culture and the impact of school leadership was discussed as part of this focus group as it relates to teacher well-being. Lastly, the participants in these focus groups provided their input on resources and supports they believe would be beneficial to teacher wellness (see Appendix F).

The data from these qualitative feedback sessions were shared with the district SEL-mental health team and district senior leadership to guide conversations and further planning for potential district-wide well-being interventions (resources, strategies, etc.) for teachers. With district approval, resources were implemented within the three school inquiry sites for further evaluation and consideration for district implementation. Where possible, some district resources were made accessible to all educators across this school district.

Data Analysis

In partnership with the district MTSS coordinator, the district SEL-mental health team, the fall 2022 survey data was evaluated to identify data patterns and areas requiring further investigation through the facilitation of focus groups at the pilot school locations. I also worked in partnership with my focus group co-facilitator to evaluate the outcome data from the focus groups. Potential focus group questions for the school inquiry sites were developed as a result of the emerging patterns from the survey data. Working in collaboration with my research partners strengthened the validity of this inquiry (Mertler, 2022).

At the conclusion of the focus groups inductive analysis was employed to identify and organize this qualitative data into a manageable framework for further evaluation (Mertler, 2022). The qualitative data captured from these focus groups was evaluated on a deeper level for patterns in feedback and recommendations through qualitative coding. “Coding is the transitional process between data collection and more extensive data analysis” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 5). A primary goal of coding is to identify repetitive patterns and consistencies in the data with human behaviors (Saldaña, 2013). In order to establish these data outcomes, I implemented a coding scheme to support the recognition of patterns and themes across this narrative information (Parsons & Brown, 2002) to assist in the preparation of my research findings.

I used an inductive coding process to evaluate the transcripts from the focus group interviews to more deeply analyze this qualitative data. Inductive coding is a first level coding technique used in qualitative research that creates codes directly from the input of the language and vocabulary used by the focus group participants. As a result of inductive coding, codes can more accurately represent the perceptions and feedback of participants. Beyond the initial coding process, I incorporated second level, or focused coding, which further analyzed the data to establish categories. As a result, of this additional layer of coding, I was able to classify and group similarly coded data into "families" or groupings because they shared a common trait, which allowed for the display of any patterns (Saldaña, 2013, p. 9). Synthesizing the data as a result of thematic coding, allowed me to identify emergent themes. A category is a word or phrase that depicts an explicit portion of data, whereas a theme is a phrase or sentence that describes a process that is more subtly described (Saldaña, 2013). As noted by Saldaña, (2013), themes are outcomes of the coding and categorization process. In order to confirm the accuracy of the thematic coding process, I included the assistance of my focus group co-facilitator.

Phase III

Phase III involved a similar protocol as utilized in Phase II. The implementation of a second-round district-wide educator well-being survey was available to educators at all 25 district schools in the fall of 2023. The comparability of the fall 2022 and fall 2023 educator well-being survey and the subsequent focus groups provided a means for contrasting data outcomes across two cycles of inquiry and evaluation. The district MTSS coordinator led a presentation during the level-alike elementary, middle, and high school principal meetings. During these meetings, principals were provided with the vision of the district SEL-mental health team, an update with the district SEL-mental health implementation plan, the survey focus areas,

survey questions, a timeline for the survey, and how to communicate this information with the educators at their schools. The second guiding question, “Which components of a comprehensive wellness initiative do teachers perceive as having a positive influence on their well-being?” will be answered during this segment of the inquiry.

Well-Being Survey

This phase of the inquiry utilized the same questions as used in the fall of 2022 and gathered post implementation data on the social-emotional health of educators. The well-being survey was again made available to educators at all 25 district schools for a two-week window in the fall of 2023. It was communicated to educators, through school-level principals, that participation in the survey was optional and confidential. At the conclusion of the survey window, the survey data was analyzed to determine patterns specific to each school and overall for this district. The partnership with Panorama Education included a data analysis session led by Panorama with school and district-level leaders. This session was virtual and provided a platform for questions, data evaluation, and an overview on the resources provided by Panorama to address adult well-being.

School Inquiry Sites

After the survey window concluded, I collaborated with the principals at each of the school inquiry sites to determine a plan for meeting with their staff to discuss the facilitation of a second round of focus groups at their respective school locations. These focus groups took place in the winter of 2024 and were utilized to gather educators’ insight on the district-level and their school educator well-being survey data. The platform for these focus groups evaluated if teachers’ perceptions of well-being had improved and included evaluating the efficacy and perceived impact of district resources to support educator wellness. These qualitative sessions

were also a forum to identify other strategies and resources for future consideration. The qualitative outcome data from these focus groups was instrumental in developing an ongoing district plan to enhance the social-emotional health and well-being of educators.

In order to demonstrate consistency with the research practices, I partnered with the school administrators of each pilot school to identify a date for the second focus group meeting. I followed up with the previous focus group participants through email to share the date of our next meeting, a review of this inquiry, and how the data collected through this inquiry would inform my work and the district SEL-mental health team in identifying long-term resources and strategies to support educator well-being within the school district. Additionally, participants were again ensured confidentiality around all data collection through the use of pseudonyms for participants and their school locations.

Second Phase of Focus Groups – School Inquiry Sites

I facilitated focus group conversations at each of the three pilot schools with similar protocol to the focus groups conducted in Phase II of this inquiry. Phase III focus groups evaluated the efficacy and utilization of each component of the district wellness initiative, discussed the current teacher well-being data, and determined what longitudinal supports were necessary to support educator well-being across the Lily Valley County School District.

Purposeful sampling was utilized for the second-round of focus groups at the pilot schools. At all three school inquiry sites, teachers who previously participated in the focus interviews during Phase II were invited through an informational email which included an overview of the purpose of the focus group, the time commitment for the focus group, and the location of the focus group. The collection process for the demographic data of participants was similar to the fall 2022 focus group interviews. As a result of the outcome data generated by the

fall 2023 SEL survey, the focus group questions were modified to support a deeper dive into areas that required further investigation. Questions for the focus groups were developed by me, in partnership with my collaborative inquiry partners, as a result of the outcome data provided by the educator well-being survey. Open-ended questions were utilized which tend to have a higher likelihood in generating input and opinions from participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Data Analysis

In partnership with the district MTSS coordinator and district SEL-mental health team, the fall 2022 survey data was compared with the fall 2023 data. The team conducted an additional analysis of the data to identify data patterns showing positive momentum and the data points representing areas requiring further investigation through the facilitation of focus groups at the pilot school locations. I again worked in partnership with my focus group co-facilitator to evaluate the outcome data from the focus groups. Potential focus group questions for the school inquiry sites were developed as a result of the emerging patterns from the survey data. Furthermore, the platform of this second focus group was invaluable to gain the inquiry participants' perspective on which components of the district wellness initiative they may find most impactful to supporting teacher social-emotional health and overall well-being.

At the conclusion of the focus groups, inductive analysis was utilized to evaluate the transcripts from the focus groups. A deeper evaluation of this data served to identify and organize the qualitative data into a structured framework for further evaluation (Mertler, 2022). The data collected from this inquiry was utilized to identify the resources, strategies, and supports that are necessary to effectively impact, improve, and sustain teacher well-being on a continuing basis. This data was shared with the district SEL-mental health team and district

senior leadership to guide conversations and planning for ongoing district-wide wellness resources for teachers.

Instrumentation

In order to thoroughly investigate this inquiry topic, an explanatory sequential research approach was utilized in order to collect quantitative and qualitative data. This data was collected in two research cycles over a one-year period. I incorporated the use of three instruments, a teacher survey, individual interviews, and the use of focus group interviews, to gather data and evaluate the selection and impact of research-based interventions on teacher well-being. The data collection process was initiated through the implementation of a district-wide well-being survey to all educators through the Panorama Education survey instrument. The survey was distributed in the fall of 2022 and again in the fall of 2023.

Quantitative data were collected with the use of Panorama, a third-party survey instrument. The target population for this survey was educators and staff at elementary, middle, and high schools across this school district. All survey participants were ensured confidentiality with their participation. The only form of participant identification was through a drop-down selection window. Participants were to select the type of position they were currently serving (i.e., teacher, classified staff, etc.) and the school's name. These survey components allowed me to look more closely at the perception data from an accessible population of teachers at the pilot school locations. The intention was to generalize the results of this survey to the entire staff population in this district (Mertler, 2022). Questions for the fall 2022 and fall 2023 surveys remained consistent to measure growth, opportunities, and reliability across survey topics.

The Panorama Teacher and Staff Survey gathers educator perceptions of their professional well-being; capacity and efficacy around supporting academic, social and emotional

learning; professional learning opportunities; cultural competency and awareness; school climate and culture; and relationships with colleagues, families, and school leadership. Panorama Education is an independent education technology company that partners with schools and districts to support student literacy and social-emotional learning (SEL) and is not affiliated with any particular academic or legal philosophy. In order to minimize measurement error, the Panorama survey instrument was developed based on modern principles of survey design to include: wording survey items as questions rather than statements; avoiding “agree-disagree” response options that may introduce acquiescence bias; asking about one idea at a time rather than used double-barreled items; and using at least five response options to capture a wider range of perceptions (Panorama Education, n.d.).

Panorama Education employs a survey development process which conforms to the similar practices utilized for developing student surveys. The survey development process prioritizes the task of establishing validity. By focusing on validity during the development of items, there is high potential for more efficient (i.e., shorter) scales as well as more efficient pilot testing (Gehlbach & Brinkworth, 2011). Research practices including a thorough literature review and input from other academics and potential respondents in the item-development and revision phase with the goal of achieving credibility across both populations. Panorama describes how their literature review and the qualitative data from focus group/interviews can be synthesized into a comprehensive list to facilitate the development of survey items. Survey designers subject the items to an expert review and cognitive pretesting before executing a pilot test to conclude the development process.

Survey questions were selected in partnership with my collaborative inquiry partners, district senior leadership, and in alignment with the goals within the district strategic plan. The

survey focus topic was, “Adult Well-Being.” Prior to the implementation of each survey, a district communication was shared with school-level administrators all 25 schools to share with their teams. The communication included the purpose of the survey, participation is anonymous, and how the data would be utilized to create a more inclusive, equitable, and supportive learning environment for students and staff. Questions for the fall 2022 and fall 2023 surveys were consistent to measure growth, opportunities, and reliability across survey topics (see Appendix F).

At the conclusion of the fall 2022 and fall 2023 surveys, the data was analyzed to determine patterns that would be beneficial to evaluate further. After analyzing the survey data, the next step in the qualitative data collection process was to facilitate focus groups at each of the school inquiry sites. Purposeful sampling was utilized for the selection of teacher participants at the three pilot schools to better understand the data outcomes (Creswell, 2005). Teachers at each of the inquiry school sites were again invited to participate in the focus group interview process through the completion of a survey using Google forms. The survey included an overview of the information previously presented during staff meetings; the purpose of the focus group; the time commitment for the focus group; the dates and times to select for participation; and the location of the focus group. Questions for the focus groups were developed by me, in partnership with collaborative inquiry partners, as a result of the Panorama survey responses. The data collection for the focus groups was kept confidential and secured through a password protection process.

The format of a focus group interview was selected for this inquiry due to the limited amount of time in which to access inquiry participants. Additionally, this type of interview platform can yield more qualitative information due to participants willingness to participate in a group setting versus individual interviews and the tendency for individuals to experience greater

idea generation due to feeding off the perspectives of others' comments (Mertler, 2022). The focus group interviews were comprised of an average of 5-7 participants took place in a private and secure location of each pilot school. Prior to participating in the focus group, all participants were provided with an informed consent form which included my name and contact information, title of the inquiry, a description of the inquiry, the nature of their participation, the session would be recorded, assurance of confidentiality, a reminder that participation was voluntary, indication of their agreement to participate through their signature, and an offer for a summary of the research findings at the conclusion of this inquiry.

At the onset of the focus group and individual interviews, across Phase II and Phase III, participants were welcomed, ground rules for the interview platform were shared, and I obtained permission to audio record the interview. In addition to audiotaping, notes were taken as another method of capturing additional information and to assist with facilitation of this process. I incorporated open-ended questions and encouraged participation from all members of the focus group (Mertler, 2022). At the conclusion of the focus group interview, I expressed gratitude to each participant for their involvement and reviewed an offer for a summary of the research findings at the conclusion of this inquiry.

Inquiry Design Rigor

This improvement science research inquiry aimed to examine the impact on educator well-being when teachers were provided with explicit resources and strategies to support their unique social, emotional, and mental health needs. I utilized the collection of quantitative and qualitative data to identify potential solutions for a local-level educational problem (Mertler, 2022). In addition, I engaged in multiple practices across this inquiry to ensure research

methodology, data collection procedures, and investigative processes all maintained credibility, were sound, and limited the potential for bias on my part (Melrose, 2001).

I incorporated multiple steps to ensure the soundness of the data analysis processes. I triangulated the data through comparing the teacher well-being survey data (quantitative) with focus group data (qualitative) for the validity of the data. I also followed up with participants of focus groups to review the accuracy of the qualitative data outcomes in my research report. This use of member checking will ensure that I represented the ideas and perceptions of the inquiry participants accurately (Glesne, 2006). Finally, in partnership with my collaborative inquiry partners, peer debriefing was incorporated to evaluate all research stages, including data collection, analysis, and interpretation, to enhance the overall credibility of this improvement science research inquiry.

Delimitations, Limitations, and Assumptions

The focal point of this research inquiry was to evaluate the impact to teacher well-being as the result of the implementation of a wellness initiative within a district-wide SEL and mental health framework. A teacher's command of their own social-emotional competencies and ability to manage their well-being are inextricably linked to the student performance and classroom achievement (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the expectations for teachers increased significantly due to state and district initiatives aimed at improving student performance and achievement. The demands of a typical school year often require teachers to extend their contributions into longer workdays and weekends, resulting in increased levels of stress. Gallup (2014) reported in a national survey that 46% of teachers report high daily stress during the school year. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, teacher workloads have now been encumbered with the unexpected social-emotional and mental health exigencies brought by

this significant event. These additional demands could impact the instructional efficacy of our teachers and possibly their decision to stay employed in education.

This inquiry recognizes the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the extra demands placed on teachers as a result. However, this inquiry did not evaluate well-being strategies that could be used in isolation should there be another extensive and disruptive event, such as a pandemic, to the daily personal and professional lives of classroom educators. This inquiry explored a holistic approach to well-being for educators across all levels of experience and demographics. This inquiry did not differentiate the impact to teacher well-being across gender, the years of teaching experience, or the professional development or educational background of teachers as it relates to effective wellness strategies for educators. These topics will warrant further study outside of this inquiry.

The scope of this inquiry centered on three school inquiry sites at the elementary, middle, and high school level. These schools are in a distinct feeder pattern and serve approximately the same students and families. This alignment may also impact the outcomes for future studies replicated in other districts due to the situational dynamics of these learning environments. Furthermore, as the previous lead administrator at Magnolia Elementary, this may result in inquiry limitations that necessitate acknowledgement. There is the potential, during focus group interviews, that inquiry participants at Magnolia Elementary were hesitant to candidly share what could be a critical review of the inquiry or the district wellness initiative. It was my goal to identify viable strategies and resources to improve teacher well-being for *all* educators, considered this potential implication. In order to support my efforts in leading an inquiry with limited biases on my part, while actively incorporating the perspectives of others, I worked in partnership with my inquiry and non-participant inquiry partners to evaluate outcome data from

teacher surveys and focus groups. Additionally, I utilized the assistance of a non-inquiry participant to lead the focus group session for this school. Throughout this inquiry, I was diligent with adhering to the focus group protocol, outlined in Appendices F and G, in order to remain objective and unbiased across this inquiry in order to support the district implementation process coupled with identifying opportunities, barriers, and resources to support collective teacher well-being for district-wide implementation.

For the purpose of this inquiry, it was assumed that identifying barriers to increasing educator well-being would improve attendance and reduce the teacher attrition rate. Another assumption within this inquiry was the identification of resources to support teacher mental health and social-emotional needs would result in an equitable distribution and access to these resources for all teachers within Lily Valley County Schools and would not be isolated to the schools who currently have some supports in place. Furthermore, it was an assumption that there is a connection to a more positive and productive school culture when efforts are made to improve teacher well-being. It was also assumed that when teachers are provided with training and tangible resources to support the social-emotional needs of students, there would be a resulting improvement to teacher well-being. Finally, it was assumed that all participants in this inquiry would respond candidly and with integrity across surveys, interviews, and participation in focus groups.

Role of Scholarly Practitioner

As the scholarly practitioner, I led this research inquiry to investigate the development of a district wellness initiative, as part of the implementation of a Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)-mental health framework, in an Eastern North Carolina school district, in which I am employed. Within the scope of this inquiry, the focus of practice was on the impact of this SEL-

mental health framework on the social-emotional health and well-being of teachers. Effective and productive classroom teachers are integral to student success and positive school cultures (Bracket et al., 2010). It was my professional desire to understand better how to support our educators' mental health and overall well-being. This curiosity led to my determination that these topics would be integral to my focus of practice. The research supports that teacher well-being is connected to student well-being (Hoffman & Miller; 2020; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Jones & Kahn, 2017; Lucas et al., 2020). In order to thoroughly examine this research topic, the perspective of inquiry participants, and the data collection process, the inquiry included three pilot locations within this school district: Magnolia Elementary School (MES), Sunflower Middle School (SMS), and Rosedale High School (RHS).

I previously served as the principal at Magnolia Elementary School for five of my 18 years in education. I now serve as the executive director of student services, and I am also a member of the district SEL-mental health team. The schools (elementary, middle, high) were selected due to being in a distinct feeder pattern, serving the same students and families, and as a result of this logistical arrangement. I have professional relationships with the principals at each of these schools. In order to minimize personal biases or influences, I worked in partnership with my collaborative inquiry partners, more specifically the district MTSS coordinator, and non-inquiry participants, for the implementation of a district-wide SEL survey, and the focus groups at the three pilot locations. Prior to the research inquiry being activated, all participants were made aware the work being conducted by the district SEL and mental health team and how the data collected through this inquiry would inform my work and that of the district team in identifying potential resources and strategies to support educator well-being and social-emotional health within the school district.

Participants in all phases of this inquiry participated on a voluntary basis. The focus groups and interviews at Magnolia Elementary School were facilitated in partnership with an educational professional outside of this inquiry. Individuals who chose to participate in the inquiry, at each of the school inquiry sites, were provided with an informed consent form which included my name, contact information, title of the inquiry, a description of the inquiry, the nature of their participation, assurance of confidentiality where appropriate, a reminder that participation was voluntary, indication of their agreement to participate through their signature, and an offer for a summary of the research findings at the conclusion of the inquiry. I remained accessible and available to all inquiry participants across all stages of this research inquiry.

Summary

The purpose of this mixed-methods research inquiry was to examine the impact to educator well-being when teachers were provided with explicit resources to support their unique social, emotional, and mental health needs. This inquiry was conducted within three pilot school locations and occurred across three phases of investigation, which included surveys and focus groups. The qualitative and quantitative data collected from this inquiry was utilized to develop a long-term intervention framework that will be employed to support, improve, and sustain teacher well-being on a continuing basis. Chapter 4 includes the results of the data collection and analysis process across all components of this research inquiry.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The purpose of this mixed-methods research inquiry was to examine the impact on the social-emotional health and well-being of teachers when educators are provided with explicit resources and strategies to support their unique social, emotional, and mental health needs. The questions that guided this inquiry were as follows:

1. What impact does a comprehensive wellness initiative have on teacher well-being?
2. Which components of a comprehensive wellness initiative do teachers perceive as having a positive influence on their well-being?

Within a mixed-methods approach, I utilized an explanatory sequential design which involved collecting quantitative data during the second and third phases of the inquiry, and then followed up with a qualitative procedure, specifically focus groups and individual interviews, to further explain the results of the quantitative data also during the second and third phases of the inquiry (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Implementation and Data Collection

Implementation of the comprehensive wellness initiative occurred across three phases of improvement and in partnership with my collaborative inquiry partners. Phase I took place in the spring and summer of 2022 and included a review of the literature to examine the impact of improving educator well-being, the selection of survey questions, and the evaluation of potential interventions. This phase of the inquiry also involved working with the district superintendent to identify schools to participate in the inquiry and the implementation of a pilot inquiry to examine the educator well-being survey questions and the administration process for this survey.

In Phase II of the research, an educator survey was administered district-wide, utilizing an assessment tool developed by Panorama Education. This survey was voluntary, anonymous,

available to all educators, and designed to gather baseline data regarding the perception of educator well-being in the Lily Valley County Schools district. Subsequent to the survey administration, qualitative data was obtained by conducting focus groups at two of the school inquiry sites and individual interviews at one inquiry location. Focus groups were initially planned for all pilot school locations. Due to time constraints and multiple scheduling conflicts at one of the schools, it was necessary to collect qualitative data through conducting individual interviews. Inquiry participants were provided with access to the same questions utilized within the focus group format. These focus groups and interviews served as a platform to explore the subject of educator well-being more deeply, providing a more comprehensive understanding of this crucial aspect of the inquiry. The recruitment process for this inquiry involved meeting with teachers at each of the three pilot locations as part of a regularly scheduled staff meeting. Information on the nature of this inquiry was offered along with the process for participation through the completion of a survey using Google forms indicating their interest in participating in a focus group; surveys were distributed within one week after each staff meeting. All teachers who completed the survey indicating their interest in participating were included in the focus groups or individual interviews at their respective location.

Phase III followed a protocol similar to Phase II. In October 2023, a second district-wide educator well-being survey was launched and accessible to educators in all 25 district schools. By comparing the results of the educator well-being surveys from both the fall of 2022 and the fall of 2023, in addition to the subsequent focus group discussions and individual interviews this approach offered an integral mechanism for contrasting data outcomes over two cycles of inquiry and assessment (see Table 10).

Table 10

Inquiry Questions & Corresponding Data Collection Instrument

Inquiry Question	Phase of Inquiry	Data Collection Instrument	Question
What impact does a comprehensive wellness initiative have on teacher well-being?	Phase I	Initial Pilot Study	1. In your opinion, will educators find value in the work the district SEL-Mental Health team is doing to support adult social-emotional and well-being needs? Please explain your response. 2. What additional information should be considered as our district SEL-Mental Health Team focuses on educator mental health and well-being?
	Phase II	Panorama Educator Well-Being Survey (Focus Group discussions evaluated overall district)	Question 7, Appendix F.
	Phase II	Focus Groups	Question 10a, Appendix F. Question 10b, Appendix F.
	Phase III	Panorama Educator Well-Being Survey (Focus Group discussions evaluated overall district data)	Question 2a, Appendix G. Question 2b, Appendix G. Question 2c, Appendix G. Question 2d, Appendix G. Question 2e, Appendix G.
	Phase III	Focus Groups	Question 3, Appendix G.

Table 10 (continued)

Inquiry Question	Phase of Inquiry	Data Collection Instrument	Question
Which components of a comprehensive wellness initiative do teachers perceive as having a positive influence on their well-being?	Phase III	Teacher Well-Being Survey Focus Groups & Individual Interviews	Question 4a, Appendix G. Question 4b, Appendix G. Question 4c, Appendix G. Question 4d, Appendix G. Question 5, Appendix G. Question 6, Appendix G.

During this Phase III of the inquiry, wellness interventions were also implemented at each of the three pilot school locations. Educators at these schools were provided two separate professional development sessions as part of regularly scheduled staff meetings. The first session, guided by a licensed therapist, participants were equipped with a foundation for enhancing their overall well-being personally and professionally. Throughout the session, participants were introduced to strategies and resources that encompassed a spectrum of well-being, including self-care techniques, stress management, interpersonal communication skills, and strategies for work-life boundaries. This professional learning was tailored to address prevalent issues and obstacles that could potentially hinder or overwhelm the well-being of educators, ensuring they left the session equipped with practical tools to meet their unique social, emotional, and mental health needs, and enhance their overall quality of life.

The second professional development session was led by an organization that specializes in providing evidence-based training and resources for resilience and trauma-informed practices. This session was strategically designed to increase the capacity of these educators with a deeper insight into the complexities of student behavior, grounded in foundational brain science concepts. Furthermore, staff were supplied with strategies and resilience tools essential for guiding their students through the intricate challenges of stressful events. By the end of this trauma-informed training session, educators had the opportunity to deepen their knowledge of youth mental health and resilience. These educators were supplied with the practical skills necessary to support their students more effectively and were provided a platform to better understand the importance of creating an inclusive and empathetic educational environment, where the holistic well-being of young individuals can thrive.

In addition to the professional learning sessions, a member of the Lily Valley SEL-mental health team, and a collaborative inquiry partner, led a team-building activity at the beginning of a selected staff meeting. This activity was specifically selected from the Panorama playbook for supporting adult social-emotional learning. This collaborative group exercise laid the groundwork for emotional and mental rejuvenation, while adding another potential tool to these educators' wellness toolkits. During this same staff meeting, each of the school inquiry sites were provided with access to the district mental health coordinator, a licensed clinical social worker and therapist, who presented information on the connection to staff mental health and the impact to their well-being, performance, and contributions as educators. This presentation included a review of the district Employee Assistance Program (EAP), the benefits provided to district staff through this resource, and additional community resources accessible for all staff.

Additionally, each of the school inquiry sites was provided with funding to develop a resiliency room for staff members. The creation of these resiliency rooms was an intentional investment in the mental and emotional health of the school's staff. These spaces were to be designed by school level teams to be tranquil and nurturing, equipped with comfortable seating, calming aesthetics, and resources to facilitate relaxation, meditation, or a brief escape from daily stresses. These resiliency rooms will function as a retreat for educators, a place where they can temporarily disconnect from the constant demands and challenges of their roles. Whether for a few minutes of meditation, a quiet moment with a book, or simply a peaceful break, these spaces were designed to empower staff members to regroup, reset, and return to their duties with a renewed sense of purpose and resilience.

Data Analysis

Educator Well-Being Survey

During Phase II and Phase III of this inquiry, baseline data on the social-emotional health of educators was gathered through a survey, with the topic of “well-being.” See Appendix E. The survey was made available to educators at all 25 district schools for a two-week window in October of 2022, and again in October 2023. The parameters of this survey were communicated to educators, through their principals, that participation in the survey was optional and confidential. Participants answered 15 survey items which included at least five response options (i.e., almost never, once in a while, sometimes, frequently, almost always) for each question to capture a wider range of perceptions (Panorama Education, n.d.).

At the conclusion of both survey windows, the survey data was analyzed to determine patterns specific to each school and as a district. The first step in this process was a data review session led by Panorama Education with school & district-level leaders. This session was virtual and provided time for evaluation of data and an overview on the resources provided by Panorama to address adult well-being. The educator well-being survey data was reviewed and analyzed during subsequent district SEL-mental health team meetings. Descriptive statistics were utilized to identify areas of growth and opportunities to support educator wellness in this district.

Focus Groups

After the completion of the survey windows in the fall of 2022 and 2023, teachers at each of the three school inquiry sites were provided with the opportunity to participate in focus groups across two phases of this inquiry. Purposeful sampling was utilized for the selection of inquiry participants to ensure the staff engaging in the focus groups were classroom teachers. These focus groups served as a means to explore the subject of educator well-being more deeply,

providing a more comprehensive understanding of this crucial aspect of the inquiry. The qualitative data which originated from the focus groups was beneficial to provide a first-hand perspective of teachers, while further examining the identified themes and patterns from the educator survey data. The focus groups also served as a platform to answer both research questions and provided teachers with a means to shape the district wellness initiative. Kaufman and Diliberti (2021) recognizes that “teachers’ feelings of connectedness with colleagues, support, and involvement in decision-making influence their satisfaction with teaching” (p. 7). See Appendix F for the focus group protocol for Phase II and Appendix G for the focus group protocol for Phase III.

At the conclusion of the focus groups, transcripts were reviewed and edited for accuracy. Inductive analysis was utilized to identify and organize the qualitative data into a structured framework for further evaluation (Mertler, 2022). The data collected from this inquiry was utilized to identify the resources, strategies, and supports that are necessary to effectively impact, improve, and sustain teacher well-being on a continuing basis. Ensuring the integrity of data collection and the representation of information is imperative for any research. The data collection process involved collecting quantitative and qualitative data across two phases of this inquiry. Similar to any mixed methods inquiry, the researcher must validate the scores obtained from quantitative measures and address the validity of qualitative findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In this explanatory sequential mixed methods design, an analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data was conducted independently. Quantitative data was collected first from the district-wide educator surveys using the Panorama survey instrument.

The qualitative data was collected through the subsequent focus groups held at each of the pilot school inquiry sites. The data sources were integrated by connecting quantitative results

with qualitative data collection (Perry et al., 2020). The quantitative data were used to plan the development of the qualitative research questions, and the qualitative data were beneficial in explaining the quantitative results. Subsequently, inductive analysis was employed to identify and organize this qualitative data into a manageable structure for further evaluation (Mertler, 2022). This began by developing a coding scheme to support the recognition of patterns and themes across this narrative information (Parsons & Brown, 2002) to assist in the preparation of my research findings.

Demographics

As part of this inquiry, three schools within the Lily Valley County School district were identified as research locations as part of this inquiry. These selected schools (elementary, middle, and high) are part of a direct feeder pattern, serving a similar group of students and families. Collectively, these schools are considered representative of a standard school profile within the district, and their selection was a collaborative effort involving the district superintendent. Teachers at each of the three school inquiry sites were provided with the opportunity to participate in the district-wide educator well-being survey and focus groups across two phases of this inquiry (see Table 11).

All teachers at each of the pilot schools were invited to participate in their respective school inquiry through the completion of a Google survey. This survey encompassed a summary of information previously presented during a staff meeting, the focus group objectives, the expected time commitment, available dates and times for participation, and the location of the focus group. Seventeen individuals voluntarily chose to participate in this research inquiry by responding to a survey using Google forms. All teacher participants completed an informed consent prior to participation in their respective focus group session. As illustrated in Table 11,

Table 11

Demographics of Inquiry Participants

Teacher Alias	Years Teaching	Gender	Race
Charley	4	F	White
Noelle	16	F	White
Merary	4	F	White
Harley	13	F	White
Hudson	3	M	Hispanic
Finley	14	F	White
Matthew	5	M	White
Londyn	5	F	Black
Lindsey	10	F	Mixed
Suzie	16	F	White
Joseph	34	M	White
Aubrey	6	F	White
Krystal	4	F	Black
Anastasia	2	F	White
Melony	2	F	White
Macy	9	F	White
Kyler	3	F	White

the research participants consisted of classroom teachers, with seven educators at the elementary level and five each at both the middle and high school levels. While school level data was collected, due to privacy, this information is not included. The participants' teaching experience spanned from two to thirty-four years, with 41% having four or fewer years of teaching experience (see Figure 13). Predominantly, these educators were female (82%), of White ethnicity (76%), and taught core content subjects (88%). Most of these teachers had been employed at a single school for the duration of their employment (76%), and 24% of this group had less than four years of teaching experience.

The administrators at the pilot schools have been employed in Lily Valley County Schools for over ten years in an administrative capacity. Prior to serving as a principal, they each held positions as assistant principals and classroom teachers. The principal of Magnolia Elementary, now in his sixteenth year as a school administrator, assumed leadership at Magnolia at the start of the 2022-2023 school year. Prior to this role, he served as a middle school principal for eight years and previously held a position as a high school assistant principal for six years. Acknowledging the impact of a change in school leadership, and with that a shift in routines and practices, the principal is aware that these changes may influence how teachers engage in and respond to perception surveys. It is also this administrators' goal to continue to foster a culture of transparency, and create an atmosphere where teachers feel empowered to contribute their views in perception surveys.

The principal at Sunflower Middle is in her third year with this school and her tenth year in administration. When approached about her school participating in this inquiry as a pilot location, she eagerly agreed for her school to have a role in this study. She immediately recognized the benefit of placing a more intense focus on teacher well-being, and is an area of

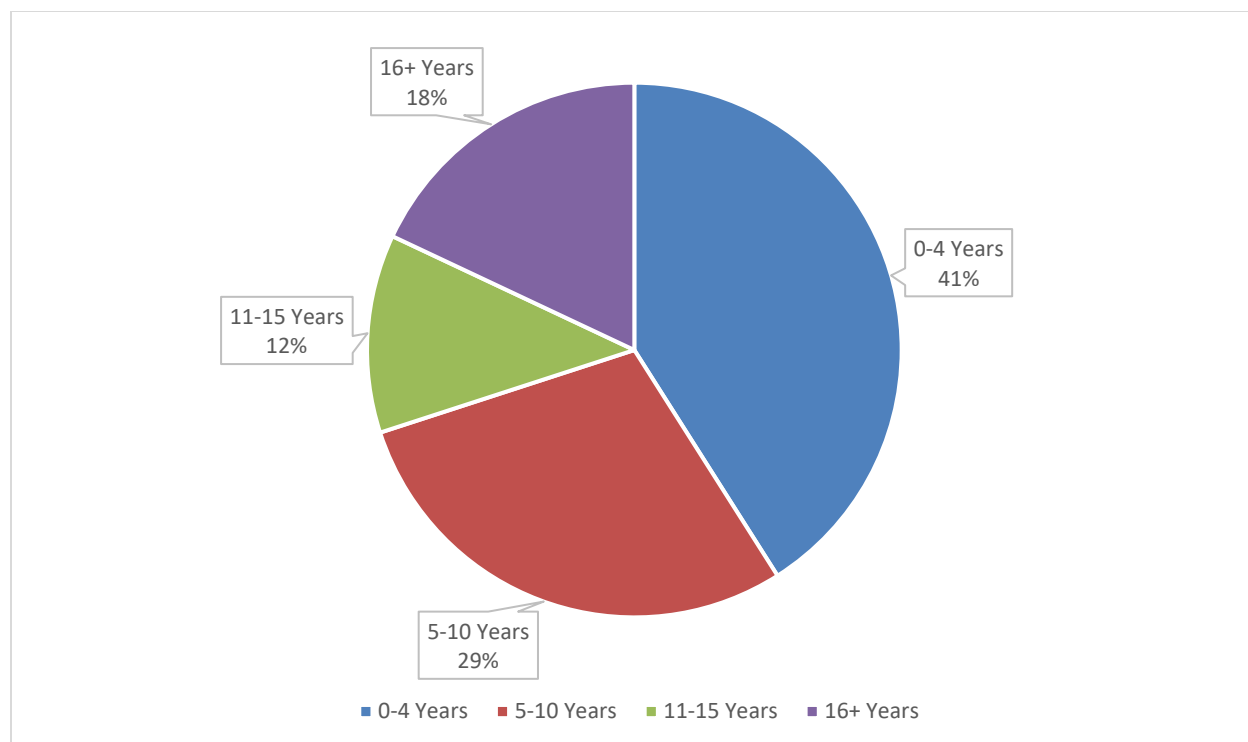


Figure 13. Inquiry participants – Teaching experience.

responsibility she takes seriously as the leader of her school. As we compared the outcome data for the teacher well-being survey across two years, we discussed that the overall favorable responses to each category have remained somewhat consistent. This administrator recognized it has been beneficial for her staff to have had consistent leadership over the last two years. She has had the ability to build solid relationships with her staff and to better understand how to support their professional and personal needs. This administrator shared how they have strategically utilized the counselor, interventionist, and a teacher leader to provide SEL supports with identified classrooms and believes this practice is making a difference. She also acknowledged the challenges in recruiting for open positions and the impact that teacher vacancies have had on her staff. The principal at Rosedale High School is an experienced elementary administrator who is in her first year at this school, and her fourteenth year as an administrator. She transitioned to Rosedale at the beginning of the 2023-2024 school year. As we discussed the educator well-being survey data from the 2022 to the 2023 survey cycles, this administrator shared several dynamics that may have played a role in how teachers responded. She identified the change in administration, and the overall impact this can have on a school culture. This administrator shared information about the work she is leading in partnership with district staff to enhance the instructional practices and procedures at Rosedale. This work has created a paradigm shift for some staff. Additionally, she discussed the increase in student behavior incidents and the work she and her team are doing to intervene with this upward trend, and the impact to the disruption of instructional time, and to the work of her teaching team. Lastly, as a result of not being able to fill teacher vacancies, these open positions have translated to larger class sizes and more work for her teaching staff. This administrator recognizes the impact of all the aforementioned dynamics and is committed to creating a culture where both students and staff can thrive.

Results

Educator Well-Being Survey

During Phase II and Phase III of this inquiry, data on the social-emotional health of educators, was gathered through a Panorama Education survey instrument (see Appendix E). During the respective survey periods, 424, or 65% of teachers in the district participated in the survey in the fall of 2022, and 365, or 59% of teachers participated in the fall of 2023. In the fall of 2022, Magnolia Elementary experienced a participation rate of 39%, Sunflower Middle was 72%, and Rosedale High was 52%, In the fall of 2023, Magnolia Elementary achieved a participation rate of 33%, Sunflower Middle 70%, and Rosedale High was at 38%. The district data provided in Table 12 represents the teachers' "favorable" response rates to individual questions, comparing the fall of 2022 and the fall of 2023. The analysis of this district-wide data provides insight into the overall well-being, engagement, and job satisfaction of teachers in the Lily Valley County School District. Overall, 62% of teachers responded favorably in the fall of 2023 compared to 60% in the fall of 2022. The responses related to engagement and emotions (feeling excited, exhausted, frustrated, happy, hopeful, overwhelmed, safe, stressed out, and worried) show a general positive trend from fall 2022 to fall 2023. This data suggests a collective improvement in the teachers' overall emotional experiences while at work. The question about how effective teachers feel at their job resulted in an increase from 55% in 2022 to 59% in 2023, indicating a perceived improvement in job performance. The questions regarding the importance and meaningfulness of their work also show positive trends, suggesting an increased sense of significance and purpose in the work these educators are performing. The overall job satisfaction question also indicates an improvement across the respective survey windows. The percentage of

Table 12

Teachers' "Favorable" Response Rates to Individual Questions – District Comparison

Survey Question	District Fall 2022	District Fall 2023
Overall	60%	62%
During the past week, how often did you feel <i>engaged</i> at work?	82%	84%
During the past week, how often did you feel <i>excited</i> at work?	83%	84%
During the past week, how often did you feel <i>exhausted</i> at work?	8%	9%
During the past week, how often did you feel <i>frustrated</i> at work?	63%	66%
During the past week, how often did you feel <i>happy</i> at work?	59%	61%
During the past week, how often did you feel <i>hopeful</i> at work?	52%	53%
During the past week, how often did you feel <i>overwhelmed</i> at work?	18%	21%
During the past week, how often did you feel <i>safe</i> at work?	56%	56%
During the past week, how often did you feel <i>stressed out</i> at work?	46%	51%
During the past week, how often did you feel <i>worried</i> at work?	73%	74%
How <i>effective</i> do you feel at your job right now?	55%	59%
How much does your work <i>matter</i> to you?	95%	97%
How <i>meaningful</i> for you is the work you do?	91%	95%
Overall, how <i>satisfied</i> are you with your job right now?	54%	59%

teachers reporting satisfaction with their jobs increased from 54% in the fall of 2022 to 59% in the fall of 2023.

In summary, the data suggests an overall positive trend in teacher experiences from fall 2022 to fall 2023. The high percentages of favorable responses to survey questions that were related to feeling excited, happy, and hopeful at work, as well as the perceived importance and meaningfulness of the work, suggest strong positive aspects in these teachers' work experiences. The responses to the survey questions about feelings of exhaustion and being overwhelmed both experienced a slight increase in favorable responses in 2023. However, both questions garnered the lowest favorable response rates across both survey windows indicating the potential for further evaluation.

The data provided in Table 13 represents the teachers' "favorable" response rates to individual questions at Magnolia Elementary, comparing the fall of 2022 and the fall of 2023. The analysis of this data can provide insights into the changes in teacher well-being, engagement, and job satisfaction within the specific context of Magnolia Elementary. The overall trends in this data reflect that the overall favorable response rate decreased from 64% in the fall 2022 to 50% in the fall of 2023, and the data outcomes for Magnolia Elementary contrasts with the more positive trends observed in the district-level comparison. There are also decreases in favorable responses related to feeling engaged, excited, happy, and hopeful at work. The most notable areas of decrease are in the feeling of engagement at work, being happy at work, feeling safe at work, and in overall job satisfaction. All these areas decreased from 71% in the fall of 2022 to 33% in the fall of 2023. In comparison to the other pilot schools, these categories experienced the greatest amount of change. Figure 14 shows the percentage of favorable responses for feelings of engagement at work. Figure 15 shows the percentage of favorable

Table 13

*Teachers' "Favorable" Response Rates to Individual Questions – Magnolia Elementary**Comparison*

Survey Question Overall	Magnolia Fall 2022 64%	Magnolia Fall 2023 50%
During the past week, how often did you feel <i>engaged</i> at work?	71%	33%
During the past week, how often did you feel <i>excited</i> at work?	86%	83%
During the past week, how often did you feel <i>exhausted</i> at work?	0%	0%
During the past week, how often did you feel <i>frustrated</i> at work?	86%	67%
During the past week, how often did you feel <i>happy</i> at work?	71%	33%
During the past week, how often did you feel <i>hopeful</i> at work?	71%	50%
During the past week, how often did you feel <i>overwhelmed</i> at work?	0%	33%
During the past week, how often did you feel <i>safe</i> at work?	71%	33%
During the past week, how often did you feel <i>stressed out</i> at work?	57%	50%
During the past week, how often did you feel <i>worried</i> at work?	86%	50%
How <i>effective</i> do you feel at your job right now?	43%	33%
How much does your work <i>matter</i> to you?	100%	100%

Table 13 (continued)

Survey Question	Magnolia Fall 2022	Magnolia Fall 2023
Overall	64%	50%
How <i>meaningful</i> for you is the work you do?	86%	100%
Overall, how <i>satisfied</i> are you with your job right now?	71%	33%

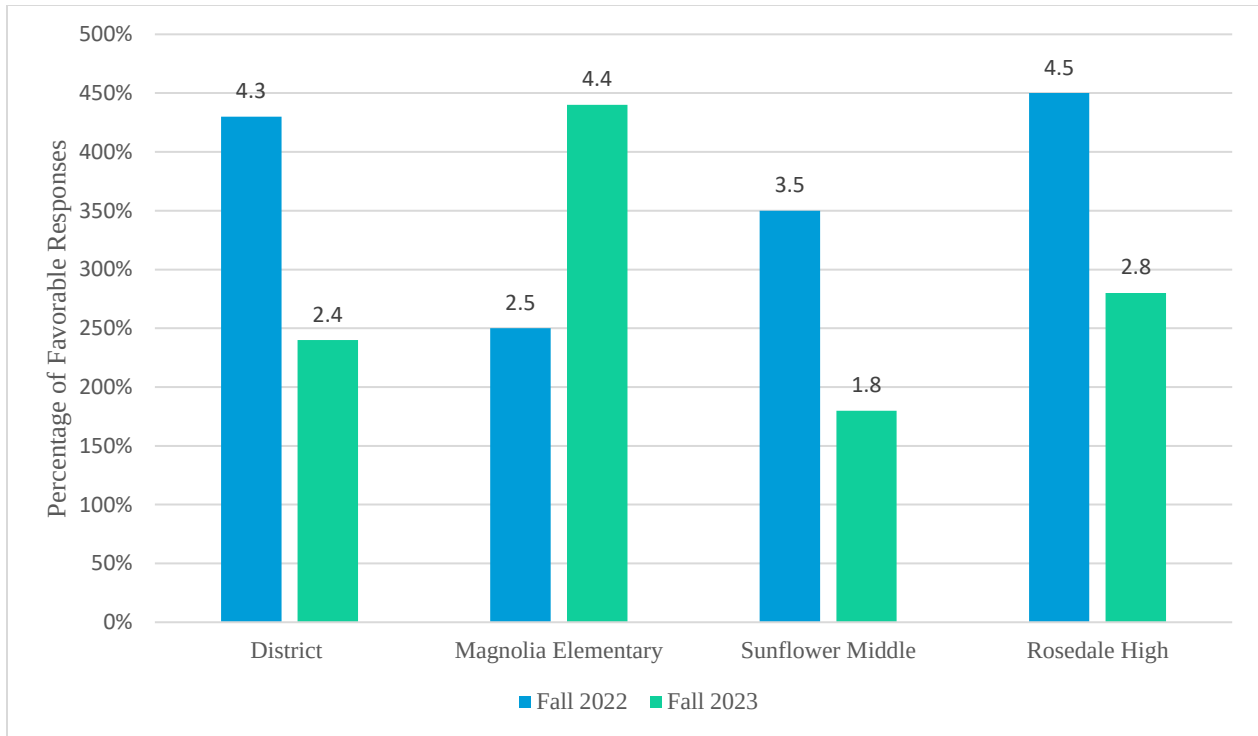


Figure 14. Favorable responses to the survey question: In the past week, how often did you feel *engaged* at work?

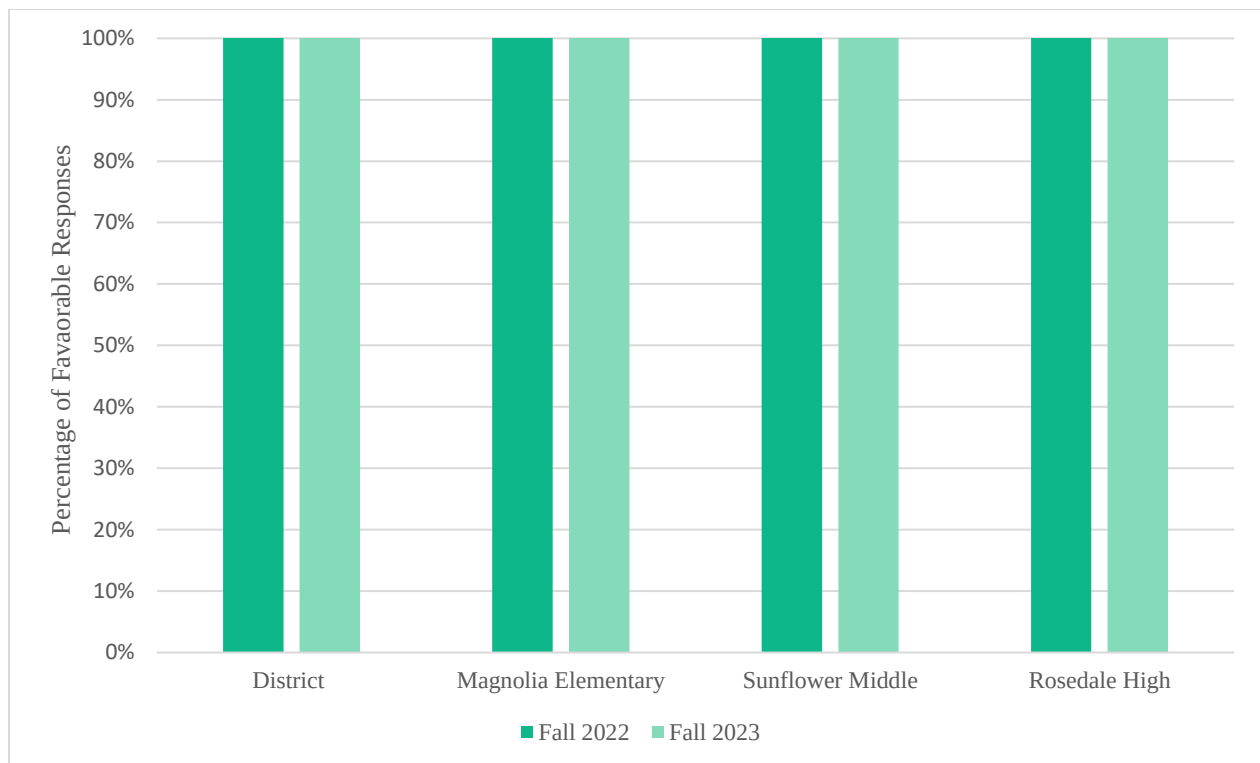


Figure 15. Favorable responses to the survey question: In the past week, how often did you feel happy at work?

responses for feelings of being happy at work. Figure 16 shows favorable responses for feeling safe at work, and Figure 17 shows overall job satisfaction. Teachers consistently reported low favorable responses to how often they experience exhaustion at work in both 2022 and 2023 (see Figure 18). This trend was consistent across the other pilot schools and the district as a whole.

Teachers at Magnolia Elementary continued to report a high level of feeling excited while being at work, 86% in the fall of 2022 compared to 83% in the fall of 2023. This data remained as, or more, consistent compared to the other pilot schools (see Figure 19). How teachers perceived the importance of their work remained stable at 100% across the 2022 and 2023 survey cycles (see Figure 20), and the meaningfulness of their work improved from 86% in 2022 to 100% in 2023 (see Figure 21). The 2023 data points for all both of these categories were higher than the district comparison.

The data provided in Table 14 represents the Teachers' "favorable" response rates to individual questions at Sunflower Middle School, comparing the fall of 2022 and the fall of 2023. The overall favorable response rate remained relatively stable, with a slight decrease from 71% in fall of 2022 to 68% in fall of 2023. This data may suggest a consistent level of teacher satisfaction. The responses related to feeling engaged (see Figure 14), happy (see Figure 15), safe (see Figure 16), excited (see Figure 19), and hopeful (see Figure 22) at work remained stable or experienced slight declines across each of these categories. The categories of feeling exhausted (see Figure 18), overwhelmed (see Figure 23), and frustrated (see Figure 24) all experienced a slight decrease in favorable responses. The feeling of stressed out at work increased to 83% of favorable response in 2023 (see Figure 25), and teachers feeling worried at work decreased significantly from 87% in the fall of 2022 to 100% of favorable responses in the

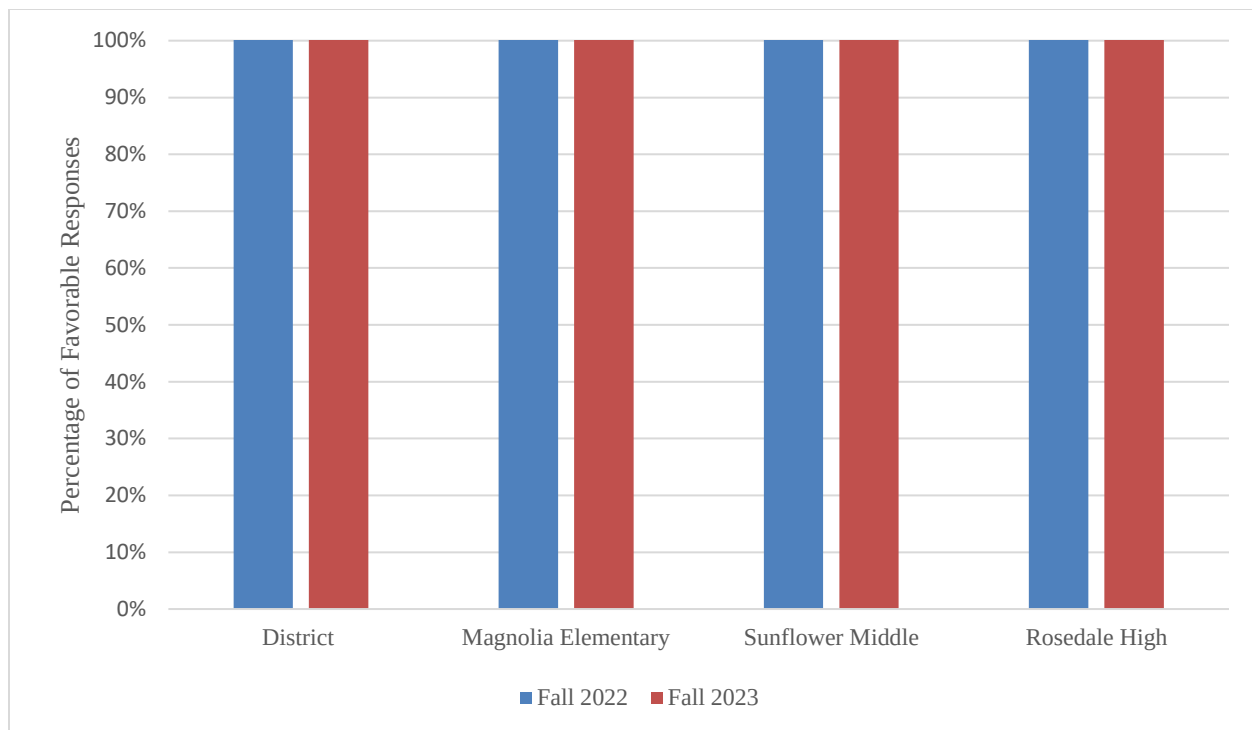


Figure 16. Favorable responses to the survey question: In the past week, how often did you feel *safe* at work?

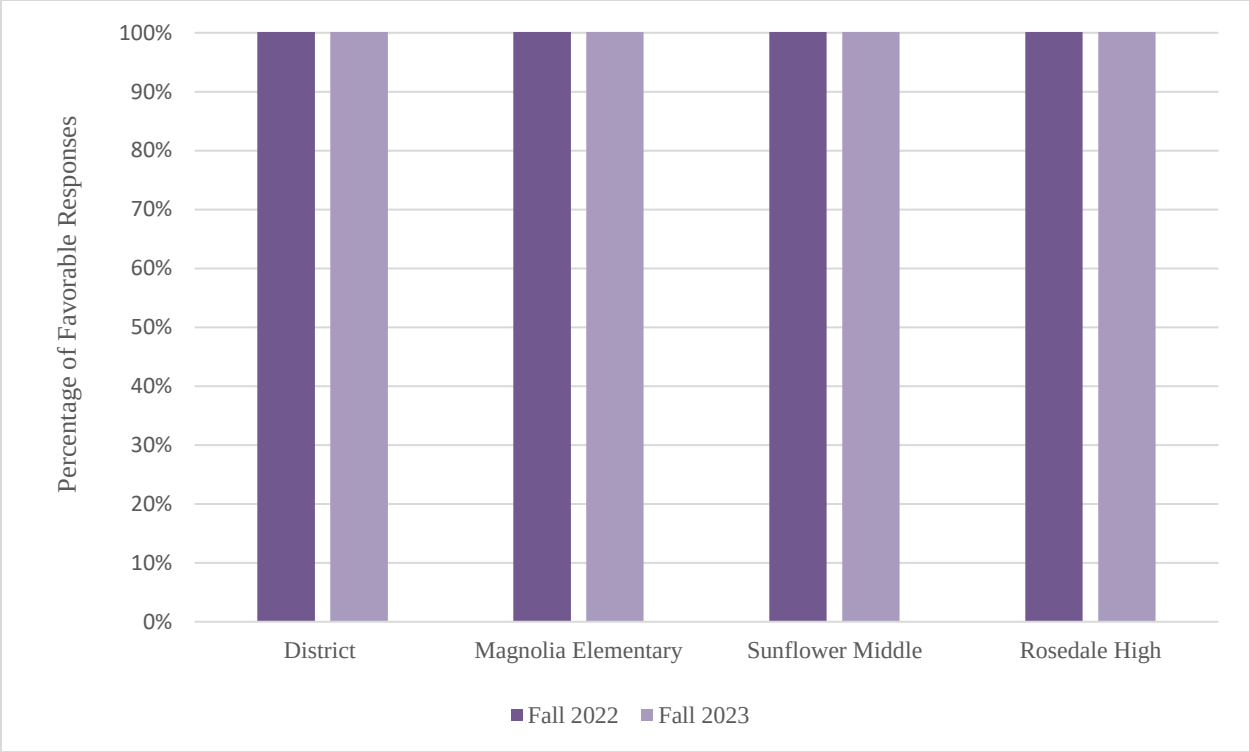


Figure 17. Favorable responses to the survey question: Overall, how *satisfied* are you with your job right now?

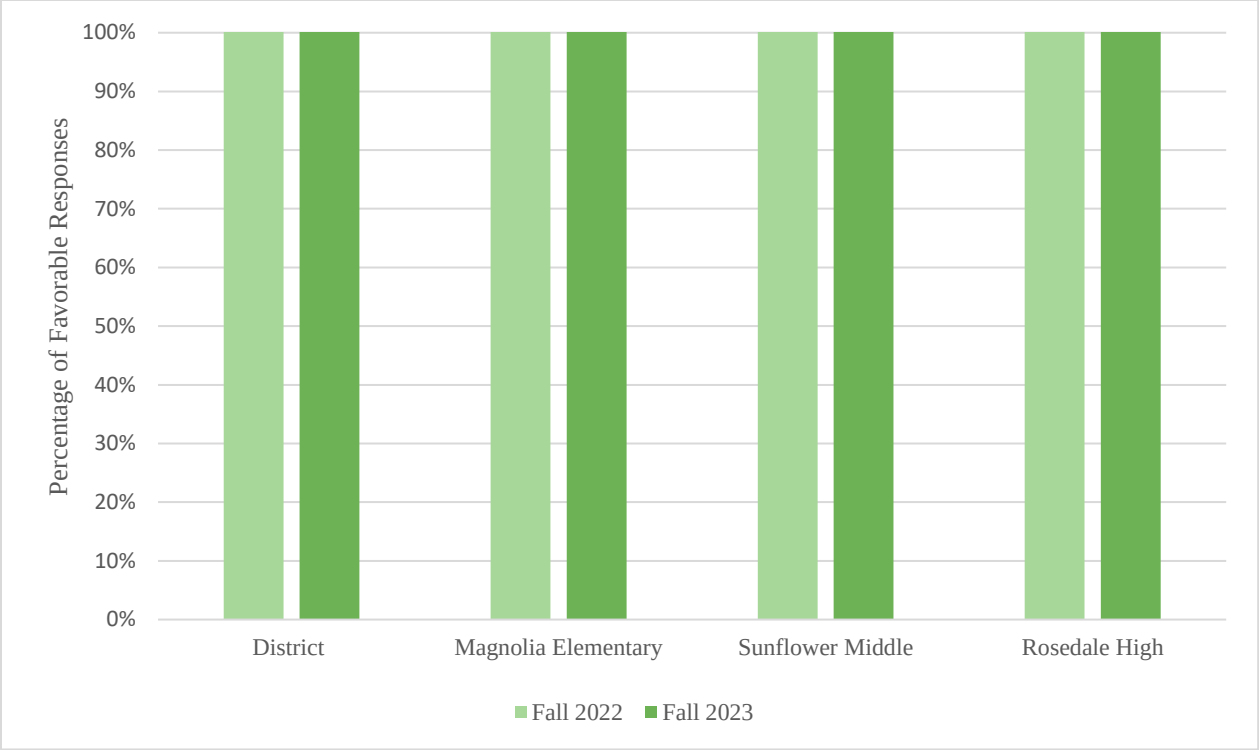


Figure 18. Favorable responses to the survey question: In the past week, how often did you feel *exhausted* at work?

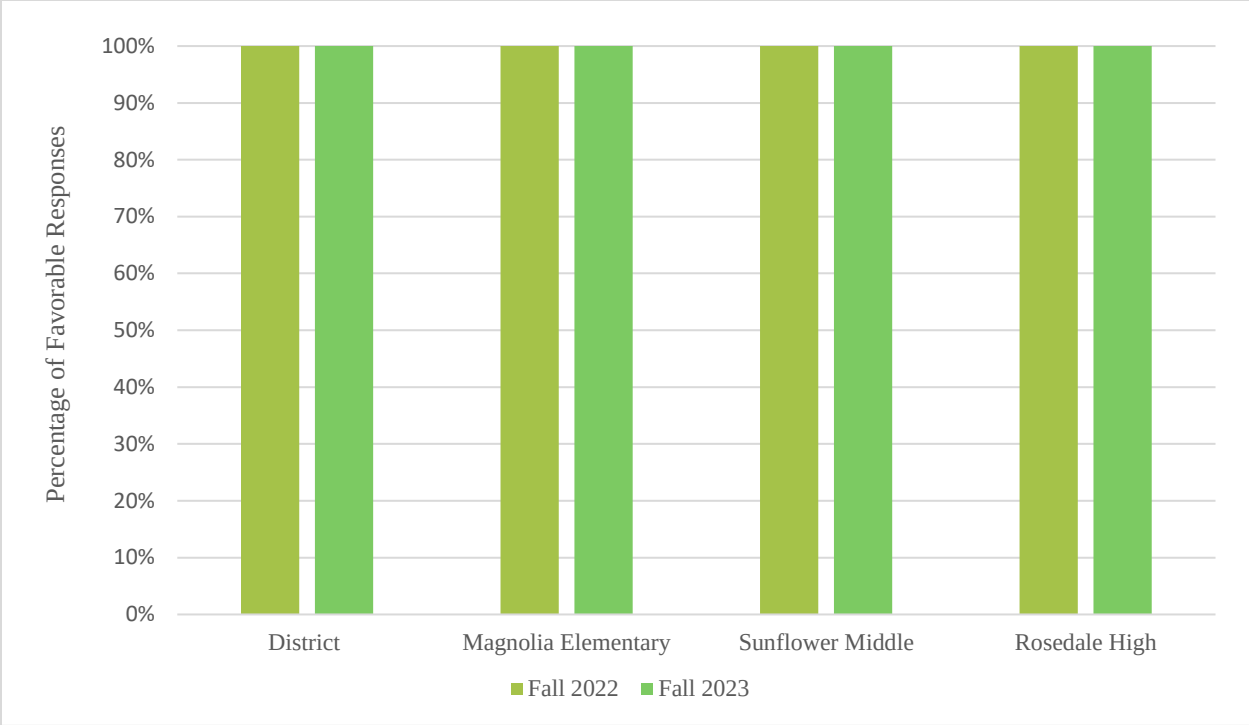


Figure 19. Favorable responses to the survey question: In the past week, how often did you feel *excited* at work?

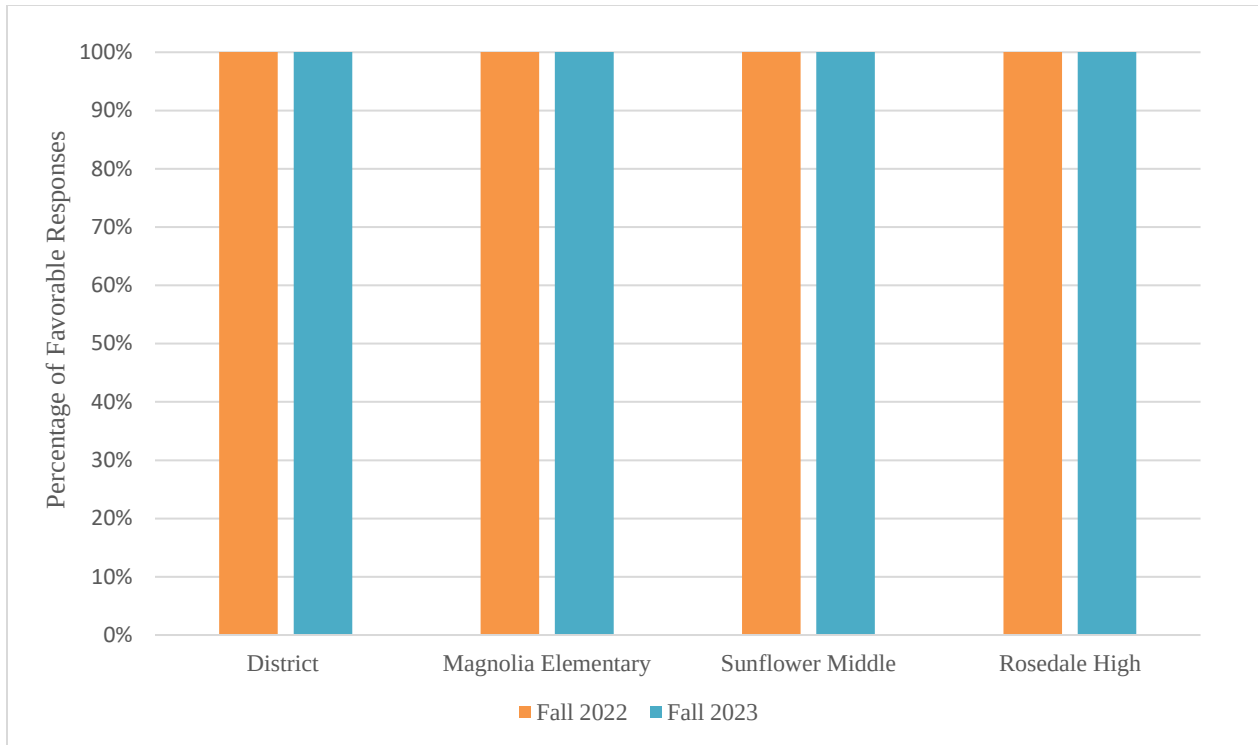
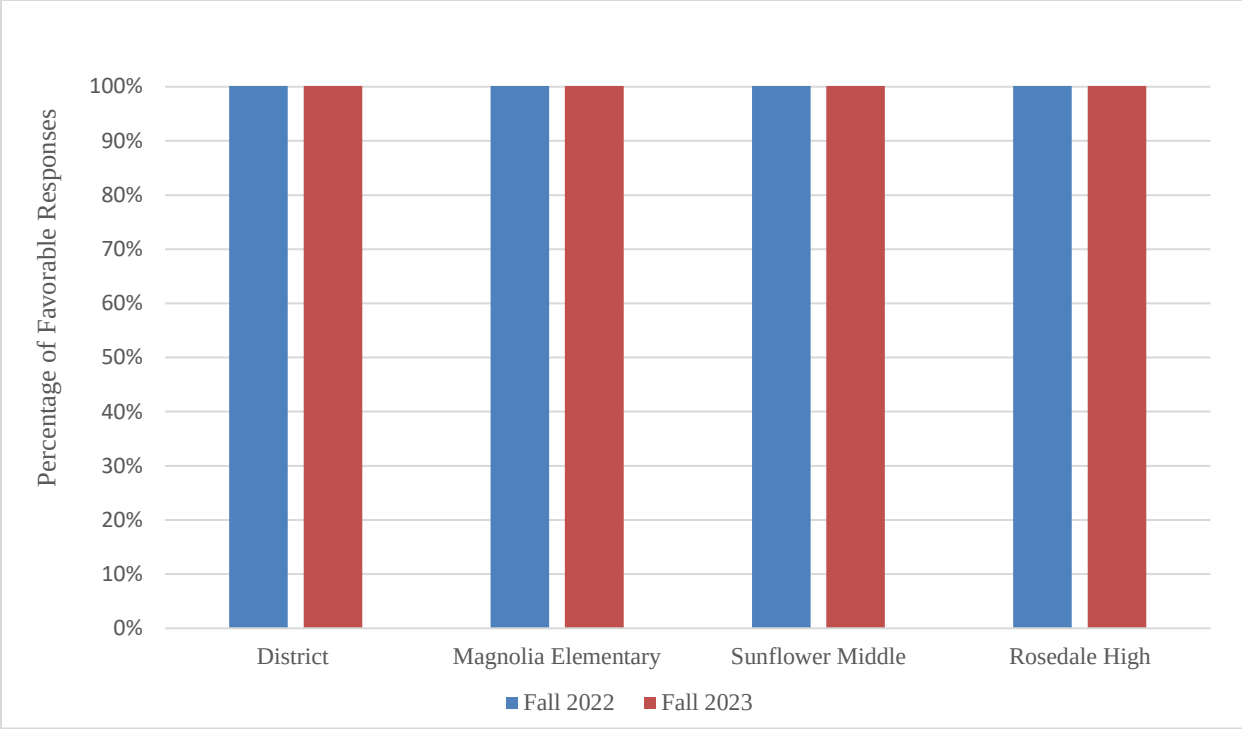


Figure 20. Favorable responses to the survey question: How much does your work *matter* to you?



*Figure 21. Favorable responses to the survey question: How *meaningful* is the work you do?*

Table 14

Teachers' "Favorable" Response Rates to Individual Questions – Sunflower Middle Comparison

Survey Question	Sunflower Fall 2022	Sunflower Fall 2023
Overall	71%	68%
During the past week, how often did you feel <i>engaged</i> at work?	88%	75%
During the past week, how often did you feel <i>excited</i> at work?	96%	83%
During the past week, how often did you feel <i>exhausted</i> at work?	13%	8%
During the past week, how often did you feel <i>frustrated</i> at work?	83%	75%
During the past week, how often did you feel <i>happy</i> at work?	75%	75%
During the past week, how often did you feel <i>hopeful</i> at work?	75%	58%
During the past week, how often did you feel <i>overwhelmed</i> at work?	35%	25%
During the past week, how often did you feel <i>safe</i> at work?	67%	58%
During the past week, how often did you feel <i>stressed out</i> at work?	75%	83%
During the past week, how often did you feel <i>worried</i> at work?	87%	100%
How <i>effective</i> do you feel at your job right now?	48%	50%
How much does your work <i>matter</i> to you?	91%	100%
How <i>meaningful</i> for you is the work you do?	96%	92%
Overall, how <i>satisfied</i> are you with your job right now?	70%	67%

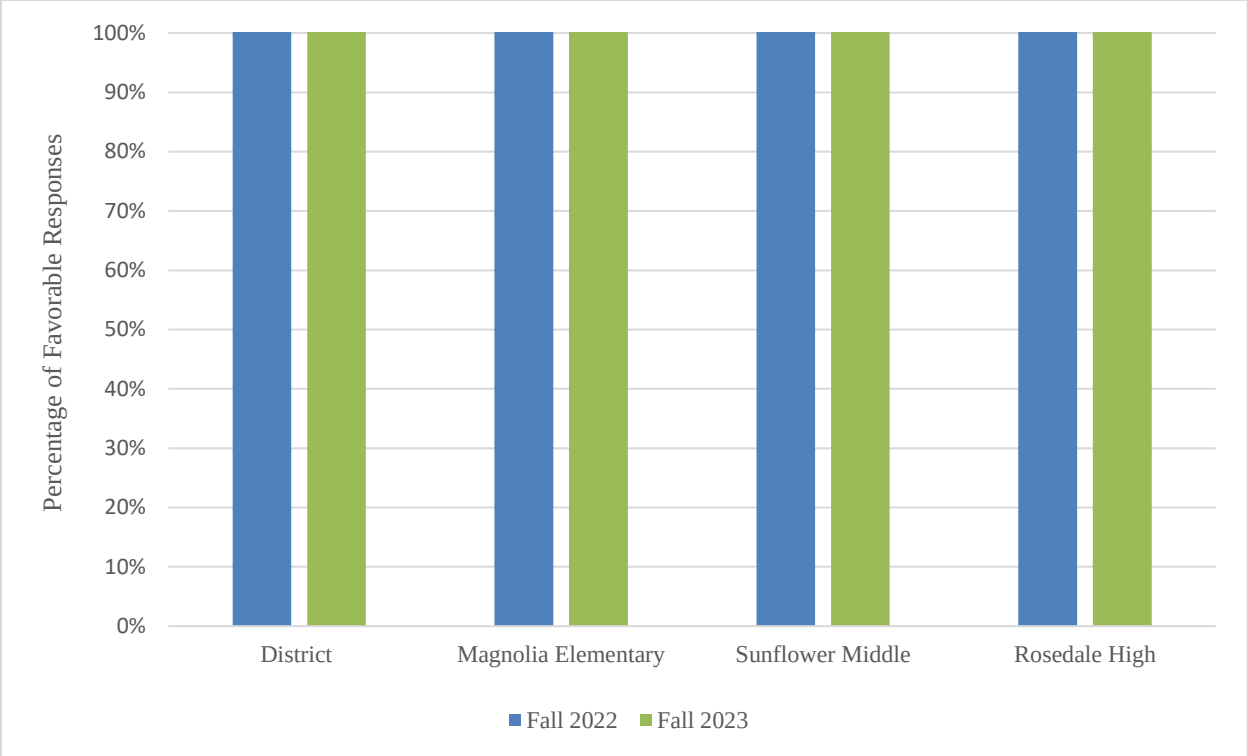


Figure 22. Favorable responses to the survey question: In the past week, how often did you feel hopeful at work?

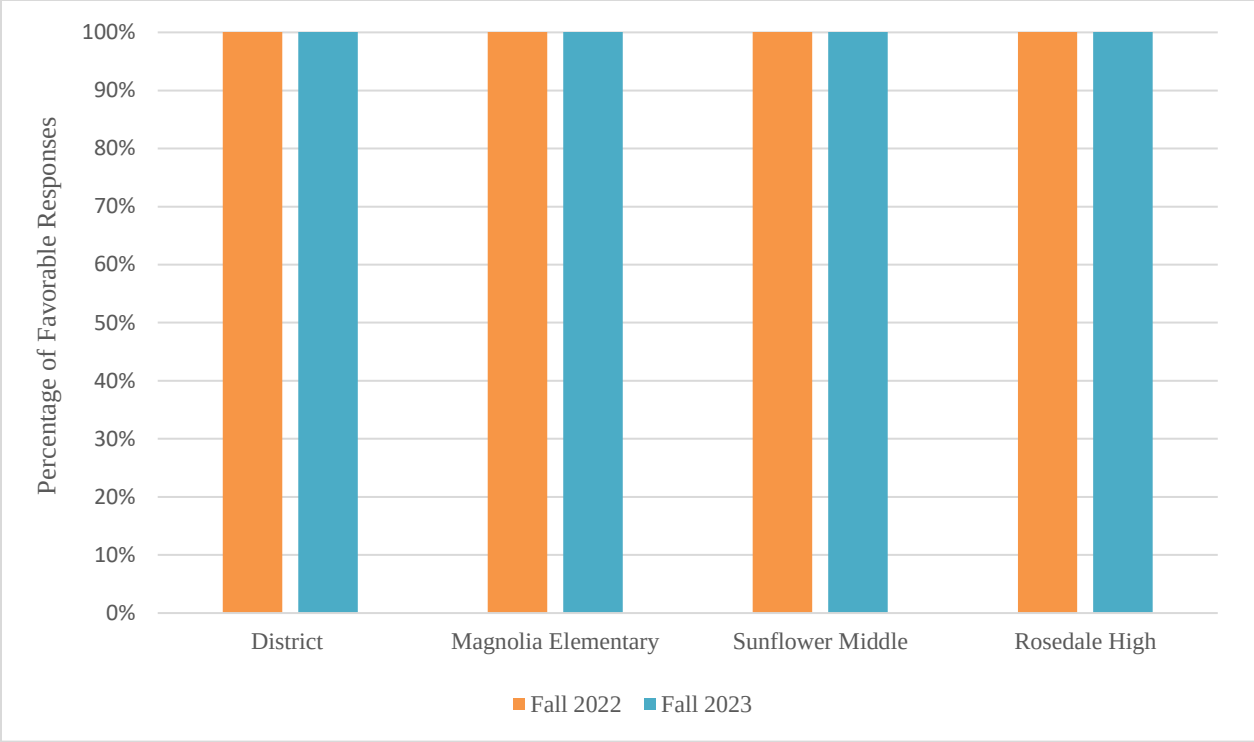
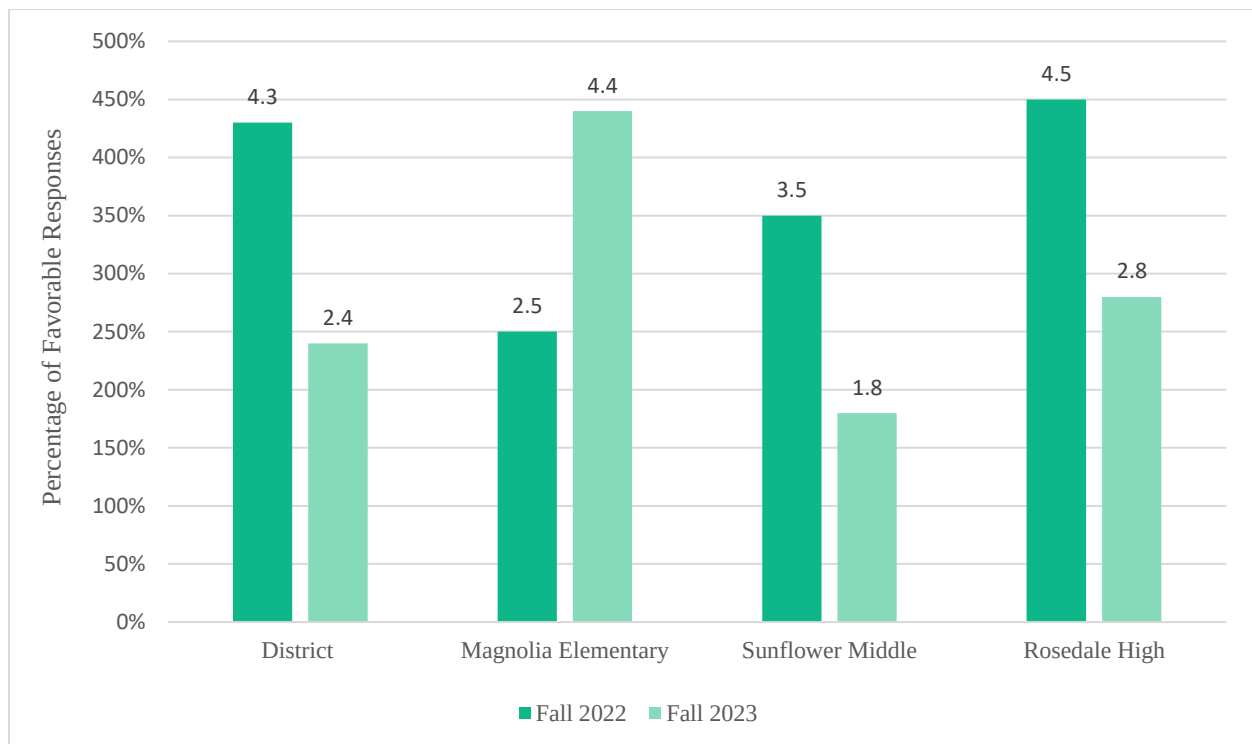


Figure 23. Favorable responses to the survey question: In the past week, how often did you feel overwhelmed at work?



*Figure 24. Favorable responses to the survey question: In the past week, how often did you feel *frustrated* at work?*

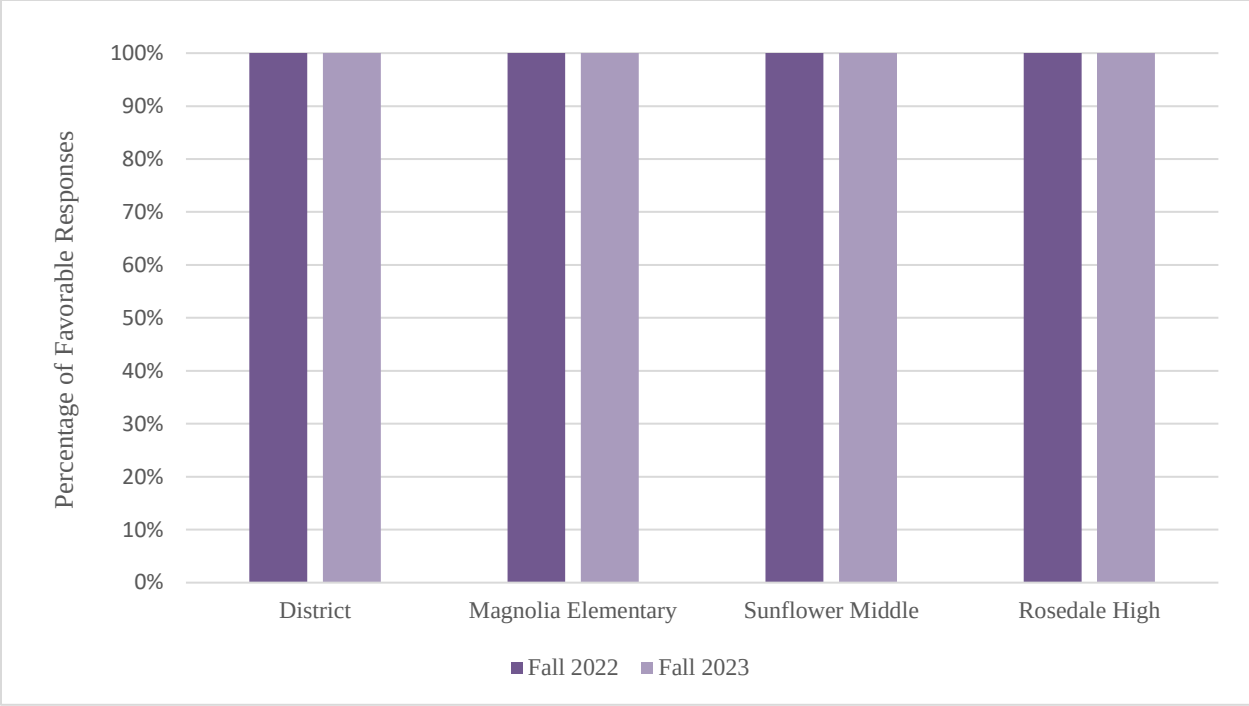


Figure 25. Favorable responses to the survey question: In the past week, how often did you feel stressed at work?

fall of 2023 (see Figure 26), These data points could indicate a continued positive atmosphere regarding these measurements.

Overall, the responses show a stable environment at Sunflower Middle School, with only minor fluctuations in favorable response rates across different survey questions. Teachers consistently reported high levels of excitement, happiness, and hopefulness at work, as well as indicating the importance (see Figure 20) and meaningfulness (see Figure 21) of their work. The data indicates a generally stable and positive environment at Sunflower Middle School, with slight decreases in overall satisfaction and engagement.

The data represented in Table 15 indicates the teachers' "favorable" response rates to well-being survey questions at Rosedale High School, comparing the fall of 2022 and the fall of 2023. The analysis of this data can provide insights into the changes in teacher well-being, engagement, and job satisfaction within the specific context of Rosedale High School. The overall favorable response rate decreased slightly from 64% in the fall 2022 to 61% in the fall of 2023, and are compatible with a district favorable response of 62% (see Table 12). Additionally, there were slight decreases in favorable responses related to feeling engaged (see Figure 14), job satisfaction (see Figure 17), excited (see Figure 19), and hopeful (see Figure 22). Comparatively, the favorable responses related to teachers feeling exhausted (see Figure 18), overwhelmed (see Figure 23), frustrated (see Figure 24), and worried (see Figure 26) while at work, remained stable with only minor fluctuations.

Conversely, the category of feeling stressed out at work (see Figure 25) experienced a 7% increase in favorable responses, and the feeling of safety at work increased from 48% in the fall of 2022 to 60% in the fall of 2023 (see Figure 16). Overall, the educators at Rosedale High

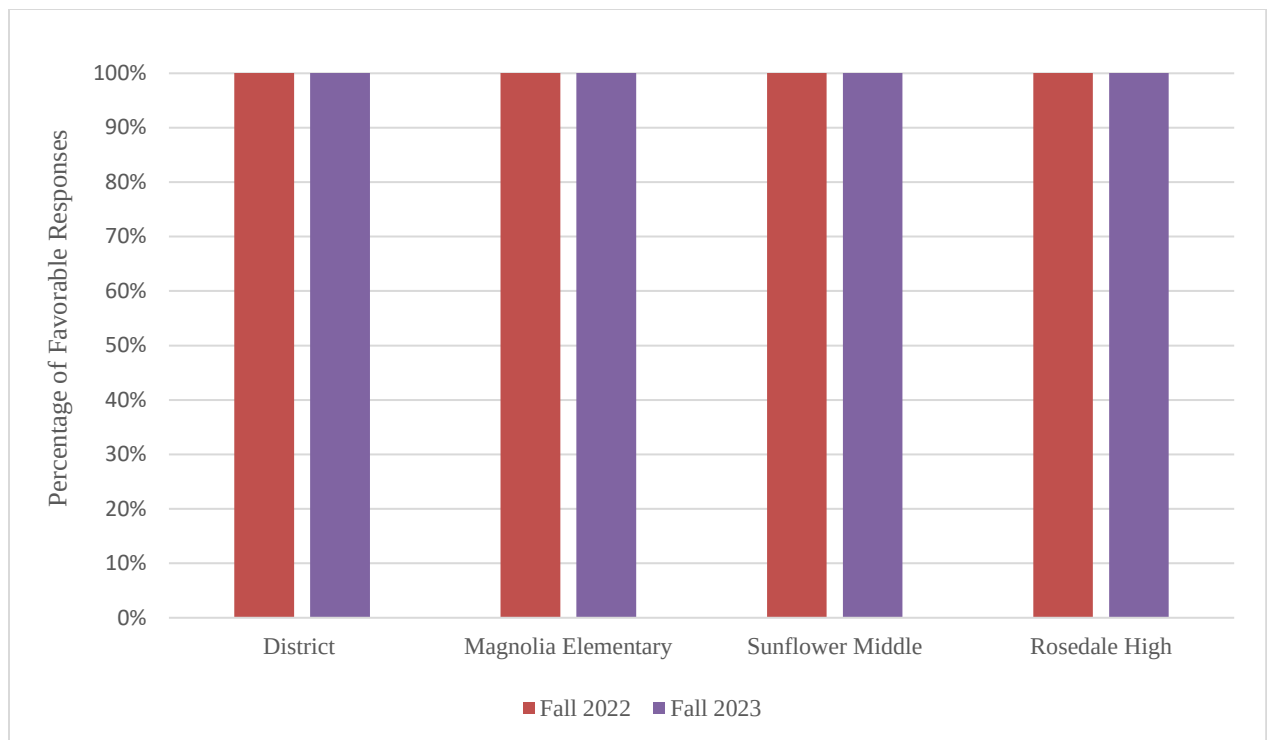


Figure 26. Favorable responses to the survey question: In the past week, how often did you feel worried at work?

School reported a 9% increase in favorable responses of feeling happy while at work (see Figure 15), which improved to 80% and was almost 20% higher than the district data for this category. The categories of feeling excited and engaged at work, also achieved an 80% favorable response rate (both categories did experience a slight decline from the 2022 survey as previously noted).

Teachers' favorable responses for the meaningfulness of their work (93%) (see Figure 21), the importance of their work (93%) (see Figure 20), and the perceived effectiveness at their job (60%) (see Figure 27), experienced slight declines from the 2022 survey, but also sustained a relatively high positive outcome that is compatible with or higher than district data for these categories. Overall, the data outlined in Table 15 indicates a slight decrease in overall teacher satisfaction and engagement at Rosedale High School from the fall of 2022 to the fall of 2023.

First Phase of Focus Groups (Winter 2023)

The initial series of focus group sessions, which launched in the winter of 2023, were focused on extracting insight from educators regarding the first district-level educator well-being survey (see Appendix F). Additionally, these sessions provided a platform for educators to express their viewpoints, and an in-depth exploration into various facets and perceptions of well-being. The overarching objective of these focus groups was to delve into the various interpretations of well-being by teachers. This process involved evaluating the dynamics among school leadership, the prevailing school culture, and the potential stressors embedded in the educational environment that may impact educators' well-being. These discussions also included the identification of potential practices and resources necessary for supporting educator wellness at the school level. Simultaneously, the focus groups served as a forum for gathering feedback on potential district-wide strategies and resources which may foster a collaborative environment conducive to continuous improvement.

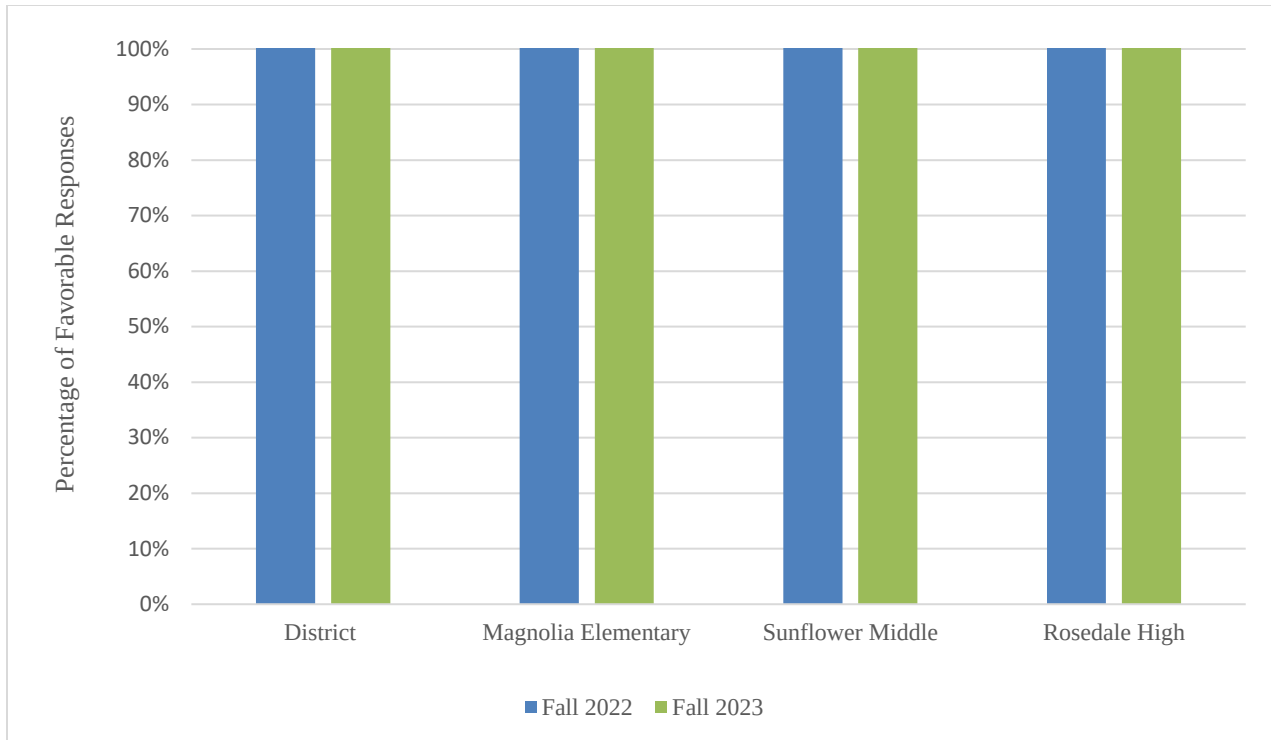


Figure 27. Favorable responses to the survey question: How *effective* do you feel at your job right now?

Table 15

Teachers' "Favorable" Response Rates to Individual Questions – Rosedale High Comparison

Survey Question	Rosedale Fall 2022	Rosedale Fall 2023
Overall	64%	61%
During the past week, how often did you feel <i>engaged</i> at work?	86%	80%
During the past week, how often did you feel <i>excited</i> at work?	95%	80%
During the past week, how often did you feel <i>exhausted</i> at work?	14%	13%
During the past week, how often did you feel <i>frustrated</i> at work?	67%	60%
During the past week, how often did you feel <i>happy</i> at work?	71%	80%
During the past week, how often did you feel <i>hopeful</i> at work?	48%	47%
During the past week, how often did you feel <i>overwhelmed</i> at work?	29%	27%
During the past week, how often did you feel <i>safe</i> at work?	48%	60%
During the past week, how often did you feel <i>stressed out</i> at work?	40%	47%
During the past week, how often did you feel <i>worried</i> at work?	76%	67%
How <i>effective</i> do you feel at your job right now?	62%	60%
How much does your work <i>matter</i> to you?	100%	93%
How <i>meaningful</i> for you is the work you do?	95%	93%
Overall, how <i>satisfied</i> are you with your job right now?	67%	53%

The qualitative outcomes stemming from these focus group discussions played a pivotal role in shaping the initial district-wide plan to enhance the social-emotional health and overall well-being of educators. The collection of educators' perspectives and experiences laid the groundwork for a more targeted approach that was also reflective of the nuanced challenges encountered by educators in their daily professional lives. These focus groups emerged as a cornerstone in the ongoing district initiative to cultivate a supportive and respectful environment to cultivate educator wellness. Focus group sessions were recorded and transcribed through the use of Microsoft Teams.

To conduct a thorough analysis of the qualitative data derived from focus group interviews, I employed an inductive coding method to evaluate the transcripts. I utilized a multi-tiered coding approach to pinpoint significant codes, categories, and themes embedded in the data. Through the first-stage coding process, the codes of educational practices, community support, stress, belonging, emotional support, standardized testing, workload, administrative decision-making, communication, student behavior, student engagement, support (from administrators and the district), and professional growth (students and staff) were consistently apparent across all three pilot school data. Beyond the initial coding, I conducted second-level, or focused coding, to scrutinize the data more thoroughly and establish categories. The synthesis of information at a more comprehensive level through thematic coding, resulted in the identification of the emergent themes that included: the importance of being a part of a supportive and cohesive school community; the necessity of providing educators with a deeper understanding of the factors that impact the social-emotional and mental health of students and the connection to being an effective classroom educator; and the impact of positive school leadership practices (see Figure 28).

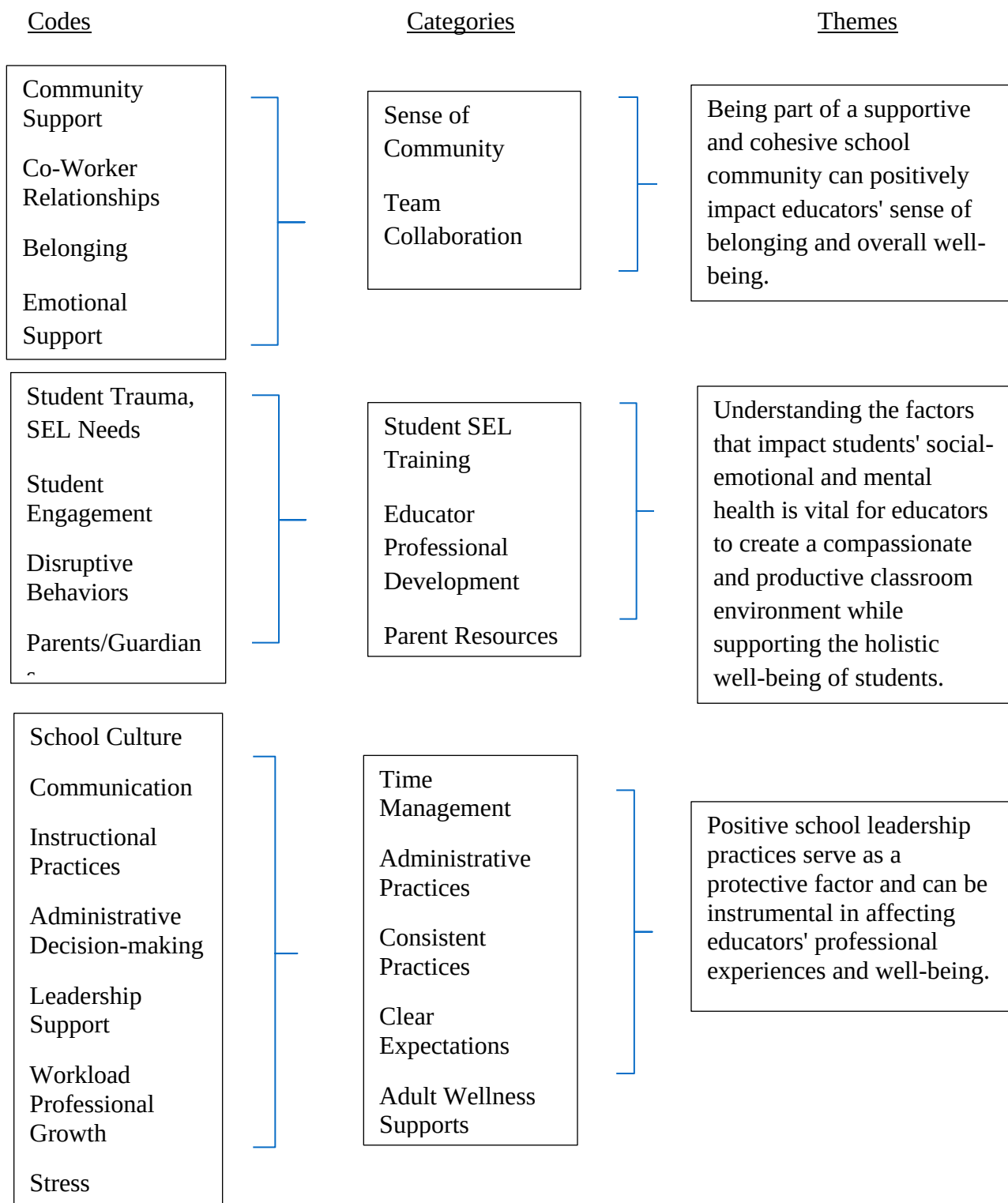


Figure 28. Coding scheme – First Phase of Focus Groups.

Theme 1: Being Part of a Supportive and Cohesive School Community Can Positively Impact Educators' Sense of Belonging and Overall Well-Being

When asked to define “well-being,” focus group participants across all pilot schools responded similarly with their holistic perception of this term, which included a focus on stress reduction, mental, social, emotional, physical, and spiritual health. Lindsey stated that “you can’t have well-being if you’re not taking care of the entire person.” Finley stated that to her, well-being was about “health and happiness,” while Harley, Londyn, and Charley all shared the importance of taking responsibility for their self-care. Krystal recognized “if the people you work with aren’t taking care of themselves mentally, spiritually, physically, to help them decompress, then I think it does rub off on everyone else.” Macy shared the importance of placing an intentional focus on educator well-being and “it should be as much a priority as the concern for student well-being.”

When discussing the greatest sources of stress for educators, the concerns around time management were reoccurring across Magnolia Elementary, Sunflower Middle, and Rosedale High Schools. Aubrey shared “there is never enough time for everything. I’ve done this six to six [6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.] plenty of times and I still take it [work] home.” According to Londyn, it is “all the expectations I need to meet. It seems like I can never meet them all in a day.” Merary stated that “it’s a never ending ‘to do’ list. I feel like there’s never enough time in any day, teacher workdays, or not teacher workdays, to get anything done, and that’s one of the most aggravating things.” Hudson shared that “all of the unknowns as a first-year teacher” and managing these successfully were stressful for him. Bundled with general time management concerns, were that of managing the multiple instructional expectations of classroom teachers. Melony shared a regular sense of guilt:

Because I feel like I'm not doing enough for the kids...I'm not communicating enough with the parents...and then on top of this to get grades done and get stuff in the book...and try to teach kids throughout the day. The programs [curriculum resources], that's been the hardest part for me, they keep changing and we have so much to do.

Kyler expressed concern around the additional work required to meet individual student needs. "You have to take all this time outside of school to get these interventions planned, get the necessary materials together, because these interventions don't just make themselves." Charley shared that she was "giving, and giving, and giving... working from home, staying late, until I realized I couldn't. I wasn't enjoying myself. I wasn't enjoying my job, I was not taking care of myself... I was pouring from an empty cup." Suzie shared how stressful it is to meet the needs of each student. "All these kids need to grow [academically] not just the kids needing interventions." Inquiry participants consistently shared their concerns for meeting the unique needs of each student.

Coupled with the concerns around managing the instructional needs of students, multiple inquiry participants shared their perspective on the demands of state testing requirements. Joseph said,

Whether it's Lily Valley County Schools, or pick a school system, it's all about the testing stuff... that's every place across the state and it's all public schools. As long as they continue to focus on this, we're gonna be behind the eight ball. In my opinion, when we focus on that stuff [testing] you're missing the point. If you can get kids to buy into their future, buy into themselves, take ownership in it, the rest of that stuff [testing] will work itself out. Change that culture... make them [students] love to be at school... buy into their education... show them they have a future, and they will grasp it and own it.

Anastasia shared that she enjoys the flexibility of not teaching subjects that require a state exam. “It’s a blessing I’m not a state tested teacher...talk about one of the biggest stressors. Our goal as educators is to produce productive members of society [guiding students to higher education or a trade] ...it’s about them making a good life for themselves.” Lindsey expressed the impact to her personally teaching classes that were state tested versus teacher made exams. “I actually didn’t realize until our scores came back how stressful it was. It was like a weight off my shoulders... we did pretty good... it was at that moment I realized how stressed I had been.” Noelle shared:

I’ve had a breakdown a few times... I think I felt like quitting four times. I’ve been told ‘don’t worry about it,’ but at the end of the year, we gather for our final staff meeting and test scores are displayed...and to some people who just look at that final number, it’s not enough. But if you go deeper with where we came from [growing students academically], it is [enough].

The inquiry participants at each of the pilot schools shared strategies for supporting their well-being personally and professionally. Several inquiry partners identified the importance of creating boundaries between their work as an educator and their personal lives. Krystal shared that “I’ve given myself a cut off time. The latest I stay at school is 4:45 and then my laptop is closed...some days I leave it [at school] so that I’m not tempted to take it home and open it up.” Londyn identified with a need to make healthier lifestyle changes after a recent doctor’s visit. “They told me I was prediabetic [she is small in stature and surprised by this diagnosis] ...I’m eating healthier, going to gym more... I’ve definitely felt the difference. On my days off, I try to do things for me [not work].” Merary shared that she is a martial artist. “I train almost every single night...it’s therapy to and punch bags and relieve stress.” Hudson recognized that “venting

with his colleagues...talking it out” helps him as a new teacher. Additionally, he noted the significance of “improving my teaching methods...growing my confidence [as a teacher] does alleviate stress and help with my well-being.” Joseph expressed the importance of pre-planning for each week. “I spend 3-4 hours prepping on Fridays for the following week,” and the impact to his mental outlook. “I’ve got a good attitude coming in... and this gets me through the week because everything is set up the way it needs to be.” Anastasia noted the importance of “emotionally compartmentalizing” her work as an educator. “I have started shelving my emotions to where I am very regimented and then I give myself times to feel deeply.” Lindsey concurred with Anastasia about the importance of giving yourself time to absorb and assess feelings. “Sometimes you just need a good cry, and you feel better afterwards...obviously you can’t do this every day, but it is good to give yourself a moment to feel deeply.”

Across each of the inquiry sites, the significance of a healthy team rapport and supportive school culture were communicated as integral variables that can positively impact educator wellness and connectedness to their schools. According to Noelle, “I think having a great team to work with is one of the best things about our school. As a school we do come together... You can’t stick within your four walls and be okay...we work in a collaborative career.” Lindsey attributed a positive school culture to the well-being of teachers, stating “it’s harder to say how it’s [school culture] not connected to it...we are social creatures.” She compared the impact of a school culture where teachers are not allowed to have “bad days... can’t take time [off], have to follow that standard” versus an environment where “you can take a mental health day... a moment to yourself, and stressing the importance of what you surround yourself with.” Matthew believes “great environments are built,” and the importance of “everyone rowing in the same direction.” He [enthusiastically] shared that he is working in a school that “everyone is moving

in the right direction... this is one of the better cultures I've worked in, and I hope that's the way it is in other places." Krystal praised the camaraderie she has with her team. "My team is awesome; I love my team and wouldn't trade them for anything in the world...everybody in this building will lend a helping hand no matter what...so for me that makes it feel like we are family." Hudson shared that he feels "like I belong...I feel really included here." Charley conveyed she previously taught in another school and "the culture was not what it is here [current school]," and it was one of the main reasons for leaving her last school. "My well-being was not well." Harley expressed that "this is such a good school culture we work in, it makes you want to come to work, to be here." Inquiry participants established the significance of team camaraderie and a nurturing school culture as factors that can have a positive influence on educators' well-being and their sense of connection to their schools. Inquiry participants recognized that each school year can bring a new dynamic or shift in their school culture from the previous year. Melony noted that as a first-year teacher, she sometimes feels like "I'm on an island" [teaching partner in the same content area was a long-term substitute], and the difficulty of not having a strong team, and "it's hard to come in with a positive mindset and feel like your well-being is taken care of." Kyler concurred, noting that there has been a change in the dynamic with her teaching team from last school year. Last school year "was great and why I came here... we worked together as a team." This school year, "we have not worked as well together... a complete flip and I don't know why, but I now feel like isolating myself to do my own thing." Aubrey stated "it can be really stressful and difficult...fairly unnerving and overwhelming" when there is not a collaborative team partnership in place. Harley compared her beginning experiences at the same school to where she is now several years later.

I was coming to school, opening my closet door, and crying every day. I didn't want to be here, and to now... a place where I enjoy coming to work because I enjoy who I work with... now it's a joy to come [to school], it has changed.

Inquiry participants further conveyed that a positive work environment is paramount, and it can significantly impact the overall well-being and mental health of employees. Hudson shared that the right school culture can “provide a supportive foundation [for teachers] and it eases some of the general factors of stress that teachers deal with every day.” Merary commented that “culture has a big impact on the well-being of teachers...it needs to be everyone is on the same team, with the same agenda, and it's easier to go to work and do your job if that is the case.” Lindsey noted the importance and impact of the relationships with her teaching team and school teams. “You can't separate it, you can't come in at 7:30, leave at the end of the day and not talk with anyone, not have relationships with anybody and be your best self...you can't, you have to have it.” Anastasia added:

If you think about what makes people say they love a job. It's the stuff like a good work environment...being able to have balance... have good relationships with the people you work with. I feel a sense of belonging and family, like I am doing good work, and it makes an impact...having connections [with others] and every aspect really does make a huge difference.

Theme 2: Understanding the Factors that Impact Students' Social-Emotional and Mental Health is Vital for Educators to Create a Compassionate and Productive Classroom Environment while Supporting the Holistic Well-Being of Students

Inquiry participants recognized the potential for a vicarious connection between their students' social-emotional health and their own well-being. Krystal made a connection to the

COVID-19 Pandemic and impact on her well-being. “Students have faced a lot of challenges...I take on my student’s stress. I don’t get frustrated unless I see the frustration in my students...it is the social and emotional aspects of my students that stresses me out the most.” She also noted that she feels capable in meeting the social, emotional, and academic needs of her students, “but there’s only so much a classroom teacher can do.” Lindsey asserted it is personally challenging for her to meet the academic, social, and emotional needs of her students. “Since COVID, mental health has become more of an issue. Could you completely take care of all student needs? I wish I could say I feel confident that I’m able to do this, but there’s so many barriers.” Noelle concurred with Krystal’s perspective and feels that the demands of meeting the instructional priorities coupled with the wellness of students, brings a continuing level of angst. “We take on so much...the anxiety just keeps going and going because of what more can I do? Why can’t I reach this kid who is out of control?” Educators in this inquiry repeatedly shared they sometimes struggle prioritizing the expected and unwritten expectations of managing their classrooms.

For some inquiry participants, there can be the perception there is no separation between their personal lives and their work lives. Noelle added that this aspect of her position “takes a toll on me physically, emotionally, like I don’t know how teachers have families, you know [she shared she is single and no children].” Macy stated that:

It’s constant worry... my mind does not cut off even when I’m at home...it’s like you are not thinking about your own life. You’re definitely very exhausted... it’s not just a physical exhaustion, it’s a mental thing, an emotional thing. It hits you all different types of ways.

Matthew shared that he “definitely can connect with kids.” He shared a scenario about a student sleeping regularly in his class each morning. Speaking with the student, Matthew learned the

student was working a job every night until 1:00 a.m. to help support his family, and he was exhausted. Matthew shared the significance of taking necessary steps to “make that connection with kids, with what is going on with them emotionally... and no adult should see what some of these young people see. The fact they know we care makes a difference.” Joseph shared that he has “focused on the social-emotional growth [of students] ever since COVID, and I buy into it immensely. You pretty much gotta have a psychology degree and experience to understand where these kids are coming from.” Londyn shared “as a whole, if the students are good, then I’m good. If I’m not doing good, the students are probably not gonna be doing good.” Inquiry participants continually recognized the weight of supporting the social-emotional health of their students. Hudson determined that he feels “somewhat capable” in meeting the comprehensive needs (social, emotional, academic) of his students and is concerned about the personal impact to his own wellness. “I feel like I will stress myself out [trying to do this long-term]. Trying to understand each individual student, it takes time and effort, it takes energy out of us as individuals... it can impact your [personal] well-being.” Harley emphasized that educators are known for “always thinking about” their students, even when outside of work hours. Due to the competing demands of her teaching responsibilities and the personal needs of her students, Melony emphasized the many times “I left school crying. I didn’t feel like I did a good job [teaching students and meeting their needs] ... there are days I feel so defeated, like they [students] don’t view me as someone they can come to and trust.” This “never ending” concern and focus on student well-being can be at times consuming and sometimes mentally and physically draining for educators.

Finding the time to address the social, emotional, and mental health of students was a reoccurring challenge shared by inquiry participants. Charley and Aubrey agreed they both feel

capable in meeting the social-emotional needs of their students, but “there’s never enough time” to do this well. Aubrey added “it’s rough when you have to cut off a kid” [sharing a personal story] in order to keep things flowing in the classroom. Lindsey stressed there are many things they [teachers] can’t control. “I have no idea what [needs] students are bringing in with them, and you can’t control it, but you might feed off of it.” Noelle emphasized the significance of not knowing where students come from [their life experiences], what happened that morning, or last night. They bring it all to you because they’re just kids and they don’t know what to do with it.” Participants in the inquiry consistently highlighted the recurring challenge of allocating time to attend to the social, emotional, and mental health needs of students.

Theme 3: Positive School Leadership Practices Serve as a Protective Factor and Can Be Instrumental in Affecting Educators' Professional Experiences and Well-Being

Inquiry participants were asked to rate, on a scale of one (low) to five (high), the level of support they have received from their school leadership. For the context of this inquiry, leadership was defined as school leadership to include the school principal, assistant principal(s), members of the school improvement team, leadership team, or teacher leaders. Across Magnolia Elementary, Sunflower Middle, and Rosedale High Schools, the overall responses resulted in a mean score of 4.16. Londyn recognized the importance “that all teachers have the same expectations, and yet there is leniency because we know that teachers can be seen as superheroes, but we can’t do it all.” She elaborated that her administration is “very helpful,” anything “I need to better myself as an educator, or personally, like if I need to take a day off, they are very supportive of teacher needs.” Hudson stressed that his administrators have “done their best to assist me with help for my lesson plans, behavior management in my classroom, how to improve my social skills when talking to parents, some engagement skills within my

classroom content... they try their best.” Merary gave her administrators a “5” noting a connection to the level of support she has received and her overall well-being. She shared that “this is the second administration I have worked under [at her present school] and I feel like my well-being has increased significantly since [they began] and I think I wouldn’t be the only person who believes that.” Joseph agreed that his well-being is connected to the support he receives from his administration team. “If you feel supported, you feel like you are doing something viable, and you are buying into what you are doing as a teacher that much more. You gotta have that support.” Krystal gave her administration team high marks when it came to supporting her with a personal matter. She stressed the importance of school leaders authentically supporting their staff in prioritizing personal needs when necessary and that they “see you as humans and not just robots or just bodies in the classroom.” This sentiment on administrative support in balancing personal and work lives of educators was recurring across this inquiry.

When the educators in these pilot schools are feeling stressed or overwhelmed, they shared multiple leadership practices that have proven beneficial to them. Merary shared that her administration “have high expectations of us, but they’re also willing to put in the work to get there. If I need help with anything, I can always feel comfortable to ask, and they are visible, out and about.” Merary also felt it was important she share this level of support is in contrast to the practices of the previous administration at her school. Matthew believes “we have an exceptional leadership team. They are empathetic to the students and to me as a person.” He stated that the level of structure and that the rules are clear to everyone. Additionally, Matthew noted that as a “culture, I feel like I’m valued, and they care about me. I have a very strong and positive view [of working at his school].” Lindsey noted the importance of being able to speak to a member of

the school leadership team when she was feeling a lot of stress. “I knew whoever I went to talk with was going to have my back, going to be supportive and empathetic of whatever I had to say.” Anastasia stated that “anything I needed they would do whatever was in their power to help me, especially as a beginning teacher. That was great for me and took a lot of stress off.”

Lindsey feels “them [administrative team] being present around the school, and not cloistered away in their offices” is beneficial. “Our administrators stop and ask how are you doing... are you feeling better.. how was the trip we went on...” Anastasia recognized that her administrators have an “adaptable leadership style,” and they don’t micromanage her work, but “offer constructive feedback, and allow her to “be myself in my classroom, and I don’t have to take my personality and put it in a box... I think this helps with my productivity.”

Other inquiry participants identified there are times when school leadership practices may have conflicted with their personal expectations and increased their levels of stress. Noelle identified the need to be recognized as the “expert in her classroom and over her content area.” She stated she doesn’t “feel supported in this area, especially when going to administration with recommendations.

Nine times out of ten, I’ve been shot down [with no explanation as to why]. If someone would come back to me with why [my ideas] won’t work... fine. But I think just like the students need to know why, we also need to know why... The rationality is sometimes missing and I that’s frustrating to us.

However, Noelle did share that the “emotional support from our leaders has been phenomenal... I feel comfortable enough [to share] whether it’s directed towards them or just something in general.” Suzie shared that when she first started teaching, she felt that the administrator at that time would:

Find someone to pick on and my first year it was me. I came to school every day crying, I told my husband I wanted to quit, I don't want to do this anymore, because of the way this administrator made me feel for two years. I changed grade levels and then this administrator loved me, I felt great, I loved coming to work. I was now looked at like I was doing what I was supposed be doing... teaching these kids as I should, whereas before, this administrator made me feel like I was doing everything wrong. I felt so much better as a teacher and a person.

Macy discussed her school leadership team and that things are "proposed on a school level."

Noelle identified an opportunity with her school leadership team in that they get asked about "any concerns we have, nothing about any positives. I think something that can change is definitely what can we do to make things positive versus [a focus on] what is wrong."

Finley, Suzie, and Charley recognized the impact of the instructional teacher leader at their schools and the importance of this position when there are changes with school leadership, or as a result of the demands placed on school administration. Finley stated that sometimes "she is the glue that's holding everything together." Finley further clarified this teacher leader is effective at providing teachers with advance communication on what their priorities should be. "She's a leader, she is outspoken... she will ask the questions [with school leadership] I may not feel comfortable asking. If she has a correction, she is never negative...she always comes with a solution." Kyler concurred, about the support she has from her teacher leader. "If I'm juggling multiple things... she tries to provide a solution... she does a good job helping us. I feel comfortable because she's transparent, she's going to tell you when you're not doing something right...I like that a lot." Charley shared that she's never gone to her teacher leader "with a problem she didn't have a solution for."

Suzie discussed how she partners with her school counselor, and “she does what she can [to support teachers]. Suzie also added she can partner with the instructional teacher leader for discipline matters, “it is easier with her... because she’s going to handle it.” Melony has access to a different instructional teacher leader, and emphasized “I want to know what I am doing wrong in a constructive way so I can fix it,” and she sees this as an area of opportunity for their partnership, which is new for this school year. Melony feels that some of her stress this school year is due to the dynamic of their working relationship, and that “it’s been hard to find that balance of when to go [for support] as a beginning teacher, or when to walk away because I’m about to be overwhelmed [due to the nature of their conversations].”

When asked about leadership practices and supports that have been helpful, Londyn quickly identified with the person who holds an instructional teacher leader role in her school. “This is the first time I’ve had an instructional teacher leader and having that support inside the classroom has been amazing, having someone else to come help and support, more students are on task.” Londyn further discussed the impact of having this role accessible and the positive connection to classroom management and student academic growth.

Inquiry participants were asked for other recommendations to support educator well-being. Hudson identified with the need for more teacher workdays. “I believe a lot of work gets done and they are productive. These are days to reset myself and evaluate myself on the students [progress]... it’s a day to reset, so we can approach things from a new perspective.” Londyn shared “Having more teacher workdays. The expectations can be overwhelming and stressful. If I had more days to do the data and do the work...during our planning period we have many other things to do... we need a whole day.” She also added that providing more instructional teacher

leaders and teacher assistants [elementary and middle schools] in the classroom are necessary, “from my experience that [extra assistance] is so helpful, that’s really what we need.”

Inquiry participants recognized an opportunity to expand the communication and collaboration with district staff. Macy noted that when district staff come to her school for instructional classroom observations, this can bring about frustration. “Sometimes, it would be nice for people to just come see us... anytime, not to just grade us [her perception of these visits].” She did add the importance of getting constructive criticism [from district visits], but sometimes it’s nice to just see other people [in our school].” Macy added that the district visits can be a positive practice if they were more frequent and focused on “how hard the kids are working, how hard the teachers are working, and then you might have a different view... you might value that final score much better.” Anastasia noted that “if we want collaboration between our district and schools, we have to facilitate it, or otherwise it creates cognitive dissonance.” She gave an example of steps taken to create collaborative classroom environments with students, to “make sure the students have good relationships... they can facilitate conversations between themselves” and how the district can do the same with teachers. “The district builds good rapport with teachers...you’re kind and friendly when entering a classroom, don’t treat them [teachers] like a body in the classroom, with the understanding we are going to observe today to see how to best support you.” Matthew recognizes the importance of district visits and “it is a stressor when the district comes around, but that’s the way it is.” Matthew previously worked in the business industry and reflected on “anytime you have higher ups in the building, in any work environment, yeah, that’s a stressor.” His recommendation is to “find a way to informally get to know our district office, and them get to know us.” In his perspective, by taking the steps to “build that bridge” with deeper relationships between school and district

staff will bring a “paradigm shift,” reduce the stress educators may feel with district visits and increase the productive dialogue about classroom practices and data outcomes.

Communication practices were a common topic across each of the inquiry school sites. Macy noted the importance of a solid communication flow from the school level to families, administration communicating with teachers, but also from district staff to the schools. “We always hear ‘they are telling us to do this’, who is ‘they?’ She emphasized that as a teacher, the necessity of knowing the names [and people] behind directives to support “communicating effectively between the levels.” Lindsey stated there was a time period when “I was really struggling with my mental health” and some of her co-workers told her about the district Employee Assistance Program (EAP). “Once I figured this out, the fact that it [EAP services] was offered, it was amazing.” She did add that there was nothing like this in the previous county that she worked. Lindsey also added there is an opportunity for the district to communicate more about this resource. Krystal noted the importance of the services [EAP] being available for employees. She was working through a family matter and utilized services she found on her own. She shared that “after this family need, our director of public relations sent out an email that talked about this program [EAP], it’s confidential, and it’s free. I think that’s one of the best things they [the district] could have done for us.” Macy has worked in the district for several years, and stated, “I’ve never heard of this, and what’s it about [referring to the EAP services].” The educators in this inquiry stressed the importance of consistent, clear, and ongoing communication as a connection to assisting them with more effective time management practices.

Family and community support were also discussed as areas of opportunity. Finley expressed her concerns that there used to be more communication with families than there has

been in the past. “I don’t know if we are welcoming people back in the building as openly as we were before this virtual thing [referring to COVID]. Things over the phone [with parents] is just kind of insincere and quick.” Harley shared that:

I’ve seen it change; I was a parent here [before becoming a teacher]. I was here almost every single day... teachers were asking parents to help. There was a big group of parents that were doing things to help teachers... then COVID and parents went everywhere... they haven’t come back, there is the not the sense of community there used to be.

Some inquiry participants identified a shift in the perceptions of a teacher’s role by families and those who work outside of education. Kyler added that:

Society as a whole just doesn’t look at teachers the way they should. They think of us as babysitters, but we’re teachers, we’re doctors, we’re nurses, the school secretary. We have to be everything, it’s frustrating and if I go back to my well-being and mental health, it really kind of takes a toll. If I’m looked at as a babysitter, what am I doing here?

Suzie added “I don’t think this is just in our county. I think that’s the whole state from forums I follow. But across the board it does affect you [the perceptions the community and families have about teachers].” Anastasia shared that “at the end of the day, everyone in education is there for a reason, everyone at the district is there for a reason, and we can work towards more understanding, break down those walls.” There was a common perception with the inquiry participants connecting a greater community appreciation and respect of the work of teachers and to that of increased job satisfaction and teacher retention.

Second Phase of Focus Groups (Winter 2024)

The second series of focus group sessions occurred in the winter of 2024 and were specifically aimed at gathering insight from the participating educators regarding the second

district-level survey on educator well-being (see Appendix G), their perspectives on the emergent themes identified, and their evaluation of the wellness interventions that were implemented at each of their respective pilot schools. Moreover, these sessions served as a forum for educators to continue the exploration of addressing the topic of educator well-being and identifying potential solutions that may enhance, and barriers that may hinder, the wellness needs of educators.

The qualitative results arising from these focus group discussions influenced the continued formulation of the district-wide plan aimed at improving the social-emotional health and overall well-being of educators. These conversations also involved pinpointing potential practices and resources essential for promoting educator wellness within the unique cultures developed at each school. Concurrently, the focus groups served as a platform for collecting input on prospective district-wide strategies and resources that could cultivate a collaborative, supportive, and productive learning environment for students and staff. Focus group sessions were recorded and transcribed through the use of Microsoft Teams.

Educator Well-Being Survey

In October 2023, the second district-wide survey on educator well-being was administered to educators across all 25 of the district schools. Participation in this survey was voluntary and anonymous. By comparing the results of the educator well-being surveys from both the fall of 2022 and the fall of 2023, in addition to the subsequent focus group discussions and individual interviews, this approach offered a platform for contrasting data outcomes over two cycles of inquiry and assessment. Inquiry participants were able to provide their perceptions of the district outcome data across select data points.

Data collected from the fall of 2022 survey to the fall of 2023 survey revealed an increase from 60% to 62% of teachers across the district who responded favorably to their professional well-being. Inquiry participants identified multiple factors that may have played a role in the increase in overall favorable responses with this survey. It was noted that the data was collected each year in October, which is approximately two months after the new school year has begun, and the timing of the survey may be a factor. Aubrey observed that the beginning of a school year can bring a “new level of enthusiasm and about the team you will be working with.” Other inquiry participants also noted that student behavior can be more in line with school-wide expectations and more “positive,” in the beginning of a school year. Harley added that teachers could be feeling more confident and “comfortable since they are bringing in more experience” from the previous year. Kyler, is in the third year at her school and she could relate to the excitement and energy someone may have when they are “beginning a new school year, beginning with a new school and a new team.”

Other inquiry participants recognized different dynamics that may resulted in a positive increase with this data. Matthew made a connection to the COVID-19 Pandemic, and that “possibly we’re getting back to a more sense of normalcy,” as we have continued to come out of the pandemic. He also included that he realizes “we are not there 100%, but with students and staff, there is more of a sense of normalcy.” Noelle believes there is a shift in the perception and dialogue around self-care and mental health. “We are finally fostering a culture of self-care and being able to openly voice our feelings about these. She also included that “it [the norm in the workplace] was to work yourself to death and now it’s just work to survive.” Macy concurred and said, “It’s more okay now to speak up and say I’m not okay, when previously it would have been harder to do this.” In conjunction with the ability to more openly discuss mental and

emotional wellness, inquiry participants discussed that resources are more available and accessible. Anastasia believes “the more we make education on mental health available, continue those conversations, have the resources posted, and take the taboo away from discussing mental health, it’s eventually going to change our behaviors [on how we respond to it].”

Inquiry participants were asked to evaluate the reasons for what is causing the low percentage of favorable responses for teachers feeling exhausted and overwhelmed while performing their school-related responsibilities. Both of these topics generated the lowest percentage of favorable responses across all survey items. Harley quickly added that she believes it is connected to the level of responsibilities expected of teachers, “there is so much on our shoulders, so much to do.” Kyler said she feels the weight of her responsibilities every time she comes into the school. “I feel like I have all these things on a checklist [every day] because it’s what’s expected of us.” Inquiry participants also discussed the perception of teachers’ work ethic as a factor. Melony shared “we’ve been given so much over the years, it seems like it’s, ‘oh well, the teachers will do it.’ And we can’t do our job wholeheartedly and fully take care of ourselves because we have all these responsibilities.” Noelle is confident it is a result “of the many tasks we are told to do, because traditionally, you have to do it [as a teacher].” Focus group participants shared a common concern around their demanding workload and how it is impacting the efficacy of their teaching practices, impacting the effective use of their planning periods, extending their work days regularly, and contributing to an ongoing sense of not seeing closure with their work responsibilities.

Student behavior management was also identified as a variable that may be impacting the increased levels of frustration and feelings of being overwhelmed by educators in this district. Inquiry participants agreed that students are exhibiting more frequent and intense behavioral

needs and are not isolated to specific schools, but they are enrolled at all schools, regardless of the size of school or location. Aubrey shared that “we are seeing an increase in the intensity and behaviors from some students.” She also added that these more extreme behaviors are “traumatizing other students” and as a teacher, “you’re coming in scared of, not if, but when, one of your kids is going to pop off and how bad is it going to be today.” Kyler shared her concerns with having to address the same student repeatedly and this focused attention on one student distracts her from attending to the other students in her classroom. “It’s frustrating and there’s no solution to it.” Participants discussed the impact of not addressing the social-emotional needs of students and the connection to their level of engagement. Melony conveyed that “we can’t teach them if they’re struggling with this [social-emotional needs] internally...I’m not a trained psychologist, I don’t know how to talk with a kid that’s dealing with depression or suicide.” Aubrey is concerned that when a student exhibits “intense behaviors for a prolonged period of time, these behaviors are being modeled for other students” and eventually these behaviors may seem acceptable, and students begin to “copy these behaviors.” Inquiry participants believe the expectation in this district is that social-emotional needs have to come before teaching and learning, but there is an opportunity in the district to increase the level of support and resources in schools to address the issues with students who need more comprehensive behavioral support.

Some leadership practices were identified as a possible variable that impacts teachers’ levels of frustration and sense of being overwhelmed. Kyler reported that she gets “stressed, overwhelmed, and exhausted, there’s not proactiveness happening to prevent the things that are bringing the stress and exhaustion.” This response was in relation to her perception that expectations are not communicated in a timely manner and “last minute things are brought to us, and we’re the people that have to get it done.” Another leadership practice that generated

concern, was using a “one size fits all” approach with educators. Anastasia and Noelle both see an opportunity for their administrators to clearly articulate what is expected from teachers, but also take into consideration that there are teachers who may need “a more individualized approach” with the level of support they need. Matthew agreed and noted the importance of administration and leadership “partnering with teachers in order to keep things [expectations] aligned with district policy and to keep school running efficiently,” but do it in a manner that is supportive and based on their needs. He also added the significance in his fellow teachers being held accountable “for not doing what they’re supposed to be doing,” versus a communication going out to all teachers. Inquiry participants were in alignment with the need to have a “more fluid approach” in addressing areas of opportunity with teachers as applicable, while also providing clear expectations and timelines to all staff to support the goals and initiatives of their respective schools.

Focus group participants were asked to evaluate the significance behind an increase in favorable survey responses when teachers were asked about their job satisfaction and feelings of being effective in their job. Teachers feeling more effective in their job increased from 55% of favorable responses to 59%, and the favorable responses for job satisfaction increased from 54% to 59%. Noelle noted that “we’re happy, but we’re also overwhelmed [referring to the survey question on teachers feeling overwhelmed].” Aubrey referred to the trend of increased teacher turnover and believes the favorable responses came from those “who have chosen to stay” along with the teachers who were just beginning with this district and are excited about their new position. Suzie added that she is in her sixteenth year and is excited to be at her school. Anastasia attributes an increase across both indicators coming from the teachers who are experiencing more autonomy in their work and are “getting to come into their classroom with their own style

without feeling shame for not perfectly adhering to being in a box [of similar expectations for everyone].” Matthew is working more closely with a teacher leader this school year and feels more “hopeful” and “100% more positive” about his instructional practices as a result of this support. Lindsey sees a connection to a difference in responses between the teachers who are teaching a class which requires a state exam, versus a class with a teacher-made exam. Lindsey has taught both types of classes and she also noted the additional complexity if a teacher with an end-of-course state exam, is also experiencing a large amount of behavioral issues with students. “All of that together kind of piles up...and can cause stress.” Inquiry participants were able to recognize there can be multiple variables that can influence how teachers responded to these survey questions, including that the timing of the survey was a few weeks after summer break, and as Kyler noted, “we are not burned out yet, we still got it,” as she referred to the survey taking place seven weeks after the beginning of the school year.

Educator Well-Being Interventions

During the second focus group session, inquiry participants were provided with a review of the measures being undertaken by Lily Valley County Schools to create a holistic wellness framework aimed at fostering and improving the well-being of educators. Their feedback focused on assessing the potential effects and potential outcomes, if any, of implementing an increased emphasis on educator well-being across the three school inquiry sites. Inquiry participants did express the importance of their district demonstrating a longer-term commitment to this initiative and the level of support that is necessary for those educators who are feeling stressed and overwhelmed, coupled with keeping other educators from getting to this point. Harley shared that “sometimes things start strongly, then it fizzles out...if it’s followed through, then I think it sounds great.” Noelle recognized that it will be important to understand how this

wellness framework will look when officially implemented, and she stated, “it’s kind of hard to make a determination when I don’t know what it will look like [long-term] and at my school.” Macy was adamant that a wellness initiative should be “individualized by school, and the needs of an elementary school may be different than a high school.” Lindsey and Anastasia recognized the importance of not having a “cookie cutter” approach, and a wellness framework for educators could be “beneficial if resources are allotted based on the needs of the school.” Inquiry participants shared the importance of focusing on teacher wellness, but expressed concern that the effectiveness of a district initiative could be hindered by school leadership practices. Melony expressed “for me, my stress and being overwhelmed comes from the need for more communication [from school leadership].” She also added “another program is just a program...and it’s only going to help to an extent...if they [school leadership] don’t support it and in conjunction with the need for more proactive communication [on expectations and priorities].” This inquiry participant further stated that, “It’s almost like I have a trauma response when I walk into this building... I will have a million things that I already needed to get done,” in conjunction with the demands of meeting all the “academic and social-emotional” needs of her students, and “there will be more things added [she wasn’t aware of].” Collectively, focus group participants identified the importance of consistent and timely communication as being the norm with their school practices, and it serving as vehicle to lowering the levels of stress, increasing the optimism about serving as a teacher, and serving as a buffer for when those unexpected demands or issues arise.

Adult Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) Activity. At the beginning of a staff meeting, a member of the district SEL-mental health team led a team-building SEL activity selected from the Panorama playbook for supporting adult social-emotional learning. This collaborative group

exercise was approximately 15-20 minutes and laid the groundwork for emotional and mental rejuvenation, while adding another potential tool to our educators' wellness toolkits. Hudson found the activity beneficial and found value in being able to pause at the end of a school day, “recollect your thoughts, evaluate your day...reflect on the folks I have a connection to in this building...and not feel so alone.” As a result of the SEL activity, Melony reflected on the question about someone in your building you can trust. She saw this as an opportunity to show more appreciation to her mentor. “I don’t think I tell her enough...when I wrote down her name, I really need to make sure I tell her...it’s little stuff like that.” Londyn shared the importance of all aspects of a staff meeting being “beneficial to us [teachers]. She added that unless there is a recognized need for such an activity, “it’s not going to be beneficial... for us [teachers], and just like our students, we have to find meaning in it [an activity] or else it’s a waste of time.” Several inquiry participants stressed the importance of taking into consideration when to incorporate an adult SEL activity into a staff meeting. Noelle received feedback from colleagues not participating in the inquiry, that “they did not appreciate the activity [due to it adding time to the agenda] and would rather be done with the staff meeting.” Mark said his administration does make an effort to make their staff meetings “concise and to the point, with the information we need to know.” Macy said “it [incorporating the SEL activity into a staff meeting] was bad timing and staff see it as one more thing they have to do.” Overall, inquiry participants were favorable about the experience of the SEL activity, but consistently noted that administrators will need to be strategic about when to incorporate an activity like this into school practices in order for it to be better received and advantageous for participants.

Professional Development – Licensed Therapist. A session was guided by a licensed therapist who provided participants with a foundation for enhancing your overall well-being

personally and professionally. Participants were introduced to strategies that encompassed a broad spectrum of well-being, including self-care techniques, stress management, interpersonal communication skills, setting boundaries, and managing the demands across work and the personal lives of these educators. This session took place during a regularly scheduled staff meeting after school and was approximately 45-50 minutes. Noelle stated, “it was a great presentation...we need to normalize this [information shared] and foster this in our school community.” She found the content meaningful but added that it was not overall well received by others because it was “bad timing [taking place after school].” Macy noted that when the presenter discussed “no, being a complete sentence” and when “you say yes to something, you are saying no to something else,” this was awkward being in this session with her administration. Lindsey added the significance of educators being able to professionally and “literally saying no when it’s necessary...you forget [you can do this] because our job is to put other people’s needs first.” Multiple inquiry participants discussed the value in being able to push back, and say “no,” when necessary, but also questioned the feasibility of this happening in their school, especially when responsibilities and issues are being brought to them at “the last minute” and they are things “we can’t say no to” as a result. Melony added that she recognized the value in receiving information like this and that she “would be happier as an individual if she would take the time to implement these strategies in my life.” Due to the “amount of information coming at us [teachers]”, she recommended that it would be more beneficial if educators were provided with reminders about these well-being strategies so that there might be a higher likelihood of incorporating them into their personal and professional practices.

Youth Resilience & Trauma-Informed Professional Development. A session was led by an organization that specializes in providing evidence-based training and resources for

resilience and trauma-informed practices. This session was designed to increase the capacity of educators with a deeper insight into the complexities of student behavior and was grounded in foundational brain science concepts. Staff were supplied with strategies and resilience tools essential for guiding their students through the intricate challenges of stressful events. This professional development session took place within an afterschool staff meeting for two of the pilot schools, and during a district professional development day for the third school inquiry site. Each session was approximately 45-50 minutes. Noelle shared that “this presentation was phenomenal... the information was perfect [for their needs], to better understand how not to trigger a student, or what can we do about it, when they are.” Macy recognized that “everything all of our kids have dealt with...maybe they have come from some type of trauma [outside of school]” and the necessity of students better understanding how to manage their emotions in challenging situations.

Employee Wellness Resources. During a staff meeting, the district mental health coordinator, a licensed clinical social worker, presented information that included a review of the district Employee Assistance Program (EAP), the benefits provided to district staff through this resource, and additional community resources accessible for all staff. Each presentation was approximately 10-15 minutes and flyers with resource information were shared. Noelle shared “this information was great,” and appreciated staff having access to external resources to support their individual wellness needs. Aubrey expressed a concern that “you never know what somebody’s going through...it’s [teaching] already stressful...it’s [teaching] overwhelming...and I think it’s important for the district to share this information.” Harley recognized that she received a significant amount of information “in 15 minutes and it was worth listening to...I remember everything she said.”

Educator Resilience Space. Each of the school inquiry sites was provided with funding to create or enhance a space for school staff to reset, renew, and recharge. The vision for each of these resilience spaces is a design that will support educators in temporarily disconnecting from the constant demands and challenges of their roles. Matthew stated that “there can be a potential impact [positive] for space for us to go... and get a little extra push for the rest of the day.” Londyn noted that sometimes during the school day, “you need to get away... and if you are in this room... others recognize you need to decompress, be left alone.” Noelle is aware of a school in another district that has a designated space for staff. She shared that “teachers love it... it is a very positive space, and it is working [for them].” Noelle added that it was challenging to provide more specific input since the resilience room in her school is not yet accessible. Harley added there would be value in “entering a space like this and have the opportunity to not think about anything else.” Charley “absolutely” believes the concept will be beneficial to teachers and looks forward to being able to access it. It is important to note that at the time of these focus group discussions, the educator resilience spaces were in varying stages of completion. Therefore, when discussing the use of this space, inquiry participants shared their “perceived value” of teachers having access to a space dedicated for educators to reset and renew.

Additional Recommendations. Inquiry participants were asked to provide additional recommendations for supporting and enhancing educator wellness across Lily Valley County Schools. Aubrey stressed that it will be important to “make sure that when new things are implemented, they are not adding to the responsibilities already on our plates.” When asked about a digital resource hub for staff wellness information, Finley identified that information located in a centralized location, and “in a place I could go, that would be private, and not have to ask anyone, would be of value” to her. Londyn quickly added that “a four-day work week”

would support educator well-being. Lindsey and Macy conveyed the importance of teachers having the opportunity for movement during their day, and access to sunlight and nature if a teacher should work in a classroom with no windows, so not to “feel trapped in a box.” Noelle stressed the importance of opportunities for “fellowship” either within her school or district-led initiatives so that staff can get to know others outside their classrooms and schools and increase a sense of connectedness and community with district employees. An inquiry participant believes there is an opportunity for the district to establish a partnership with therapy providers in the community to provide on-campus services to staff. Providing onsite access to these services would mirror the community partnership currently available to students receiving school-based therapy services. Anastasia shared that, “I think this would be incredible because of the potential impact that it [school-based therapists for staff] would have on your school environment...work ethic is going to increase... job satisfaction would increase dramatically.” Finally, inquiry participants identified a need for stronger compensation practices in their district to increase teacher retention and reduce the demands on teachers having to cover and teach classrooms with a vacant teacher position.

Summary

The purpose of this inquiry was to examine the impact to educator well-being when teachers are provided with explicit resources to support their unique social, emotional, and mental health needs. This inquiry occurred in three phases of investigation across a one-year period. Two of the phases were conducted in collaboration with teachers within three pilot school locations. These schools were in a direct feeder pattern to one another and were also representative of a typical school profile in this district.

Within a mixed-methods approach, I utilized an explanatory sequential design which involved collecting quantitative data during the second and third phases of the inquiry, and then using a qualitative procedure, such as focus groups and individual interviews, to further explain the results of the quantitative data also during the second and third phases of the inquiry (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Quantitative data were collected first with the use of a third-party survey instrument. The target population for this survey was educators and staff at all elementary, middle, and high schools across this school district. The inquiry participants from each of the pilot school locations were also provided with the opportunity to examine this data and provide their perception of the district data outcomes to support the development of a long-term plan that will be employed to support, improve, and sustain teacher well-being on a continuing basis. Qualitative data were subsequently collected through conducting interviews and focus group discussions at each of the pilot schools. Through this data, teachers shared their perceptions of school practices that both support and hinder their wellness as an educator. These teachers also evaluated the wellness interventions that were implemented in their schools to determine the impact and efficacy of these resources within an educational setting.

Chapter 5 will share a summary of this inquiry's findings, interpretation of those findings, limitations of the inquiry, implications of the findings for practice and for equity, and recommendations. Chapter 5 will conclude with reflections on my leadership experiences and development as a result of conducting this inquiry with a focus on identifying and sustaining viable practices to enhance educator well-being.

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, & RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this research inquiry was to examine the impact on the social-emotional health and well-being of teachers when educators are provided with explicit resources and strategies to support their unique social, emotional, and mental health needs. This inquiry was conducted within three pilot school locations and occurred across a one-year period. The questions that guided this inquiry were as follows:

1. What impact does a comprehensive wellness initiative have on teacher well-being?
2. Which components of a comprehensive wellness initiative do teachers perceive as having a positive influence on their well-being?

Summary of the Findings

The overall well-being of educators is connected to, and impacted by, numerous variables, spanning a wide range of influences across professional, personal, and environmental dimensions. Inquiry participants identified potential practices and strategies that may alleviate some of the obstacles they experience and can serve as a buffer for performing their roles more effectively while positively impacting job satisfaction and overall well-being. They assessed the wellness interventions introduced in their individual school sites. It was identified that having access to wellness resources and support is important for addressing stress and emotional well-being among educators. Although positive feedback was given for each intervention, the overall response emphasized the importance of school teams having the autonomy to make decisions regarding the selection of wellness interventions tailored to the specific needs of their staff and school cultures, and the timing of when these interventions would be implemented.

The educators participating in this inquiry recognized that a positive and supportive school culture, especially collaborative relationships with colleagues and administrators, can

foster an increased sense of belonging and well-being. Inquiry participants shared multiple anecdotes about the significance of having teaching colleagues they trust, can collaborate with, and have a shared understanding of the positive and unfavorable aspects of being an educator, as significant to their job contentment. These collegial relationships may serve as a safeguard to the experiences and practices of school leadership or administration they perceive as not supportive or conducive to effectively performing their role as educators.

Most significantly, these educators desire a collaborative and positive partnership with their school administration who can provide them and their school community with a clear vision for expectations, create and sustain a positive and welcoming culture, provide teachers some autonomy and control over their work, and develop productive partnerships with parents and the school community. Participants highlighted the necessity for proactive communication from their administration, underscoring the vital role of receiving regular and timely updates about deadlines, school initiatives, work responsibilities, meetings, etc. This proactive communication is perceived as a critical element in time management for educators. By staying informed through consistent and timely updates, educators may be able streamline and more effectively manage their responsibilities, while also providing the space for the unforeseen pressures and demands that will come. These productive leadership practices may reduce stress, feelings of being overwhelmed, and lead to an increase in feeling valued and appreciated for their efforts and contributions. Overall, inquiry participants expressed appreciation for the opportunity to participate in this inquiry, and acknowledged the necessity, and some cautious optimism about a continued focus on educator well-being in this district.

Interpretation of the Findings

When answering the first research question, *what impact does a comprehensive wellness initiative have on teacher well-being*, the input of inquiry participants centered on evaluating the potential effects and outcomes of implementing a heightened emphasis on educator well-being in the Lily Valley County School District. Prioritizing the well-being of teachers should be a central concern for school districts and has been linked to both teaching effectiveness and student outcomes (Hascher & Waber, 2021). Research has emphasized the importance of teachers' social and emotional competencies and their influence on the teaching and learning process (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). Furthermore, Bracket et al. (2010) observed that educators who possess the ability to regulate their emotions are more likely to contribute to the emotional regulation of their students. This suggests that teachers, when equipped with emotional competence, play a crucial role in fostering a supportive environment for students to develop their own emotional regulation skills. These teachers also reported an increased satisfaction with their work and a sense of personal accomplishment, factors which can lead to increased productivity, a decrease in absenteeism, and increased retention longitudinally. “Until schools fully attend to adults' social-emotional needs—parallel to those of students—educators will continue to engage in superficial recharge activities, and turnover will persist” (Rodman et al., 2021, p. 55).

Addressing teacher well-being as a systems-level problem may result in a synchronized identification of resources for educators to equitably address their social-emotional and mental health needs. As shared by Patricia Jennings, professor of education at the University of Virginia, “If you want to support student mental health and well-being, you have to support teacher well-being and mental health because they are inextricably linked” (Will, 2021, p. 2). Participants in the inquiry shared an appreciation for an inquiry of this nature, with an emphasis

on the significance of their district demonstrating a sustained commitment to this initiative in order to provide the necessary support for educators experiencing stress and feelings of being overwhelmed. When district leadership provides robust support to principals and teachers, they experience more favorable outcomes in the implementation of social-emotional and wellness initiatives (DePaoli et al., 2017). When support for SEL implementation is extended at the district level, there is a greater sense of community among key stakeholders and school administrators have an increased opportunity for sustaining effective SEL and educational practices (CASEL, 2015; Meyers et al., 2015).

Inquiry participants also highlighted the importance of taking proactive measures, in general, to prevent educators from reaching such points of distress. While underscoring the need to focus on teacher wellness, participants expressed concerns about the effectiveness of a district initiative being hampered by school leadership who may lack the interest, or capacity to model, lead, and implement wellness initiatives in their schools. This concern was compounded, in light of the competing demands and expansive responsibilities of a school administrator. Jones and Cater (2020) conducted a research inquiry that concluded with the principals in the inquiry acknowledging the importance of SEL initiatives but were limited in fully understanding the purpose of SEL or how SEL should be defined in a school setting. The findings of this investigation revealed that the beliefs, attitudes, and prior experience of principals regarding social and emotional learning can impact the integration of SEL into their school practices and overall climate. Bouchamma et al. (2014) observed that principals, guided by their perceived self-efficacy, attribute significance to various components of school leadership, encompassing instructional practices, managerial responsibilities, and the oversight of the school environment. When answering the second research question, *which components of a comprehensive wellness*

initiative do teachers perceive as having a positive influence on their well-being, inquiry participants provided an evaluation of the wellness interventions implemented at each of their respective school inquiry sites. While favorable responses were provided for each intervention, overall feedback stressed the significance of school teams having the ability to have “voice and choice” over the selection of wellness interventions most appropriate for the needs of their staff and school cultures. Research has recognized that when teachers are given the ability to provide input on school and district initiatives, they “feel more energized and supported” (Kaufman & Diliberti, 2021, p. 7). Feedback for the use of an adult SEL activity with school practices resulted in recommendations for opening staff meetings at the beginning of the school year, when a need is determined for such an activity, or during a designated teacher workday or professional development day. Inquiry participants responded favorably about offering educators access to a mental health professional to share information and reminders on wellness strategies, or for a personal consultation. However, it was recommended that the timing for this type of resource being available would need to fit within a school schedule for when educators identify a need and during a timeframe that will not extend their workday.

Access to professional development on providing evidence-based training and resources for resilience and trauma-informed practices resulted in highly favorable feedback. Inquiry participants recognized a need for educators to have viable strategies to support the social-emotional needs of their students. Given the extensive time teachers spend with their students, they are well-positioned to contribute significantly to the effective implementation of SEL practices, establishing a productive foundation for social-emotional and wellness supports within their classrooms (Cardoza, 2021; De Stasio et al., 2017; Jones & Kahn, 2017). Additionally, across the school inquiry sites, it was recommended that this information be provided to students,

by someone other than the classroom teachers, so that they will have a better understanding of how their bodies respond to stress, managing heightened emotions, and having the skills to manage their ability to self-regulate in difficult and stressful situations. In a 2014 national survey of teachers, 95% of respondents said that SEL is teachable; 97% said that SEL can benefit students from all socioeconomic backgrounds (Gallup, 2014). Jones and Kahn (2017) contend that all learning is intricately connected to social and emotional characteristics. It is becoming increasingly untenable to engage in discussions about instructional practices, prevention initiatives, academic achievement, and the culture and climate of schools without addressing social-emotional competencies. In the course of their development, children need to acquire the skills of forming connections with others and adapting their thoughts, feelings, and responses to different contexts. This developmental process is driven by the cognitive growth of the brain, which will be impacted as a result of the interpersonal and cultural frameworks children experience (Elias, 2019).

Inquiry participants agreed that having employee wellness resources shared during a staff meeting was an appropriate use of time and staff focus. They also recognized the convenience of having applicable resources available for teachers to use as a starting point for addressing their individual needs without having to spend an inordinate amount of personal time seeking out resources. Feedback from the inquiry participants was optimistic about having access to an employee resilience room, yet they expressed mixed emotions, due to not having the ability to utilize this space at the time of our discussion. Research substantiates that teachers may not benefit equally from the strategies employed to help teachers in ways that both prevent and alleviate the impacts of burnout (Howson, 2016). Multiple variables may impact teacher well-being and resistance to burnout. Balancing the intricate demands of a classroom, attending to the

social-emotional needs of students, navigating challenges in student and family relationships, addressing the dynamics of professional interactions, and considering the overall school climate may enhance or impede educators' sense of healthy well-being and mental health (Iancu et al., 2018).

Outside of specific wellness interventions, inquiry participants identified additional opportunities to support and enhance their well-being. Participants shared that being part of a supportive and cohesive school community can positively impact their sense of belonging and overall well-being. Research has acknowledged that workplace well-being is closely linked to positive relationships among team members and a sense of belonging (Jones et al., 2019). Jones et al. (2019) identified those educators who deeply understood their colleagues on a personal and professional level as beneficial to their workplace well-being. Blöchliger and Bauer (2018) established the presence of supportive and productive workplace relationships as a buffer to against stress and burnout. Effective teamwork, marked by shared professional philosophies, clear role definitions, and collaborative efforts, has been identified as a key factor in strengthening overall workplace well-being (Nislin et al., 2016). Educators with cohesive professional relationships and a healthy sense of well-being have been found to improve the well-being of their colleagues (Costa et al., 2014). The influence of a heightened sense of well-being can “result in a cycle of positive energy within the classroom” (Jones et al., 2019, p. 10).

Inquiry participants also stressed the importance of having an awareness about the factors that impact students' social-emotional and mental health is crucial to their role as educators, but also highlighted the need for support in managing the more complex behavioral and mental health needs of their students. When educators do not have access to adequate social-emotional resources and professional development to effectively manage emotional and behavioral

challenges in their classrooms, children exhibit reduced levels of focus and academic outcomes. Consequently, these educators also encounter heightened emotional fatigue and discontentment (Schonfeld et al., 2017; Schussler et al., 2016). Ryan et al. (2017) contend that self-management skills are imperative in encouraging positive experiences and preventing burnout in educators. Educators who self-manage their emotions are shown to have lower emotional exhaustion, greater job satisfaction, and an overall positive sense of well-being. Carlock (2011) emphasized the importance for educators to showcase the ability to uphold effective classroom management practices along with adept self-management skills. This demonstration increases the likelihood of creating a positive teaching environment and establishing effective relationships with students and families. Furthermore, Jones et al. (2013) acknowledged that educators proficient in self-management are more likely to feel confident in their instructional practices and have an increased likelihood of fostering a trusting and welcoming learning environment for their students.

Across each of the school inquiry sites, it was evident that positive school leadership practices can serve as a protective factor and can be instrumental in affecting educators' professional experiences and well-being. Points of emphasis were administrators being available, accessible, and providing guidance on prioritizing the conflicting priorities on teachers. Inquiry participants also emphasized the importance of consistent and timely communication from administration as a standard practice in their schools. It is their perception that adhering to this communication norm could alleviate stress, support their efforts with more effectively managing their time, boost optimism among teachers, and serve as a safeguard against unforeseen demands or issues. The influence of school administrators on the support extended to their teaching staff and their overall impact on school climate has been linked to the well-being and retention of

educators (Boyd et al., 2011). “Teachers who are satisfied with the decisions and degree of support provided by school administrators show more positive attitudes regarding their occupation” (Grayson & Alvarez, 2008, p. 1,359). Further studies have acknowledged that effective leadership strategies employed by school administrators can enhance the overall well-being of teachers. This includes reducing workload demands, aiding in the management of challenging relationships with families, offering supervisory support tailored to teacher needs, and promoting increased autonomy (De Stasio et al., 2017).

Fostering social and emotional development within an educational setting encompasses not only enhancing the skills of students but also those of adults. The overall advancement of SEL implementation is influenced by the prevailing culture and climate (Jones & Kahn, 2017). To improve academic achievements and promote positive health outcomes for students, research has demonstrated the vital role of school leaders in cultivating a culture that provides environmental support for every educator (Gimbert et al., 2021). A study conducted by Jones and Cater (2020) acknowledged the essential role that principals play in establishing a positive school climate and integrating social and emotional learning initiatives. Furthermore, when school leaders lead by example, model and exemplify the social and emotional behaviors that will support teachers in being more productive, while also supporting their efforts in managing their personal stress and potential burnout, this has the potential to enhance their dedication to their work and foster a stronger sense of connection to their school (Gimbert et al., 2021; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017). Hardy (2018) suggests that school leaders should facilitate educators in formalizing social norms and subsequently establish a consensus-driven set of processes that foster social-emotional learning interactions among school staff. “Although school leaders alone cannot solely champion SEL, nor be the catalyst to invest in social-emotional

development for every member of the school community, they hold a key position on campuses” (Gimbert et al., 2021, p. 18). When leaders in education cultivate an environment grounded in trust and support for teaching and learning, educators feel more empowered to take risks, welcome constructive feedback, and are more likely to positively respond to suggestions aimed at improving their instructional methods. This nurturing atmosphere fosters a collaborative culture, encouraging ongoing improvement and innovation in educational practices, ultimately enhancing the overall teaching and learning experiences for both students and educators (Mahfouz et al., 2019; Oberle et al., 2016).

Limitations of the Inquiry

The parameters of this inquiry focused on qualitative feedback from educators located at three pilot schools. Participation was voluntary across all phases of the inquiry and included approximately 20% of teachers employed at these schools. While all educators at each of these schools were invited to participate in this inquiry, with the opportunity to openly share their perspectives and experiences during the focus group and individual interview discussions, there is the possibility the fundamental nature of their school culture, practices, and needs were not fully captured in the qualitative data due to the size of the participant sample.

Additionally, due to scheduling demands, individual interviews were necessary with one of the pilot schools across both phases of qualitative data collection. While these conversations were highly beneficial to this inquiry, they may not have been as robust as the focus group sessions conducted at the other inquiry locations. According to Mertler (2022), “interactions among focus group participants may be extremely informative due to people's tendency to feed off others' comments” (p. 200). The acknowledgment that participant engagement and they

dynamics of the qualitative conversations at these school locations were beyond my control further underscores a potential limitation of the inquiry.

The composition of the participants for this study revealed that 82% of the educators were female and may indicate a gender imbalance within this inquiry sample. This gender distribution may have implications for further review, as the experiences and perspectives of male educators could potentially be underexplored. Most of these teachers had been employed at a single school for the duration of their employment (76%), and 41% of this group had four years or less of teaching experience. The level of teaching experience underscores the prevalence of early-career educators within the sample. This characteristic introduces the possibility that the perspectives and challenges expressed by these teachers may be influenced by their stage of professional development. The experiences of novice educators may differ significantly from those with more extensive teaching backgrounds, influencing the inquiry's insights into the dynamics of teaching and learning (De Stasio et al., 2017).

The recognition of administrative changes at two of the school locations during the course of the inquiry presents potential impacts on the inquiry findings. Administrative changes within a school can potentially impact the dynamics, culture, and overall operations, potentially influencing the outcomes of this inquiry. These administrative changes could have introduced some variability in the data collected, as different administrators will have distinct approaches to decision-making, resource allocation, staff management, and their overall vision on what school leadership should look like on their school campus. Consequently, the inquiry's results may be influenced by the unintended consequences of administrative transitions.

Implications of the Findings for Equity

The ethnic makeup of the participant sample reflects that a majority (76%) of inquiry participants identified as White. This data raises considerations about the cultural representativeness of this inquiry and the possibility for these findings to be evaluated across more diverse populations. The concentration of a particular ethnic group within this inquiry may underscore the importance of capturing a comprehensive range of cultural perspectives, experiences, and needs within our schools. It is crucial to recognize that educational experiences and challenges may vary across gender, ethnic and cultural backgrounds, and length of employment. The opportunity for a more diverse sample could provide a broader understanding of the contents of this inquiry while uncovering a broader view of experiences, perspectives, challenges, wellness needs of our educators.

Identifying the obstacles confronting marginalized teaching faculty, hindering their entry into or persistence in the education profession, may be alleviated through the implementation of holistic wellness supports. Additionally, there could be significant benefits that come as result of diverse staff spearheading these initiatives. Exploring the potential intersection of social-emotional, mental health, and overall well-being strategies and a diverse leadership approach may unveil opportunities to address and overcome the challenges faced by marginalized educators in pursuing and sustaining careers in teaching.

Implications of the Findings for Practice

The findings of this inquiry aimed at improving and enhancing teacher well-being have significant implications for both educators and the education system as a whole. The well-being of teachers has been associated with enhanced student outcomes and the overall well-being of students (Hoffman & Miller, 2020; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Jones & Kahn, 2017; Lucas et

al., 2020). Educators who experience fulfillment are more inclined to be effective leaders in their classrooms. This, in turn, fosters heightened student engagement, improved academic performance, and the establishment of positive learning environments. Identifying viable well-being practices can lead to increased teacher satisfaction, potentially reduce attrition, and more positive school cultures (Bracket et al., 2010). This inquiry may also highlight the importance of open communication and collaboration among teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders on the subject of staff wellness. Establishing an atmosphere where educators feel comfortable expressing their concerns and sharing ideas fosters a more supportive and empathetic community (Kaufman & Diliberti, 2021). Educators who perceive a high level of support and appreciation may be more inclined to remain in the profession, thus lowering turnover rates. Moreover, when leaders in education cultivate an atmosphere of trust and support for teaching and learning, educators exhibit a greater readiness to take risks, welcome constructive feedback, and actively engage with innovative ideas aimed at improving their instructional methods (Mahfouz et al., 2019; Oberle et al., 2016).

Furthermore, the qualitative feedback from inquiry participants underscore the importance of ongoing professional development and resources that focus on mental health and well-being for all educators. School districts should consider investing in training both educators and education leaders on stress management, the impact of vicarious trauma, and time management strategies. As a result, schools can use the findings to create a positive and supportive culture that prioritizes teacher well-being (Jones et al., 2019). Supportive actions may involve fostering a sense of community, providing resources for mental health support, and recognizing and rewarding teacher efforts.

The findings from this inquiry could inform and possibly influence education policies and practices at both the school and district levels. School and district leaders might reevaluate, communicate, and implement policies that promote and demonstrate support of work-life balance, acknowledging the importance of teachers having time for personal and family activities, and the value of separating work from personal time. Engaging parents, families, and the broader community in understanding and supporting teacher well-being can be an outcome of the inquiry's findings (Gimbert et al., 2021). Schools may benefit from building a network of support that extends beyond the classroom.

The findings of this inquiry may influence teacher preparation programs to include components that address well-being and stress management. Preparing educators for the challenges of the profession, both academically, emotionally, and mentally, can better equip them for long-term success (Will, 2021). Additionally, content within this inquiry may support further research into effective strategies for promoting teacher well-being. Continuous investigation and evaluation of these practices can contribute to ongoing improvements in the public education system. In summary, the implications of a inquiry focused on improving and enhancing teacher well-being in public K-12 education has the potential to catalyze positive changes in the education system, fostering healthier and more productive environment for both educators and students (Hascher & Waber, 2021).

Recommendations for Practice

Kaufman and Diliberti (2021) recognize that emphasizing teacher voice and autonomy in wellness and school-related initiatives is vital. To encourage increased support of and buy-in with school and district initiatives, involve teachers in decision-making processes related to school policies, curriculum development, and professional development opportunities. School

districts should explore opportunities to involve educators in decision-making processes, allowing them to choose the supports and resources aligned with their unique social, emotional, and mental health needs (Kaufman & Diliberti, 2021). This approach not only fosters a sense of empowerment but also ensures that interventions are personalized to the specific needs of educators, and schools, thereby enhancing their effectiveness and increasing the likelihood for a more successful implementation.

It is also recommended that there are offerings for regular professional development sessions focused on stress management, work-life balance, and well-being strategies tailored to educators (Costa et al., 2014). These sessions should be accessible through virtual and in-person options, should be voluntary, and if for a school-wide initiative, evaluated by the school leadership team prior to implementation. Expand professional development offerings to school leadership. Growing the capacity of school leaders through their participation in holistic wellness training may result in a school culture that prioritizes the mental and emotional health of the entire school community (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017). Additionally, establish on-site counseling services and resources accessible to educators, reducing barriers to seeking mental health support. These resources may require increased funding at the district and state levels to allocate resources specifically for mental health services in schools.

Encourage open dialogue within schools, ensuring that educators feel comfortable discussing well-being concerns with colleagues and administrators (Grayson & Alvarez, 2008). Increased communication may be established through the creation of committees, or the expansion of current committees, within schools that include teachers, administrators, and support staff to collaboratively address and implement well-being initiatives. Additionally, develop, or expand, district-wide wellness policies that address the physical, mental, and

emotional well-being needs of educators and all staff, integrating them into the school and district practices (DePaoli et al., 2017).

These recommendations, grounded in the findings of the inquiry, offer practical strategies for both practitioners and leaders at various levels to improve and support educator well-being. By implementing these changes, school districts can foster a healthier and more sustainable environment for educators, ultimately benefiting the entire educational community.

Recommendations for Future Study

To enhance the applicability of the inquiry findings, future research should also consider focusing on strategies to boost participation rates at pilot schools for a wider range of input and a more comprehensive evaluation of wellness interventions. Implementing targeted outreach programs, incentives, and fostering a culture of openness and collaboration can encourage greater engagement among educators, thereby maximizing the impact of the inquiry and even beyond the scope of the inquiry. Recognizing the time required for meaningful changes, future studies should extend the intervention period to allow teachers sufficient time to incorporate and adapt to wellness interventions. A lengthier timeframe supports a more accurate assessment of the sustained effects on educator well-being, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the intervention's long-term impact.

Delving deeper into the concept of "belonging" and its correlation with educator well-being is a critical avenue for future research. Understanding how a sense of belonging within the school community contributes to overall wellness can inform targeted interventions aimed at cultivating supportive and inclusive environments.

Investigating the connection between educator well-being and the phenomena of compassion fatigue and vicarious trauma is essential. Exploring the emotional impact of working

in a service industry that deals with trauma indirectly and directly, can provide insights into the unique challenges educators face. Future studies should assess coping mechanisms, resilience-building strategies, and the impact of support systems in mitigating compassion fatigue among educators. By addressing these recommendations, future research endeavors can contribute significantly to the ongoing discourse on educator wellness, ultimately fostering healthier and more supportive educational environments.

Conclusions

The overall well-being of educators can be influenced by a variety of variables, spanning professional, personal, and environmental factors. As a result of the qualitative data from the focus group and interview discussions, it became apparent that balancing teaching responsibilities with personal life commitments is a challenge, which can lead to increased levels of stress and potentially burnout if not managed effectively. Inquiry participants expressed a shared challenge among educators, which involves finding it difficult to mentally disengage from thoughts about their students and teaching responsibilities beyond the classroom.

These qualitative conversations also revealed that the excessive administrative tasks, the multitude of unexpected demands, the belief that as teachers they are to serve in many different “roles” (i.e. counselor, nurse, secretary, etc.), the pressure to meet academic standards and deadlines, challenging student behavior, and school leadership practices that are inconsistent and perceived as non-supportive, can all be significant stressors. Inquiry participants identified a need for stronger compensation practices in their district to increase teacher retention and reduce the demands on teachers having to cover and teach classrooms with a vacant teacher position. It was also noted that educational policies and regulations, often beyond the control of their school

administration, and sometimes district administration, can impact the workload, classroom dynamics, and overall job satisfaction of educators.

Scholarly Practitioner Reflections on Leadership

Experiencing the journey of leading an inquiry focused on improving educator well-being within the context of an educational leadership program, and within my current school district, has been a meaningful and insightful experience that has shaped my personal and professional growth as a leader. As I read and worked through the literature about the focus of my inquiry, I gained a deeper appreciation for the connection between leadership practices and the well-being of educators, and the connection of student well-being to that of their teachers. The work of this inquiry also led me to more deeply examine the multifaceted challenges faced by educators and the dynamic role that leadership can hold in fostering a positive and supportive educational environment for students and teachers. As my focus group participants shared, *positive school leadership practices can serve as a protective factor and can be instrumental in affecting educators' professional experiences and well-being.*

As a former classroom educator and school administrator, exploring the well-being of educators has further heightened my awareness about the human side of the individuals who are leading our classrooms and working alongside our students. Through focus group and individual interview discussions, the quantitative data was now able to have a voice and perspective, which could only be captured from these qualitative conversations. Professionally, this inquiry has been a catalyst for a shift in my leadership approach. Equipped with a greater comprehension of the factors that contribute to, and the variables that hinder, educator well-being, I feel I am better equipped to implement practices and to lead those discussions that prioritize the mental and emotional health of the educators in our district, and that of my student services team. In

conclusion, conducting this inquiry on improving educator well-being as part of my educational leadership degree has only deepened my understanding of the challenges faced by educators but has also equipped me with the tools and insights needed to contribute meaningfully to the well-being of those educators who are entrusted to develop our students who are our future leaders and educators. My assumption at the beginning of this inquiry was that student well-being has a significant connection to teacher well-being. Through the review of previous research, working in partnership with my inquiry partners, and collaborating with the educators who participated in this inquiry, this assumption has been supported.

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APPENDIX A: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL



EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY

University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board

4N-64 Brody Medical Sciences Building · Mail Stop 682

600 Moye Boulevard · Greenville, NC 27834

Office 252-744-2914 · Fax 252-744-2284

rede.ecu.edu/umcirm/

Notification of Initial Approval: Expedited

From: Social/Behavioral IRB
To: [Cheryl Baggett](#)
CC: [Travis Lewis](#)
Date: 2/24/2023
Re: [UMCIRB 23-000030](#)
THE IMPACT OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL AND WELLNESS FRAMEWORK ON
THE WELL-BEING OF TEACHERS

I am pleased to inform you that your Expedited Application was approved. Approval of the study and any consent form(s) occurred on 2/23/2023. The research study is eligible for review under expedited category # 6,7. The Chairperson (or designee) deemed this study no more than minimal risk.

As the Principal Investigator you are explicitly responsible for the conduct of all aspects of this study and must adhere to all reporting requirements for the study. Your responsibilities include but are not limited to:

1. Ensuring changes to the approved research (including the UMCIRB approved consent document) are initiated only after UMCIRB review and approval except when necessary to eliminate an apparent immediate hazard to the participant. All changes (e.g. a change in procedure, number of participants, personnel, study locations, new recruitment materials, study instruments, etc.) must be prospectively reviewed and approved by the UMCIRB before they are implemented;
2. Where informed consent has not been waived by the UMCIRB, ensuring that only valid versions of the UMCIRB approved, date-stamped informed consent document(s) are used for obtaining informed consent (consent documents with the IRB approval date stamp are found under the Documents tab in the ePIRATE study workspace);
3. Promptly reporting to the UMCIRB all unanticipated problems involving risks to participants and others;
4. Submission of a final report application to the UMCIRB prior to the expected end date provided in the IRB application in order to document human research activity has ended and to provide a timepoint in which to base document retention; and

5. Submission of an amendment to extend the expected end date if the study is not expected to be completed by that date. The amendment should be submitted 30 days prior to the UMCIRB approved expected end date or as soon as the Investigator is aware that the study will not be completed by that date.

The approval includes the following items:

Name	Description
C. Baggett Focus Group Questions	Interview/Focus Group Scripts/Questions
C. Baggett Informed Consent	Consent Forms
Focus Group Interest Surveys	Recruitment Documents/Scripts
Survey Questions	Surveys and Questionnaires

For research studies where a waiver or alteration of HIPAA Authorization has been approved, the IRB states that each of the waiver criteria in 45 CFR 164.512(i)(1)(i)(A) and (2)(i) through (v) have been met. Additionally, the elements of PHI to be collected as described in items 1 and 2 of the Application for Waiver of Authorization have been determined to be the minimal necessary for the specified research.

The Chairperson (or designee) does not have a potential for conflict of interest on this study.

IRB00000705 East Carolina U IRB #1 (Biomedical) IORG0000418
IRB00003781 East Carolina U IRB #2 (Behavioral/SS) IORG0000418

APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

*East Carolina
University*

Informed Consent to Participate in Research

Information to consider before taking part in research
that has no more than minimal risk.



Title of Research Study: THE IMPACT OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL AND WELLNESS FRAMEWORK ON THE WELL-BEING OF TEACHERS

Principal Investigator: Cheryl Baggett

Institution, Department or Division: EdD Student in the Department of Educational Leadership within the College of Education

Participant Full Name: _____

Please PRINT clearly

Researchers at East Carolina University (ECU) study issues related to society, health problems, environmental problems, behavior problems and the human condition. To do this, we need the help of volunteers who are willing to take part in research.

Why am I being invited to take part in this research?

The purpose of this research is to learn more about how to effectively identify and address the specific wellness needs of teachers, and how a school district may provide access to, and implement specific strategies and resources to support teacher well-being.

You are being invited to take part in this research because we are in the beginning stages of creating a district wellness initiative and your experience and insight as an educator, will be instrumental as we evaluate the district wellness initiative and the opportunity to investigate and enhance collective teacher well-being.

The decision to take part in this research is yours to make. By doing this research, we hope to learn what impact does a comprehensive wellness initiative have on teacher well-being, and which components of the comprehensive wellness initiative do teachers perceive as having a positive influence on their well-being.

If you volunteer to take part in this research, you will be one of about 25-30 people to do so.

Are there reasons I should not take part in this research?

You should not participate in the present study if you are under 18 years of age.

What other choices do I have if I do not take part in this research?

You can choose not to participate. There is no penalty for doing so. You may also withdraw from the study at any point with any reasoning necessary.

Where is the research going to take place and how long will it last?

The research will be conducted at your school in a secure, private location. You will need to participate in two focus group sessions during the study. The total amount of time you will be asked to volunteer for this study is no more than 3 hours across an 11-month period.

What will I be asked to do?

You will be asked to do the following:

- Participate in two focus groups with the study investigator regarding your experiences as an educator as they relate to teacher well-being.
- Each focus group will be approximately 60-90 minutes and will be conducted at your specific school site.
- Additionally, you can participate in the district teacher well-being survey (Panorama); participation in this survey is anonymous.

What might I experience if I take part in the research?

We don't know of any risks (the chance of harm) associated with this research. Any risks that may occur with this research are no more than what you would experience in everyday life. We don't know if you will benefit from taking part in this study. There may not be any personal benefit to you but the information gained by doing this research may help others in the future.

By participating in this research study, you may also experience the benefit of guiding the work our school district is doing as we evaluate strategies and resources to support teacher well-being.

Will I be paid for taking part in this research?

We will not be able to pay you for the time you volunteer while being in this study.

Will it cost me to take part in this research?

It will not cost you any money to be part of the research.

Who will know that I took part in this research and learn personal information about me?

ECU may know that you took part in this research and may see information about you that is normally kept private. With your permission, these people may use your private information to do this research.

How will you keep the information you collect about me secure? How long will you keep it?

All data collected through the interview will be stored in a password protected electronic format. The results of the present study will be used for research and scholarly purposes only. The final report will not disclose any personal identifiers of participants. The investigator will take precautions to ensure confidentiality and privacy. As such, data will be collected and stored only after consent is granted. With permission of the participants, the interviews will be recorded and transcribed verbatim by the researcher. The transcripts and recordings will be analyzed by the investigator and stored in a password protected electronic format. The investigator plans to publish the results of this study. To protect participant privacy and the confidentiality of the research data, the investigator will not include any information that could identify participants in the published results. Other people may need to see the information the investigator collects about you. This may include people who work for your school district and other agencies as required by law or allowed by federal regulations.

What if I decide I don't want to continue in this research?

You can stop at any time after it has already started. There will be no consequences if you stop and you will not be criticized. You will not lose any benefits that you normally receive.

Who should I contact if I have questions?

The people conducting this study will be able to answer any questions concerning this research, now or in the future. You may contact the Principal Investigator at (252) 360-4614, Monday-Friday between the hours of 8:00 AM – 5:00 PM.

If you have questions about your rights as someone taking part in research, you may call ECU Institutional Review Board at phone number 252-744-2914 (days, 8:00 am-5:00 pm). If you would like to report a complaint or concern about this research study, you may call my dissertation study supervisor, Dr. Travis Lewis at 252-328-5485, or the Director for Human Research Protections at 252-744-2914.

Is there anything else I should know?

Identifiers might be removed from the identifiable private information and, after such removal, the information or could be used for future research studies or distributed to another investigator for future research studies without additional informed consent from you or your Legally Authorized Representative (LAR). However, there still may be a chance that someone could figure out the information is about you.

I have decided I want to take part in this research. What should I do now?

The person obtaining informed consent will ask you to read the following and if you agree, you should sign this form:

- ☐ I have read (or had read to me) all of the above information.
- ☐ I have had an opportunity to ask questions about things in this research I did not understand and have received satisfactory answers.
- ☐ I know that I can stop taking part in this study at any time.
- ☐ By signing this informed consent form, I am not giving up any of my rights.
- ☐ I have been given a copy of this consent document, and it is mine to keep.

Participant's Name (PRINT)

Signature

Date

APPENDIX C: NC TEACHER WORKING CONDITIONS SURVEY - INDIVIDUAL

ITEM ANALYSIS FOR LILY VALLEY COUNTY SCHOOLS

Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements about the use of time in your school.	District 2022	State 2022	District 2020	State 2020	District 2018	State 2018
Class sizes are reasonable such that teachers have the time available to meet the needs of all students.	65%	62%	63%	61%	64%	60%
Teachers have time available to collaborate with colleagues.	68%	69%	73%	75%	77%	75%
Teachers are allowed to focus on educating students with minimal interruptions.	69%	68%	71%	69%	66%	69%
The non-instructional time provided for teachers in my school is sufficient.	56%	57%	67%	65%	66%	65%
Efforts are made to minimize the amount of routine paperwork teachers are required to do.	63%	65%	65%	66%	59%	67%
Teachers have sufficient instructional time to meet the needs of all students.	75%	69%	75%	71%	74%	71%
Teachers are protected from duties that interfere with their essential role of educating students.	66%	67%	77%	71%	76%	73%
Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements about your school facilities and resources.	District 2022	State 2022	District 2020	State 2020	District 2018	State 2018
Teachers have sufficient access to appropriate instructional materials.	78%	80%	70%	77%	65%	76%
Teachers have sufficient access to digital content and resources.	91%	88%	82%	86%	83%	85%
Teachers have sufficient access to instructional technology, including computers, devices, printers, software, and internet access.	91%	88%	87%	82%	80%	81%
Teachers have sufficient access to reliable communication technology, including phones, faxes, and email.	95%	93%	95%	93%	91%	93%
Teachers have sufficient access to office equipment and supplies such as copy machines, paper, pens, etc.	88%	86%	82%	83%	81%	81%
Teachers have sufficient access to a broad range of professional support personnel.	82%	79%	79%	80%	78%	80%
The school environment is clean and well maintained.	83%	78%	84%	79%	76%	81%
Teachers have adequate space to work productively.	91%	87%	90%	88%	90%	89%
The physical environment of classrooms in this school supports teaching and learning.	88%	87%	86%	87%	85%	88%
The reliability and speed of the internet connections in this school are sufficient to support instructional practices.	85%	84%	89%	86%	75%	84%

Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements about community support and involvement in your school.	District 2022	State 2022	District 2020	State 2020	District 2018	State 2018
Parents/guardians are influential decision makers in this school.	55%	66%	57%	70%	57%	70%
This school maintains clear, two-way communication with the community.	87%	87%	91%	90%	88%	89%
This school does a good job of encouraging parent/guardian involvement.	87%	85%	90%	89%	86%	89%
Teachers provide parents/guardians with useful information about student learning.	91%	92%	95%	94%	94%	95%
Parents/guardians know what is going on in this school.	82%	81%	83%	85%	81%	86%
Parents/guardians support teachers, contributing to their success with students.	66%	70%	66%	72%	60%	72%
Community members support teachers, contributing to their success with students.	73%	75%	82%	83%	81%	84%
The community we serve is supportive of this school.	74%	80%	82%	85%	78%	85%
Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements about managing student conduct in your school.	District 2022	State 2022	District 2020	State 2020	District 2018	State 2018
Students at this school understand expectations for their conduct.	82%	77%	85%	80%	84%	82%
Students at this school follow rules of conduct.	58%	61%	64%	62%	61%	65%
Policies and procedures about student conduct are clearly understood by the faculty.	85%	77%	87%	79%	85%	81%
School administrators consistently enforce rules for student conduct.	77%	67%	78%	66%	76%	69%
School administrators support teachers' efforts to maintain discipline in the classroom.	83%	77%	87%	77%	83%	78%
Teachers consistently enforce rules for student conduct.	81%	74%	81%	76%	75%	77%
The faculty work in a school environment that is safe.	89%	88%	93%	89%	88%	89%
Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements about teacher leadership in your school.	District 2022	State 2022	District 2020	State 2020	District 2018	State 2018
Teachers are recognized as educational experts.	83%	81%	83%	84%	80%	84%
Teachers are trusted to make sound professional decisions about instruction.	85%	82%	86%	84%	80%	85%
Teachers are relied upon to make decisions about educational issues.	83%	79%	83%	82%	81%	83%
Teachers are encouraged to participate in school leadership roles.	90%	90%	90%	92%	90%	91%
The faculty has an effective process for making group decisions to solve problems.	78%	73%	82%	77%	78%	77%
In this school we take steps to solve problems.	84%	80%	85%	83%	84%	83%

Teachers are effective leaders in this school.	87%	86%	87%	88%	84%	87%
Teachers have an appropriate level of influence on decision making in this school.	72%	65%	72%	69%	69%	70%

Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements about school leadership in your school.	District 2022	State 2022	District 2020	State 2020	District 2018	State 2018
There is an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect in this school.	80%	74%	77%	75%	72%	75%
Teachers feel comfortable raising issues and concerns that are important to them.	77%	71%	76%	73%	74%	73%
The school leadership consistently supports teachers.	83%	77%	85%	79%	82%	80%
Teachers are held to high professional standards for delivering instruction.	93%	91%	93%	93%	91%	93%
The school leadership facilitates using data to improve student learning.	90%	89%	94%	94%	96%	94%
Teacher performance is assessed objectively.	87%	84%	90%	88%	89%	89%
Teachers receive feedback that can help them improve teaching.	87%	83%	89%	86%	86%	86%
The faculty and staff have a shared vision.	86%	78%	85%	83%	85%	85%
The procedures for teacher evaluation are consistent.	89%	83%	91%	87%	88%	87%
The school improvement team provides effective leadership at this school.	81%	76%	88%	84%	87%	84%
The faculty are recognized for accomplishments.	85%	83%	84%	85%	87%	86%
Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with statements about professional development in your school.	District 2022	State 2022	District 2020	State 2020	District 2018	State 2018
Sufficient resources are available for professional development in my school.	78%	79%	76%	80%	71%	80%
An appropriate amount of time is provided for professional development.	71%	71%	77%	79%	70%	79%
Professional development offerings are data driven.	70%	68%	83%	83%	83%	84%
Professional learning opportunities are aligned with the school's improvement plan.	74%	74%	90%	90%	91%	90%
Professional development is differentiated to meet the individual needs of teachers.	61%	57%	70%	67%	67%	67%
Professional development deepens teachers' content knowledge.	80%	72%	80%	77%	81%	77%
Teachers have sufficient training to fully utilize instructional technology.	77%	73%	77%	75%	75%	75%
Teachers are encouraged to reflect on their own practice.	90%	90%	93%	94%	92%	94%
In this school, follow up is provided from professional development.	68%	66%	76%	72%	74%	75%

Professional development provides ongoing opportunities for teachers to work with colleagues to refine teaching practices.	75%	72%	80%	80%	78%	80%
Professional development is evaluated and results are communicated to teachers.	62%	56%	70%	64%	67%	65%
Professional development enhances teachers' ability to implement instructional strategies that meet diverse student learning needs.	83%	78%	86%	84%	86%	84%
Professional development enhances teachers' abilities to improve student learning.	87%	82%	89%	87%	88%	86%
Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements about instructional practices and support in your school.	District 2022	State 2022	District 2020	State 2020	District 2018	State 2018
Local assessment data are available in time to impact instructional practices.	75%	74%	87%	83%	88%	86%
The curriculum taught in this school is aligned with the North Carolina Standard Course of Study.	95%	93%	98%	97%	97%	98%
Teachers work in professional learning communities to develop and align instructional practices.	86%	87%	92%	92%	92%	92%
Provided supports (i.e. instructional coaching, professional learning communities, etc.) translate to improvements in instructional practices by teachers.	82%	80%	88%	87%	87%	86%
Teachers are encouraged to try new things to improve instruction.	90%	88%	92%	92%	92%	93%
Teachers are encouraged to observe other teachers within their school/district.	77%	67%	88%	78%	83%	78%
Teachers are assigned classes that maximize their likelihood of success with students.	68%	61%	73%	70%	72%	71%
Teachers have autonomy to make decisions about instructional delivery (i.e. pacing, materials and pedagogy).	80%	75%	84%	80%	82%	83%
Teachers believe almost every student has the potential to do well on assignments.	90%	88%	89%	91%	88%	91%
Teachers believe what is taught will make a difference in students' lives.	92%	89%	94%	94%	91%	94%
Teachers require students to work hard.	91%	90%	93%	94%	91%	93%
Teachers collaborate to achieve consistency on how student work is assessed.	85%	81%	88%	88%	90%	88%
Teachers know what students learn in each of their classes.	79%	77%	84%	84%	82%	84%
Teachers have knowledge of the content covered and instructional methods used by other teachers at	80%	75%	84%	83%	81%	83%
Teachers use digital content and resources in their instruction.	96%	95%	97%	96%	94%	96%
Teachers use assessment data to inform their instruction.	90%	90%	97%	96%	95%	95%
Teachers regularly assign homework that requires access to the internet to complete.	52%	46%	62%	55%	57%	55%
Teachers regularly assign homework that requires access to a digital device to complete.	51%	46%	59%	52%	60%	57%
Overall, my school is a good place to work and learn.	87%	84%	88%	86%	84%	87%
Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements about educational equity in your school.	District 2022	State 2022	District 2020	State 2020	District 2018	State 2018
At this school, all students are treated equitably, justly and fairly.	87%	80%	85%	78%	This content was first surveyed with the 2020 NCTWCS	
School rules are applied equitably to all students.	83%	73%	81%	71%		
This school emphasizes showing respect for all students' cultural beliefs and practices.	96%	92%	94%	92%		
This school provides quality services to help students with social or emotional needs.	87%	85%	88%	82%		
The programs and resources at this school are adequate to support students with special needs or disal	83%	80%	81%	79%		
This school provides instructional materials that reflect the diverse background of our students and co	86%	83%	82%	81%		

APPENDIX D: NC SEL & EQUITY PROJECT PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT

Stakeholder	Goals	Responsibilities
LEA ¹ (LEA Team, Charter School Team)	1. Provide access to social and emotional learning (SEL) and equity professional development and coaching for your LEA 2. Integrate SEL and equity throughout the layers of Multi-Tiered System of Support 3. Learn and share with other NC SEL & equity Project Participants 4. Demonstrate SEL implementation based on district and/or schoolwide SEL indicators 5. Demonstrate positive impact on student outcomes (e.g. EWS data, school climate, achievement and opportunity gap, discipline risk ratio and graduation rate).	• Designate an LEA team/workgroup membership from LEA leadership and MTSS Team, including MTSS & PBIS Coordinator and district level curriculum & instruction leader) which will: ○ participate with LEA team in 15 month SEL and equity professional development ○ lead the integration of SEL and equity within already existing defined core and intervention systems ○ meet at least monthly on districtwide SEL and equity integration ○ complete all activities outlined in the Core SEL Practices online course resulting in a Core SEL Support Plan to include defined instruction, curriculum, environment, and data evaluation ○ support school-level implementation and integration of SEL and equity within already existing defined core and intervention systems. • Identify a person or persons who will: ○ coordinate LEA SEL and mental health work ○ participate in a monthly, one hour virtual Community of Practice ○ provide regular updates to NCDPI on LEA SEL, equity & mental health work.

		● Plan for sustainability of SEL to align and integrate the plan with their Core Support ● Plan for academics and behavior to ensure SEL focus is not abruptly ended due to lack of funding and/or other resources.
NCDPI	1. Provide SEL and equity professional development at no cost to LEA. 2. Support implementation and sustainability of SEL and equity, as well as integration within an MTSS framework 3. Incentivize LEA's participation in Partnership Agreement by providing access to available grant funding for either an evidence based SEL program selected from the <u>CASEL Program Guides</u> or a universal screener (behavior, mental health or social emotional).	● Identify and provide SEL and equity professional development opportunities. ● Provide coaching and/or technical assistance with incorporating SEL within an LEA/school's defined core and intervention system. ● Provide coaching and/or technical assistance with selection of evidence based SEL program and universal screener (behavior, mental health or social emotional). ● Provide connections to and opportunities to collaborate with Project AWARE/ACTIVATE pilot sites (Beaufort, Cleveland, and Rockingham) and other LEAs leading SEL implementation.

¹ Local Educational Agency (LEA) includes traditional and non-traditional districts and charter

APPENDIX E: PANORAMA TEACHER WELL-BEING SURVEY QUESTIONS

Survey Question	Possible Responses				
During the past week, how often did you feel engaged at work?	Almost never	Once in awhile	Sometimes	Frequently	Almost always
During the past week, how often did you feel excited at work?	Almost never	Once in awhile	Sometimes	Frequently	Almost always
During the past week, how often did you feel exhausted at work?	Almost never	Once in awhile	Sometimes	Frequently	Almost always
During the past week, how often did you feel frustrated at work?	Almost never	Once in awhile	Sometimes	Frequently	Almost always
During the past week, how often did you feel engaged at work?	Almost never	Once in awhile	Sometimes	Frequently	Almost always
During the past week, how often did you feel happy at work?	Almost never	Once in awhile	Sometimes	Frequently	Almost always
During the past week, how often did you feel hopeful at work?	Almost never	Once in awhile	Sometimes	Frequently	Almost always
During the past week, how often did you feel overwhelmed at work?	Almost never	Once in awhile	Sometimes	Frequently	Almost always
During the past week, how often did you feel safe at work?	Almost never	Once in awhile	Sometimes	Frequently	Almost always
During the past week, how often did you feel stressed out at work?	Almost never	Once in awhile	Sometimes	Frequently	Almost always
During the past week, how often did you feel worried at work?	Almost never	Once in awhile	Sometimes	Frequently	Almost always
How effective do you feel at your job right now?	Not at all effective	Slightly effective	Somewhat effective	Quite effective	Extremely Effective
How much does your work matter to you?	Does not matter at all	Matters a little bit	Matters some	Matters quite a lot	Matters a tremendous amount
How meaningful for you is the work you do?	Not at all meaningful	Slightly meaningful	Somewhat meaningful	Quite meaningful	Extremely meaningful
Overall, how satisfied are you with your job right now?	Not at all satisfied	Slightly satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Quite satisfied	Extremely satisfied

Open ended: If you could change one thing about working at your school, what would you change?

APPENDIX F: TEACHER WELL-BEING FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

Timeframe: February – April 2023

Title of Study: *The Impact of the Implementation of a Social-Emotional and Wellness Framework on the Well-Being of Teachers*

Location of Focus Group: Magnolia Elementary, Sunflower Middle, Rosedale High School

Facilitator: Cheryl Baggett; Dr. Travis Lewis, ECU

Note Taker: Cheryl Baggett

Focus Group Participants (Names or Identifiers):

Note: Demographic information gathered in a Google forms pre-survey

Introduction Text

Good afternoon! My name is Cheryl Baggett and I will be the lead facilitator for today's focus group on ***The Impact of the Implementation of a Social-Emotional and Wellness Framework on the Well-Being of Teachers.*** We are in the beginning stages of creating a district wellness initiative and the purpose of this focus group is to learn more about how to effectively identify and address the specific wellness needs of teachers. Through this study, we want to learn more about the strategies, resources, and supports that may enhance or hinder teacher well-being. Additionally, it may be possible for us to recognize and identify resources for educators to equitably address their social-emotional and mental health needs. The results of this study may be beneficial for teacher well-being across this school district and in other school districts. It is our expectations that your experience as an educator, your perspective, and insight will be incredibly valuable as we evaluate the district wellness initiative and the opportunity to investigate and enhance collective teacher well-being.

After the conclusion of the focus group, the information you share with us will be anonymized so that your responses cannot be traced to any of you. It is very important to us that you are protected in this way so that you feel free to answer the questions posed and discuss them openly and honestly. Subsequently, we will use the transcripts from this focus group session to code your responses and analyze them accordingly to identify categories and themes. The results from this study will be shared with the district SEL-mental health team, district staff, and may be shared in a professional research publication. Additionally, your feedback will be beneficial in the ongoing development of the district wellness initiative to support staff and teachers.

As indicated in the email you received from me, as well as by completing the survey linked to the email and by joining us today, you are agreeing to participate in this Teacher Well-Being focus group. If you feel uncomfortable for any reason, you are free to leave at any time.

Before we begin, first I would like to introduce you to my co-facilitator of this session, Dr. Travis Lewis with East Carolina University. Dr. Lewis will facilitate the focus group interview process and I will serve as the note taker and assisting to ensure we are accurately capturing your responses. We are also recording today's focus group and transcribing what you say accordingly. Again, the recording and all transcripts will only be accessible to our research team and your specific identifiable information will be redacted. I would like to go over a few ground rules for the focus group. These are in place to ensure that all of you feel comfortable sharing your experiences and opinions.

Ground Rules:

1. *Confidentiality* –Please respect the confidentiality of your peers. As the lead facilitator, I will ensure the information from this focus group will only be shared anonymously.
2. *One Speaker at a Time* – Only one person should speak at a time in order to make sure that we can all hear what everyone is saying.
3. *Use Respectful Language* – In order to facilitate an open discussion, please avoid any statements or words that may be offensive to other members of the group.
4. *Open Discussion* – This is a time for everyone to feel free to express their opinions and viewpoints. You will not be asked to reach consensus on the topics discussed. There will be no right or wrong answers.
5. *Participation is Important* – It is important that everyone's voice is shared and heard in order to make this the most productive focus group possible. Please speak up if you have something to add to the conversation!

Are there any questions before we begin? Thank you, now let's start the focus group session:

Questions to be Asked, Listed Fully and in Order

1. When you hear the words, “well-being” what comes to mind?
2. School culture can be defined as the attitudes, expected behaviors and values that impact how a school operates. In your perspective, how does the culture of a school attribute to the well-being of educators?
1. What would you say are your greatest sources of stress as a classroom teacher?

For the next three (3) questions, we when talk about “leadership”, we are referring to your school leadership to include your principal, assistant principal(s), members of your administrative or school improvement leadership teams.

2. On a scale of 1-5, with 1 being very low and 5 being very high, how would you describe the level of support you have received from your school leadership and the connection to your overall well-being as an educator? Why?
3. What specific leadership practices and supports have been helpful when you have been stressed or feeling overwhelmed?
4. Data from the first WCS educator well-being survey show that 60% percent of our teachers feel responded favorably to their professional well-being. Can you share your thoughts on why teachers feel this way?
5. How capable do you feel in meeting the social-emotional and academic needs of your students? What part if any does this play in your overall well-being as an educator?
6. What strategies do you use to support your personal well-being?
7. What ideas or recommendations do you have about supporting teacher well-being: A) at the school level? B) at the district level?
8. How do the relationships with your co-workers, teaching team, and school team affect your sense of belonging? How do those relationships affect your well-being?
9. Is there anything else that you wish to share or speak to that we did not cover?

Conclusion Text

Thank you for participating in our Teacher Well-Being focus group. As a reminder, we will be sharing the information learned during this session anonymously as part of our research in order to identify resources and strategies to assist and improve teacher wellness. If you think of any additional thoughts or comments that you would like to share, please contact me at the email address from your invitation. We appreciate your help with this invaluable research so very much!

APPENDIX G: TEACHER WELL-BEING FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

Timeframe: January 2024

Title of Study: *The Impact of the Implementation of a Social-Emotional and Wellness Framework on the Well-Being of Teachers*

Location of Focus Group: Magnolia Elementary, Sunflower Middle, Rosedale High School

Facilitator: Cheryl Baggett

Focus Group Participants (Names or Identifiers):

Note: Demographic information gathered in a Google forms pre-survey

Introduction Text

Good afternoon! My name is Cheryl Baggett and I will be the lead facilitator for today's focus group on ***The Impact of the Implementation of a Social-Emotional and Wellness Framework on the Well-Being of Teachers***. As I shared when we met previously, we are creating a district wellness initiative, and the purpose of this focus group is to learn more about how to effectively identify and address the specific wellness needs of teachers. Through this study, we want to learn more about the strategies, resources, and supports that may enhance or hinder teacher well-being. Additionally, it may be possible for us to recognize and identify resources for educators to equitably address their social-emotional and mental health needs. The results of this study may be beneficial for teacher well-being across this school district and in other school districts. It is our expectations that your experience as an educator, your perspective, and insight will be incredibly valuable as we evaluate the district wellness initiative and the opportunity to investigate and enhance collective teacher well-being.

After the conclusion of the focus group, the information you share with us will be anonymized so that your responses cannot be traced to any of you. It is very important to us that you are protected in this way so that you feel free to answer the questions posed and discuss them openly and honestly. Subsequently, we will use the transcripts from this focus group session to code your responses and analyze them accordingly to identify categories and themes. The results from this study will be shared with the district SEL-mental health team, district staff, and may be shared in a professional research publication. Additionally, your feedback will be beneficial in the ongoing development of the district wellness initiative to support staff and teachers.

As indicated in the email you received from me, as well as by completing the survey linked to the email and by joining us today, you are agreeing to participate in this Teacher Well-Being focus group. If you feel uncomfortable for any reason, you are free to leave at any time.

We are also recording today's focus group and transcribing what you say accordingly. Again, the recording and all transcripts will only be accessible to our research team and your specific identifiable information will be redacted. I would like to go over a few ground rules for the focus group. These are in place to ensure that all of you feel comfortable sharing your experiences and opinions.

Ground Rules:

- *Confidentiality* – Please respect the confidentiality of your peers. As the lead facilitator, I will ensure the information from this focus group will only be shared anonymously.
- *One Speaker at a Time* – Only one person should speak at a time in order to make sure that we can all hear what everyone is saying.
- *Use Respectful Language* – In order to facilitate an open discussion, please avoid any statements or words that may be offensive to other members of the group.
- *Open Discussion* – This is a time for everyone to feel free to express their opinions and viewpoints. You will not be asked to reach consensus on the topics discussed. There will be no right or wrong answers.
- *Participation is Important* – It is important that everyone's voice is shared and heard in order to make this the most productive focus group possible. Please speak up if you have something to add to the conversation!

Are there any questions before we begin? Thank you, now let's start the focus group session:

Questions to be Asked, Listed Fully and in Order

1. **Educator Well-Being Survey:** We are going to discuss some select data points comparing the fall of 2022 to the fall of 2023 Panorama educator survey:
 - Data collected from the fall of 2022 survey to the fall of 2023 survey show an increase from 60% to 62% of teachers across the district who responded favorably to their professional well-being. **Please share your thoughts on what factors may have played a role in the increase in favorable responses?**
 - During the past week, how often did you feel exhausted at work? 9% (up 1%) of respondents indicated “almost never” or “once in a while.” **Please share your thoughts on why teachers may feel this way?**

- During the past week, how often did you feel overwhelmed at work? 21% (up 3%) of respondents indicated “almost never” or “once in a while.” **Please share your thoughts on why teachers may have responded this way?**
 - How effective do you feel at your job right now? This increased from 55% to 59% across the two surveys. **What would you attribute to this?**
 - How satisfied are you with your job right now? This increased from 54% to 59% across the two surveys. **What would you attribute to this?**
2. As you are aware, from our spring discussion, our district is focusing on developing a comprehensive wellness framework to support and enhance educator well-being. Steps taken have included the following:
- Implementation of the Panorama educator well-being survey (2022 & 2023).
 - Implementation of a research study which includes the participation of three pilot schools, focus groups.
 - Implementation of well-being interventions.

In your opinion what is the potential impact, and possible outcomes, if any, of implementing a comprehensive focus on educator well-being within our district?

3. **Well-Being Interventions:** Based on our previous focus group discussion, collaboration with our district SEL-mental health team, and research studies I have reviewed, some wellness "interventions" were selected and implemented at each of our pilot schools.
- **A) SEL Activity:** At the beginning of a staff meeting, a member of our district SEL-mental health team, led a team-building activity selected from the Panorama playbook for supporting adult social-emotional learning. This collaborative group exercise laid the groundwork for emotional and mental rejuvenation, while adding another potential tool to our educators' wellness toolkits.

Share your thoughts on the benefit of staff meetings beginning with an activity focused on adult social-emotional learning?

- **B) Licensed Therapist:** A session was guided by a licensed therapist, who provide participants with a foundation for enhancing your overall well-being personally and professionally. Participants were introduced to strategies that encompassed a broad spectrum of well-being, including self-care techniques, stress management, interpersonal communication skills, and strategies for work-life balance.

Share your thoughts on the benefit of staff being provided to a mental-health professional who can lead professional learning on personal & professional wellness strategies?

- **C) Youth Resilience & MH Essentials:** A session was led by an organization that specializes in providing evidence-based training and resources for resilience and trauma-informed practices. This session was designed to increase the capacity

of educators with a deeper insight into the complexities of student behavior, and was grounded in foundational brain science concepts. Staff were supplied with strategies and resilience tools essential for guiding their students through the intricate challenges of stressful events.

Share your thoughts on the benefit or impact of participating in this professional learning session.

- **D) EAP Resources:** During a staff meeting, our district mental health coordinator, a licensed clinical social worker, presented information that included a review of our district Employee Assistance Program (EAP), the benefits provided to district staff through this resource, and additional community resources accessible for all staff.

Share your input on the benefit of having access to external resources to support educator wellness?

- **E) Educator Resilience Space:** Your school was provided with funding to create or enhance a space for your school staff to reset, renew, and recharge. The design of the space is to support you all in temporarily disconnecting from the constant demands and challenges of your roles.

Share your thoughts on the impact of staff having access to a designated space at your school to have the opportunity to disconnect and recharge?

4. What additional ideas or recommendations do you have about supporting educator well-being?

5. Is there anything else that you wish to share or speak to that we did not cover?

Conclusion Text

Thank you for participating in our Teacher Well-Being focus group. As a reminder, we will be sharing the information learned during this session anonymously as part of our research in order to identify resources and strategies to assist and improve teacher wellness. If you think of any additional thoughts or comments that you would like to share, please contact me at the email address from your invitation. We appreciate your help with this invaluable research so very much!

