



# Supporting the Well-Being of Teachers and Staff

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Address Teacher and Staff Self-Care and  
Prevent Burnout

District Leadership Forum

# District Leadership Forum

## Managing Director

Pete Talbot

## Contributing Consultants

Alyssa Buccella

Ben Court

Rebecca Richards

Margaret Sullivan

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# Executive Summary

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## INTRODUCTION

- High Stress and Compassion Fatigue Lead to Concerns Around Teacher Well-Being
- Behavioral Health for Educators Has Been an Afterthought to Student SEL
- Four Pillars Frame Best-in Class Support for Teachers and Staff
- How to Use This Toolkit

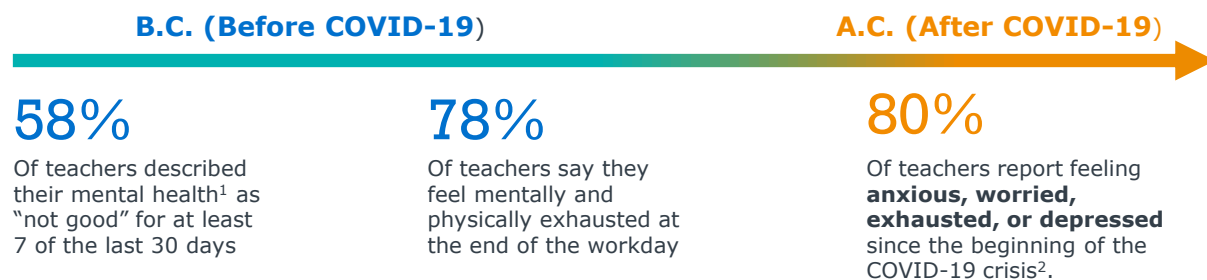
# Current Teacher Support Programs Miss the Mark

## High Stress and Compassion Fatigue Lead to Concerns Around Teacher Well-Being

Concerns of poor mental health and burnout among teachers are not new. Before the outbreak of the coronavirus, more than half reported poor mental health within the past month, and 3 in 4 reported feeling mentally and physically exhausted at the end of each day. Pressure to improve academic outcomes, growing concerns about student well-being, and a sharp increase in disruptive behaviors have left K-12 educators more vulnerable than ever to frustration, compassion fatigue, and secondary traumatic stress.

2020 has driven anxiety among teachers to new heights as they grapple with concerns over their own health and finances and worry for the well-being of their students, families, and friends. In May, 80% of teachers reported feeling anxious, worried, exhausted, and depressed. Reports indicate that these rates have only increased in subsequent weeks.

### Teachers Report High Levels of Stress and Emotional Strain



## Behavioral Health for Educators Has Been an Afterthought to Student SEL

Social and emotional learning (SEL) for students has gained considerable attention in recent years, but behavioral health support for employees lags behind. Typical supports for educators fall into two categories: informal, teacher self-care and expensive but frequently underutilized employee assistance programs. While helpful components, neither provide the continuous, accessible support teachers need to work through the daily stressors of today's classrooms. Instead, districts must establish a systematic approach to supporting the social and emotional well-being of teachers and staff.

### Strategies to Support Teacher Wellness Often Insufficient or Overlooked



1) Including stress, depression, or emotional challenges.

2) N=5,000 teachers surveyed by Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence.

3) Voluntary, work-based programs that offer free and confidential assessments, short-term counseling, referrals, and follow-up services to employees who have personal and/or work-related problems.

Sources: American Federation of Teachers, "2017 Educator Quality of Work Life Survey"; American Federation of Teachers, "PSRP Reporter: The National Publication of AFT Paraprofessionals and School Support Staff," Fall 2015; EAB interviews and analysis.

# Create Systems to Support Employee Well-Being

## Four Pillars Frame Best-in Class Support for Teachers and Staff

To support teachers through the unpredictable months and years ahead, district leaders must establish a portfolio of practices and programs that are effective, scalable, low cost, and sustainable. EAB research has found best-in class practices to revolve around four distinct pillars.



### CONTINUITY

Teacher well-being and behavioral health must be a consistent priority for district and building administrators throughout each calendar year. Mental Health Week or Month is no longer enough.



### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AND EMPATHY

K-12 leaders who publicly acknowledge the challenges their employees face through empathetic communications, practices, and policies have a measurable impact on staff well-being.



### STRUCTURED TRAINING ON BEST PRACTICES FOR SELF-CARE

It is imperative that all districts train their staff both to recognize signs of burnout and poor mental health and to maintain a structured practice of evidence-based self-care.



### FACILITATED PEER GROUPS AND SUPPORT NETWORKS

The benefits of peer support for those struggling with burnout and mental health challenges are well documented. Districts can take concrete steps to ensure that all teachers have access to others who are also working through and have overcome similar challenges at any point in the year.

## How To Use This Toolkit

This resource provides district and school leaders with a step-by-step guide for better protecting the mental health of teachers and staff throughout the school year. EAB recommends working sequentially through the following sections in order to yield maximum benefit.

1. **Assess** current communication approaches, resources, and policies to ensure adequate employee supports are in place.



Complete the **Employee Mental Health Support Audit** with your leadership teams to inform policy changes and process improvements.

2. **Equip** teachers and staff with self-care tools to help them systematically manage their stress.



Provide employees with the **Burnout/ Compassion Fatigue Self-Assessment** and the **Self-Care Planning Template** to help address signs and symptoms of burnout.

3. **Create** structured support networks to continuously address employees' social, emotional, and mental well-being.



Use the **Peer Support Meeting Guidelines** and **Wellness Partner Questionnaire** to guide your efforts in building these peer networks.

4. **Track** your team's ongoing progress in supporting employees' mental well-being.



Consult the **Rapid Response Team Checklist** to ensure your team is on track to meet its goals.



# Assess Current Practices for Supporting Employee Mental Health

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STEP

- Tool 1: Employee Mental Health Support Audit

1

## Overview

# Assess Current Practices for Supporting Employee Mental Health

### Purpose of This Tool

Use the **Employee Mental Health Support Audit** to assess your district's or school's current mental health practices against recommended best practices from leading institutions and to identify areas in need of improvement.

### Key Implementation Steps

- 1 Complete this three-part audit, rating each criterion as a "yes" or "no."** Your ratings will help you gauge where teachers and staff could use more frequent communication, additional support, improved resources, or adjusted policies.
- 2 Refer to the implementation resources** for advice and sample practices to inform your improvement efforts.

### Audit Key



Look for the "high impact practice" designation for guidance on where to focus limited time and resources to improve employee mental health and wellness



# 1 | Assess Your Current Communications Strategy

Well-crafted, consistent communication can measurably reduce anxiety and stress among teachers and staff. Which of the following practices does your institution already adhere to? Check Y (yes) or N (no).

## Part 1: Reduce Anxiety Through Transparent, Multi-Channel Communication

My District/School Has...	Rating		Implementation Resources
	Y	N	
<p><b>...directly acknowledged the increased burden and uncertainty</b> placed on teachers and staff as a result of COVID-19 and has proactively adjusted expectations of essential work responsibilities in response</p> <p> <b>High impact practice</b></p>			<p>Reduce stress and enable employees to seek needed support by honestly acknowledging the personal and professional strain resulting from COVID-19 and proactively setting realistic work expectations.</p> <p>See sample letters from <a href="#">Michigan State University</a> and <a href="#">Baylor University</a></p>
<p><b>...established a regular cadence of communication</b> (i.e., daily, weekly) that effectively updates teachers and staff on the institution’s response to COVID-19 and any known plans for the future</p> <p> <b>High impact practice</b></p>			<p>Do not wait for “breaking news”—send regular emails with updates about your institution’s response to COVID-19, even if some updates are short or simply offer messages of gratitude.</p> <p>See samples from <a href="#">Klein Independent School District</a> and <a href="#">Montgomery County Public Schools</a></p>
<p><b>...shared messages through multiple distribution channels and media formats</b>, supplementing emails with other communication, such as regular social media blasts, blog posts, short videos, or podcasts to ensure messages are timely and accessible</p>			<p>Translate existing information and emails into 1-3 posts per week to keep information digestible, accessible, and personal. Feel free to use posts to direct employees back to centralized repositories of information (e.g., your website).</p> <p>Samples include <a href="#">Clark County Public Schools’ Facebook Page</a> and <a href="#">Princeton Public Schools’ Facebook Page</a></p>
<p><b>...instituted a clear process and multiple communication channels</b> for employees to ask pressing questions and to provide feedback</p> <p> <b>High impact practice</b></p>			<p>Make this process clear on your website and use a combination of communication channels to enhance accessibility and encourage participation. Samples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A <a href="#">dedicated email address</a></li> <li>• An <a href="#">embedded webform</a></li> <li>• A <a href="#">coronavirus helpline</a></li> <li>• Virtual townhall meetings (see <a href="#">Atlanta Public Schools</a> and <a href="#">Klein Independent School District</a>)</li> </ul> <p>For virtual townhall meetings, consider allowing employees to submit questions in advance.</p>
<p><b>...created a dedicated COVID-19 webpage</b> that archives all communication and supporting resources in an easy-to-access, centralized location</p>			<p>Archive COVID-19 related communications on a centralized webpage to increase transparency and ease of future reference.</p> <p>See samples from <a href="#">NOLA Public Schools</a> and <a href="#">Jeffco Public Schools</a> and use the <a href="#">Independent School COVID-19 Self-Web Audit</a> for additional guidance.</p>
<p><b>...included a comprehensive FAQs section</b> with detailed answers for key stakeholders, including teachers and staff, on the COVID-19 webpage</p>			<p>Keep FAQs organized by topic or relevant stakeholders as the list of questions and answers continues to grow.</p> <p>See samples from <a href="#">Fairfax County Public Schools</a> and <a href="#">Denver Public Schools</a></p>

## 2 | Assess Your Current Mental Health Supports

Offering a variety of easily accessible mental health and wellness resources is critical to supporting teachers and staff. *Which of the following practices does your institution already adhere to? Check Y (yes) or N (no).*



### Part 2: Provide Resources that Support the Well-Being of Teachers and Staff

My District/School Has...	Rating		Implementation Resources
	Y	N	
<p><b>...regularly shared mental health support resources</b> and encouraged self-care (e.g., through weekly wellness emails to teachers and staff)</p> <p> <b>High impact practice</b></p>			<p>Focus weekly wellness emails on topics like self-compassion, stress reduction, and mindfulness. Be sure to also highlight available support resources and upcoming events.</p> <p>See samples from <a href="#">Simon Fraser University's</a> 14 weekly email templates and <a href="#">Northwestern University</a></p>
<p><b>...organized virtual events or informational webinars focused on mental health and wellness</b> (e.g., fitness classes, mindfulness breaks, webinar on coping strategies)</p> <p> <b>High impact practice</b></p>			<p>Offer virtual events that build community, develop resiliency skills, and reinforce healthy coping strategies like exercise and meditation.</p> <p>Survey faculty and staff about the topics and frequency of events that they would find most supportive.</p> <p>See sample from <a href="#">Montgomery County Public Schools</a></p>
<p><b>...offered virtual counseling services and support groups</b> for faculty and staff who are struggling with mental health challenges such as anxiety, grief, and social isolation</p> <p> <b>High impact practice</b></p>			<p>See EAB's <a href="#">expert insight</a> on technological solutions to improve access to mental health care during COVID-19.</p> <p>See a sample from <a href="#">Beverly Hills High School</a></p>
<p><b>...provided a comprehensive set of self-serve resources</b> for faculty and staff to focus on mental wellness and self-care</p>			<p>Provide faculty and staff with wellness and self-care tips, reputable support resources, and details on benefits available through your Employee Assistance Program (EAP).</p> <p>See samples from EAB's <a href="#">expert insight</a>, <a href="#">Jeffco Public Schools</a> and <a href="#">Montgomery County Public Schools</a></p> <p>Also direct faculty and staff to free or low-cost mental health and wellness apps. If possible, cover subscription costs for paid apps.</p> <p>See samples from <a href="#">SUNY Geneseo</a> and <a href="#">Smith College</a></p>
<p><b>...posted mental health resources and tips on social media</b> to improve accessibility and visibility of resources and to encourage dialogue about mental health and wellness</p>			<p>Incorporate mental health support resources and topics into your regular flow of social media posts about COVID-19.</p> <p>See samples from <a href="#">Miami-Dade County Public Schools</a> and <a href="#">Fairfax County Public Schools</a></p>
<p><b>...featured all employee mental health and wellness resources</b> on the COVID-19 webpage (or has linked to them from the webpage)</p>			<p>Prominently feature all mental health and wellness resources on your COVID-19 webpage so faculty and staff easily know where and how to access support.</p> <p>See samples from <a href="#">Cypress-Fairbanks Independent School District</a> and <a href="#">San Jose Unified School District</a></p>

## 3 | Assess Your Current Policies and Benefits

Having an eye towards empathy in revising administrative policies and benefits can help reduce anxiety for employees, especially during uncertain or transitional times. *Which of the following practices does your institution already adhere to? Check Y (yes) or N (no).*

### Part 3: Adjust Administrative Policies to Ease Employee Stress

My District/School Has...	Rating		Implementation Resources
	Y	N	
<p><b>...not punitively used teacher performance evaluations against teachers during this time</b> but has used them to positively acknowledge work being done while in remote instruction</p> <p> <b>High impact practice</b></p>			<p>Consider revising evaluations for those teachers educating students remotely. Look to your state department of education for guidance on revised performance evaluation protocol.</p> <p>For example, see guidance from <a href="#">Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction</a></p>
<p><b>...enabled employees to implement flexible work schedules</b> to support work-life balance</p> <p> <b>High impact practice</b></p>			<p>See sample guidance and resources from EAB's <a href="#">Conversation Guide for Managers</a> and <a href="#">Yale University</a></p>
<p><b>...granted additional paid administrative leave</b> to accommodate extenuating circumstances related to COVID-19</p>			<p>See samples from <a href="#">Kansas City Kansas Public Schools</a> and the <a href="#">University of California System</a></p>
<p><b>...communicated any necessary hiring freezes</b>, outlining affected roles, and clarifying any impact on workloads, job security, or advancement opportunities for current employees</p>			<p>Be sure to highlight how a temporary hiring freeze will safeguard your ability to support current students, faculty, and staff.</p> <p>See sample statement from <a href="#">Albemarle County Public Schools</a></p>
<p><b>...begun or has continued offering telehealth services</b> to employees</p>			<p>See sample policies from <a href="#">Tattnall County Schools</a> and <a href="#">Fairfax County Public Schools</a></p>
<p><b>...allowed employees without enough accrued sick time to use unearned sick days</b> to take care of themselves or family members affected by COVID-19</p>			<p>Consult the Families First Coronavirus Response Act, which includes direction on paid sick leave regarding COVID-19.</p> <p>See sample policies from <a href="#">Rockwood School District</a> and <a href="#">Woodburn School District</a></p>



This resource has been modified from its original version published on [eab.com](http://eab.com).



# Create Structures for Employee Social-Emotional Self-Care

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STEP

2

- Tool 2: Burnout/Compassion Fatigue Information Sheet
- Tool 3: Burnout/Compassion Fatigue Self-Assessment
- Tool 4: Assessment of Self-Care Regiment
- Tool 5: Self-Care Planning Template

## Overview

# Create Structures for Employee Social-Emotional Self-Care

### Purpose of These Tools

Use these information sheets, self-assessments, and planning templates to help teachers and staff:

- Gain greater awareness of the signs and effects of occupational stress
- Assess and monitor their current mental well-being
- Incorporate basic self-care strategies into their daily routines

### Key Implementation Steps

- 1 Structure some professional development time** that focuses on keeping employees informed of the signs and symptoms of burnout and provides time for them to continuously commit to self-care.
- 2 Provide all teachers and staff copies of the [Burnout/Compassion Fatigue Information Sheet](#)** on page 14. Encourage them to use these sheets as a guide for discussion during Professional Learning Communities or Peer Support Meetings (see tool #6 on page 22).
- 3 Ask teachers and staff to complete the [Burnout/Compassion Fatigue Self-Assessment](#) and the [Assessment of Self-Care Practice](#)** on pages 15-18. These are meant to help staff reflect on their current mental health and wellness and to identify when they may need additional support from school administrators or professional services.
- 4 Ask all employees to regularly complete and revisit the [Self-Care Planning Template](#)** on page 19 during Professional Learning Communities or Peer Support Meetings.

# Increase Awareness of Burnout & Compassion Fatigue



## Definitions

**Compassion Fatigue:** The physical, mental, and emotional strain experienced by those who work with traumatized people. Over an extended period of time, this strain can result in withdrawal from or indifference toward the suffering of others.

**Vicarious Trauma:** Emotional distress resulting from hearing about the traumatic experiences of someone else. Distress may result from hearing someone’s trauma story, witnessing the aftermath of a traumatic event, retelling a student’s story, or seeing images related to trauma. Individuals with severe symptoms could be diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

**Burnout:** Emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a sense of reduced personal accomplishment. Burnout develops as a result of general occupational stress but is not used exclusively to describe the effects of indirect trauma exposure.

## Risk Factors

Any professional who works directly with children, especially children exposed to trauma, is at risk of compassion fatigue and burnout. But statistically, certain groups are more likely to suffer from secondary traumatic stress.



Female gender



Inexperience in the field



Degree of exposure



Prior trauma exposure



Young age

## Warning Signs



<b>Hypervigilance</b>	Excessive anxiety, alertness for potential threats or dangers at and outside of work; always being “on” and “on the lookout”
<b>Poor boundaries</b>	Lacking a balanced sense of your role; you take on too much, step in and try to control events, have difficulty leaving work at work, or take work too personally
<b>Avoidance</b>	Coping with stress by shutting down and disconnecting
<b>Numbing</b>	Unable to remain emotionally connected to your work
<b>Addictions</b>	Attaching to distractions to check out from work and/or personal life
<b>Chronic exhaustion/physical ailments</b>	Experiencing physical, emotional, spiritual fatigue or inexplicable aches and pains exceeding what you expect for an ordinary busy day or week
<b>Minimizing</b>	Trivializing a current experience by comparing it with another situation that we regard as more severe
<b>Anger and cynicism</b>	Using cynicism or anger to cope with other intense feelings that you may not understand or know how to manage
<b>Feelings of professional inadequacy</b>	Becoming increasingly unsure of yourself professionally, second-guessing yourself, feeling insecure about tasks you once felt confident performing

## Self-Assess Your Level of Burnout

**Recognize the warning signs:** Becoming aware of the effects your work has on you is essential to helping you take care of yourself. Think about the warning signs of compassion fatigue and burnout and consider whether they are present in your daily life.

Even if you are not frequently exposed to student trauma, you may be struggling with issues of burnout. Check back regularly to see how things are going and determine if you need to make adjustments to your self-care plan.


Warning Sign	Yes or No	If Yes, Describe Effect on You
Increased anxiety or concern about safety	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Intrusive, negative thoughts and images related to your students' traumatic experiences	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Difficulty maintaining work-life boundaries	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Avoiding people, places, and activities that you used to find enjoyable	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Feeling emotionally numb, disconnected, or unable to empathize	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Experiencing feelings of chronic exhaustion and related physical ailments	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Regularly feeling angry and/or cynical about students, staff, and your work	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Feeling inadequate in your work and questioning whether what you do matters	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Other:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	

# 1 | Assess Your Physical Self-Care Practice

**Assess your self-care practice:** Many strategies are available to support self-care and reduce the signs and symptoms of burnout. Complete the self-care self-assessment below; this tool provides ideas about how to practice self-care across a number of areas of your life. Remember that no one strategy works for everyone.


**Rate how often you do each of the below strategies using the following scale:**


**5**–Frequently   **4**–Sometimes   **3**–Rarely   **2**–Never   **1**–It never even occurred to me

Physical Self-Care 	
	Get regular preventative medical care
	Take time off when you are sick
	Seek emergency medical care when needed
	Exercise and/or do physical activity that is fun for you (e.g., walk, run, hike, lift weights, go to the gym, yoga, martial arts)
	Get away from stressful technology (e.g., cell phone, computer, social media, e-mail)
	Avoid excessive use of alcohol and other substances
	Get enough sleep
	Eat regularly (i.e., breakfast and lunch)
	Eat healthily
	Take vacations, mini-vacations, or day trips
	Get massages
	Other:




## 2 | Assess Your Emotional and Professional Self-Care

Emotional Self-Care 	
	Express emotions (e.g., anger, worry) in a constructive way
	Stay in contact with important people in your life
	Treat yourself kindly (i.e., supportive inner dialogue or self-talk)
	Feel proud of yourself
	Re-read favorite books, review favorite movies
	Identify and seek out comforting activities, objects, people, places
	Spend time with others whose company you enjoy
	Find things that make you laugh
	Allow yourself to cry
	Other:

Workplace or Professional Self-Care 	
	Identify projects or tasks that are exciting, growth promoting, and rewarding for you
	Ask for help when needed, get support from colleagues and/or administrators
	Say no to excessive additional responsibilities that will erode your time
	Pursue regular learning and professional development opportunities
	Have a peer support group
	Make time for reflective thinking
	Take time to chat with coworkers
	Take time to eat lunch
	Other:

Sources: "Building Trauma-Sensitive Schools Handout Package," U.S. Department of Education National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments; EAB interviews and analysis.

### 3 | Assess Your Psychological Self-Care

Psychological Self-Care 	
	See a therapist or counselor for yourself
	Make time for self-reflection (e.g., your dreams, thoughts, imagery, and feelings)
	Write in a journal
	Say no to extra personal responsibilities that distract from what matters most to you
	Take a step to decrease stress in your life
	Make time for prayer, meditation
	Share with and/or ask for help from others
	Engage your intelligence in a new area—go to an art museum, performance, sports event, exhibit, or other cultural event
	Read literature unrelated to work
	Spend time outdoors
	Contribute to or participate in causes you believe in
	Express gratitude
	Participate in a spiritual gathering, community, or group
	Celebrate milestones with rituals that are meaningful to you
	Remember and memorialize loved ones who have died
	Listen to inspiring music, sing
	Do something at which you are a beginner
	Other:








Continue to page 19 to complete your self-care plan. Pay particular attention if your category scores on this assessment were within the following ranges:

- Physical self-care: 11-30
- Emotional self-care: 9-28
- Professional self-care: 8-24
- Psychological self-care: 17-48

# Plan Ways You Will Commit to Self-Care

**Adopt specific strategies:** Based on your responses to the self-care self-assessment, list 1–2 things in each area that you already do and 1–2 things that you would like to do to take care of yourself. Then choose 3–5 things from your list that you can make a commitment to doing in the next month.

Area	I Already...	I Would Like to Begin...
<b>Physical</b> 		
<b>Emotional</b> 		
<b>Professional</b> 		
<b>Psychological</b> 		
<b>Committed to Doing in the Next Month:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> </ul>		
<b>Suggestions from Wellness Partner (see Section 3, p. 24):</b>		

 These templates were adapted from the U.S. Department of Education’s resources for “Building Trauma-Sensitive Schools.” Click [here](#) for more trauma-informed care training materials, events, and implementation supports, or visit EAB’s guide to [Supporting Students with a History of Trauma](#) for guidance on adopting a trauma-sensitive approach to education.

Sources: “[Building Trauma-Sensitive Schools Handout Package](#),” U.S. Department of Education National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments; EAB interviews and analysis.



# Establish School-Based Peer Support Networks

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STEP

3

- Tool 6: Peer Support Meeting Guidelines
- Tool 7: Wellness Partner Questionnaire

## Overview

# Establish School-Based Peer Support Networks

### **Purpose of These Tools**

These tools are designed to help districts and schools develop formal peer support networks that will deliver sustainable and meaningful impact throughout the school year. These school-based support networks provide crucial opportunities for teachers and staff to discuss and address their own feelings of stress, compassion fatigue, and burnout. These networks can also help employees hold one another accountable to caring for their social-emotional needs.

### **Key Implementation Steps**

- 1** **Carve out one hour of meeting time once or twice a month** during regularly scheduled staff meetings or professional development days.
- 2** **Create a schedule of monthly or bi-monthly meetings** focused on a variety of topics meant to provide teachers with rich discussion and helpful wellness strategies (e.g., mindfulness, meditation, or exercise).
- 3** **Communicate the finalized schedule to all employees** encouraging them to sign up; see the [Peer Support Meeting Guidelines](#) for additional recommendations.
- 4** **Pair staff members together as “wellness partners” to connect outside of group meetings** when they are grappling with difficult circumstances in their school or classroom.
- 5** **Encourage staff to consult the [Wellness Partner Questionnaire](#)** for conversation topics and resources.

# 1 | Optimize Meetings for Impact and Convenience

## Wellness Meetings Destigmatize Teachers' Struggles, Offer Support

Below is a step-by-step guide for implementing regular peer support meetings—either virtual or in person—for teachers and staff to cope with stress, emotional strain, and burnout.



### 1. Communicate the Opportunity to All Teachers and Staff

- Notify all employees of opportunity to engage in monthly or bi-monthly peer support meetings
- Consider using multiple channels, such as email, in-person or virtual meetings, and regular newsletters or social media updates



### 2. Schedule Meetings During Contractual Hours

- Schedule one-hour, monthly or bi-monthly meetings to take place in a convenient, yet private school location or over a secured online meeting platform
- Try to allocate time during teachers' contractual work hours (e.g., part of a regularly scheduled team/staff meeting or a professional development day) to encourage more participation
- Depending on the number of participants, each school may consider dividing meetings into smaller groups to allow for more intimate conversations



### 3. Designate and Prepare Meeting Facilitators to Guide Sessions

- Solicit the support of administrators, counselors, or resource teachers to facilitate meetings
- Prepare facilitators to guide conversations around social-emotional and trauma-informed practices for educators, and equip them with strategies for creating a safe, non-judgmental space
- Provide facilitators with suggestions for supplemental meeting content, follow-up materials, and procedures to direct employees to more formalized services if needed



### 4. Plan Meeting Content and Themes

- Designate a themed focus of conversation for each session, and try to include a related activity
- Focus on covering a variety of themes and relevant topics, such as how to disconnect from work-related anxiety, how to embrace good habits over bad ones, how to decompress from a stressful day, how to strike a work/life balance, etc.



### 5. Ensure Awareness of Expectations in Advance of Meeting

- Provide interested teachers and staff with an overview of the meeting themes and what they should be prepared to discuss at each session
- Ensure all participants are aware meetings are meant to be safe, judgement-free spaces for conversation



### 6. Pair Teachers Together as Wellness Partners

- Each participant should be assigned a wellness partner
- Partners will provide mutual support to one another between meetings and will hold each other accountable to following through on their personal action steps



These peer support meeting guidelines were inspired by Happy Teacher Revolution, a Baltimore-based organization focused on supporting teacher mental health through facilitated wellness groups. Click [here](#) for more information on the organization and what they recommend. Also visit [Teach for America's compilation of mental health resources](#) for journal prompts and wellness worksheets.

## 2 | Plan Ahead for Regular Peer Support Meetings

### Wellness Meetings Destigmatize Teachers’ Struggles, Offer Support

Below is a sample template to help plan for peer support meetings at your district or school.



### Session Theme: Embracing Mindfulness in Our Daily Lives

Time	Focus/Activity	Materials Needed	Follow-Up Action Steps
5 min	<p><b>Introductions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Invite participants to introduce themselves/provide updates on progress</li> <li>Establish/reaffirm meeting guidelines:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This is a judgment-free space</li> <li>Everyone is invited to freely share their thoughts and emotions but is not obligated to do so</li> <li>All discussions should remain confidential and shared only among those in the room</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	N/A	N/A
25 min	<p><b>Discussion:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Encourage participants to share some job-associated challenges they’ve recently experienced, noting how they responded to these challenges</li> <li>Ask participants to listen for commonalities in their shared experiences</li> </ul>	Offer an organizer to help participants self-reflect before sharing aloud	Ask participants to brainstorm and record how they may advise their peers (and themselves) to respond to these challenges in the future
25 min	<p><b>Mindfulness Guided Meditation:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lead participants in a guided meditation focused practicing mindfulness in the day to day</li> <li>Encourage participants to remain mindful of their joys and their connections even in the midst of challenges</li> </ul>	Optional use of yoga mats to ease relaxation and enhance meditation experience	Ask participants to practice mindfulness throughout their day, taking note of moments they may feel compassion fatigue or abundant anxiety; encourage them to journal each day to track their progress
5 min	<p><b>Conclusion:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Thank participants for freely sharing and listening to their peers</li> <li>Review follow-up action steps and remind everyone to be meeting regularly with their wellness partners between group meetings</li> </ul>	N/A	N/A

**Note:** Meeting facilitators should consider best practices for planning effective lessons—applying many of the same principles for engaging students to engaging adults.

# Equip Employees with Peer Support Guidance

## Wellness Partners Provide Ongoing Support and Accountability

Below is series of questions wellness partners can use as reference during their regular peer check-ins. Wellness partners should regularly remind each other to follow through on their self-care strategies and seek additional help when needed. Keep in mind staff pairs do not need to work in the same grade level, building, or professional role.

<b>Questions to Ask Your Wellness Partner During Regular Check-Ins</b>	
<b>Ensure Your Wellness Partner Is <b>Practicing Self-Care</b></b>	<b>Resources/Additional Ideas</b>
Have you taken time for yourself in the last week to do something relaxing and enjoyable (e.g., meditate, exercise, read, engage in another hobby, etc.)? What specifically have you done, and how did you feel during the activity?	Consult <b>Tool 4: Assessment of Self-Care Regiment</b> in this toolkit for additional topics and self-care ideas to discuss with your wellness partner.
Have you taken some substantial breaks from screen time and technology use in the last week? Was it difficult to pull yourself away?	
Have you been able to spend quality time with loved ones in the last week? If so, what did you do together?	
Have you been able to discontinue or say “no” to at least one extra, stress-inducing responsibility in the last week? What was the thing you discontinued? Was it difficult to do?	
<b>Ensure Your Wellness Partner Is <b>Maintaining Self-Commitments</b> Made at Peer Support Meetings</b>	<b>Resources/Additional Ideas</b>
What progress have you made in your resolutions to <i>[insert any resolutions made at peer support meetings, e.g., journaling, meditating, practicing mindfulness, taking time off, etc.]</i> ?	Consult any notes or organizers used during peer support meetings to review resolutions made.
What do you need in order to maintain or begin making progress on these self-resolutions? Is there something I can support you in doing?	
<b>Ensure Your Wellness Partner Is <b>Seeking Additional Help</b> When Needed</b>	<b>Resources/Additional Ideas</b>
Have you noticed any improvements in your sense of well-being? Or have you experienced additional stress and emotional strain recently?	Contact a trusted school or district leader or any licensed clinician working for the school or district who can direct your wellness partner to more formalized supports. Also, consult resources and benefit details available through your Employee Assistance Program (EAP).
Do you feel well supported in your role? Do you feel part of the community? Are you confidently able to rely on others for support?	





# Track Your Progress Towards Effectively Supporting Employees' Well-Being

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STEP

- Tool 8: Rapid Response Team Checklist

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# Supporting the Well-Being of Teachers and Staff

## Objectives

1. Evaluate current systems for supporting employee mental health and revise policies accordingly
2. Develop structures for employees to regularly engage in social-emotional self-care and wellness
3. Improve employee peer support networks that hold staff accountable to practicing self-care

## Key Metrics

1. Percentage of teachers and staff attending peer support meetings
2. Percentage of teachers and staff reporting feelings of stress, anxiety, burnout



## Address Teacher and Staff Self-Care and Prevent Burnout

1. Have you audited your district or school's current approach to supporting employees' mental health?
2. Have you consulted and applied some of the provided recommendations and resources on pages 9 through 11 to inform your districtwide or schoolwide improvements?
3. Have you carved out professional development time dedicated to understanding the signs and symptoms of burnout?
4. Have you provided dedicated time for employees to self-assess their level of burnout and compassion fatigue and their current self-care regiment?
5. Do all employees engage in self-care planning on a regular basis?
6. Have you reserved contractual time for employees to meet regularly and discuss their shared challenges while also learning wellness and self-care strategies?
7. Have staff been assigned a wellness partner to help them stay on track with their wellness goals?





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