Interventions to Improve Educator Well-Being

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The U.S. Department of Education (2021) indicates schools focus on supporting the social, emotional, and behavioral aspects of mental health. One of their recommendations to increase capacity to provide these supports is to "Prioritize wellness for each and every child, student, educator, and provider" (p. 19). Educator well-being and social, emotional, and behavioral competencies have been linked to student academic, behavior, and social-emotional outcomes (e.g., Braun et al., 2020; Harding et al., 2019; Klusmann et al, 2022). Interventions can increase educator wellness and social-emotional-behavioral health (SEBH), and help teachers deal with job-related stress (e.g., Oliveira et al., 2021).

Prevention and Identification Strategies

Pre-service and in-service education can support the development of teacher well-being and SEBH. Teacher certification requirements in the majority of states include responsible decision making, social awareness, and relationship skills, but very few states require students to learn self-awareness and self-management skills. These two areas include skills such as stress management, emotional regulation, and the appropriate expression of emotions. They also include being able to identify one's emotions and understanding how one's thoughts and feelings influence behavior (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2017). Given the high stress levels associated with teaching (Steiner & Woo, 2022), supporting the self-awareness and self-management competencies of teachers should be a priority in teacher pre-service and in-service education.

There are few psychometrically sound tools for broadly assessing the social and emotional competence of educators. Instead, the outcomes of programs targeting these areas are often measured using multiple assessments focused on different aspects of SEBH (e.g. Jennings et al., 2017; Roeser et al., 2022). There isn't one common accepted definition of teacher well-being. As a result, there are a range of measures of teacher well-being, with researchers often using multiple assessments measuring different aspects of well-being (Fox et al., 2023). See Appendix A for examples of assessments that measure components of adult SEBH and teacher wellness.

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Intervention Strategies

Research on the effectiveness of SEBH interventions developed specifically for teachers is limited (Marquesi et al., 2019). Existing interventions target social-emotional competencies (self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making), instructional practices, and well-being. Research suggests interventions can positively affect teacher social-emotional competence, positive emotions, and perceived well-being, while decreasing psychological distress and internalizing problems (Oliveira et al., 2021).

This brief provides an overview of several promising interventions for teachers, including how to access the interventions and, when available, the cost of the intervention.

#1 Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education (CARE)

The Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education (CARE) program is a 30-hour program for educators intended to promote social and emotional skills and reduce emotional stress. The program includes content and practice related to mindfulness, emotional regulation, and compassion for oneself and others. The program is presented in four or five sessions across several weeks or during a summer retreat, with a booster session several months after program completion. There is also telephone or email coaching for each participant between the training sessions (Jennings et al., 2020).

CARE is available through <u>CREATE (Creating Resilience for Educators, Administrators, and Teachers</u>). Face-to-face delivery of the program is preferred for $2500 per day plus expenses for up to 30 people. Administrators may want to consider supporting a staff member in becoming a CARE trainer. This process includes the CARE training as well as working with a current CARE trainer (D. Morelli, personal communication, June 26, 2023).

Research by Jennings et al. (2013, 2017) suggests suggests CARE has a positive impact on teachers' mindfulness, psychological distress, and emotional regulation, as well as classroom interactions with students. CARE participants' level of emotional support for their students slightly increased across the school year, while the level of emotional support for students decreased for those who did not participate (Jennings et al., 2013, 2017). Additionally, participants increased their awareness and responsiveness to their students' needs, demonstrating the same level of warmth and respect for their students at both the beginning and the end of the year (Jennings et al., 2017). Jennings et al. also suggest that the CARE program provided protective effects for teachers by increasing social-emotional learning competencies and decreasing psychological distress. A follow-up assessment conducted 12 months after the intervention began showed that emotional regulation continued to increase in the intervention group, while psychological distress continued to decrease.

Further, CARE training had a greater impact on teachers who reported higher psychological distress prior to the intervention compared to those with lower psychological distress (Jennings et al., 2019). Participants indicated high satisfaction with the program, as well as perceived improvements in their well-being, self-awareness, effectiveness in managing classroom behaviors, and their ability to engage in supportive relationships with their students (Jennings et al., 2013, 2017).

#2 Stress Management and Relaxation Techniques (SMART-in-Education)

Stress Management and Relaxation Techniques (SMART-in-Education) is a 36-hour program that focuses on mindfulness, emotion and emotion regulation, stress, compassion, and forgiveness. The program includes 11 sessions delivered across 8 weeks (Roeser et al., 2013; Taylor et al., 2016). It has also been delivered in nine 2.5-hour sessions with two full-day retreats (Benn et al., 2012). The effectiveness of SMART-in-Education has been studied with elementary and secondary teachers in urban and suburban districts in the United States and Canada (Roeser et al., 2013; Taylor et al., 2016), as well as with special education teachers and parents with a child with a disability in a small city (Benn et al., 2012).

Research shows SMART has several positive effects on teachers' social-emotional competence. Teachers reported increased mindfulness and self-compassion and decreased stress and anxiety (Benn et al., 2012; Roeser et al., 2013). Benn et al. (2012) found changes in mindfulness, self-compassion, personal growth, stress, and anxiety were larger at the 2-month follow-up than at the end of the intervention, showing continued improvement over time. Taylor et al. (2016) found participating in SMART-in-Education resulted in decreased job stress and increased efficacy for regulating one's emotions.

Participants also reported positive changes in their efficacy in forgiving students. It may be that positive changes related to forgiveness allowed teachers to resolve conflicts with others, resulting in decreased stress. Results also demonstrated SMART-in-Education participants made positive changes in how they responded to stressors (Taylor et al., 2016). Participants reported high levels of satisfaction with the SMART program and they indicated they would recommend the program to others (Benn et al., 2012; Roeser et al., 2013).

SMART-in-Education is available through Glowmundo, a non-profit organization in Colorado. One of the original developers of SMART-in-Education has updated the program and provides training to educators and other groups (M. Cullen, personal communication, June 26, 2023).

Teachers who completed this program indicated less job stress and anxiety and greater self-compassion related to their work following program completion, as well as four months later. Improvements in levels of emotional exhaustion and symptoms of depression were also indicated at the four-month follow-up (Roeser et al., 2022). Additional information about Cullen's Mindfulness-Based Emotional Balance (MBEB) program is available through her website. Cullen and Brito Pons (2015) developed a workbook version of the program to be completed in 8-weeks. The effectiveness of the workbook version of the program is unknown at this time.

#3 Contemplative Interventions (CIs)

Contemplative Interventions (CIs) have long been used to enhance well-being. One aspect of CIs includes mindfulness, which focuses on the increase of positive emotion, awareness of stressors and mental health, and acceptance of experiences. Harris et al. (2016) provided a yoga-based CI named Community Approach to Learning Mindfully (CALM) to educators in hopes of improving well-being. The 16-week program combines mindfulness and yoga practices into a daily routine provided on-site so educators can attend. The group format of the program provides some accountability and an opportunity to learn with coworkers. The program focuses on improving emotional functioning and stress management skills. Interventions included in the daily practices focus on (1) awareness in the present moment, (2) breathing exercises, (3) gentle movement, (4) meditation, and (5) the opportunity to process the experience with others. In addition, participants are provided tools to use throughout the day (Harris et al., 2016).

Harris et al. (2016) found the program helped to reduce educators' physical symptoms such as blood pressure and cortisol awakening responses. The researchers also found educators' positive affect, mindfulness practices, classroom management, and distress tolerance improved. While CALM cannot decrease the number of stressors in a teacher's life, it can better assist them in how they respond to these stressors. Participants noted that attending the program twice a week was reasonable and 90% would continue the program if it was offered, with 94% of participants recommending the program to other staff members (Harris et al., 2016).

CALM may be provided virtually or face-to-face. The virtual option is more cost-effective ($8,200 initial cost with $200 for each school added). Live administration of the program costs between $10,000-$18,000 depending on the number of schools using the program. If administrators choose to implement the CALM program, they should consider implementing the program in multiple schools. The program is available through CREATE.

#4 Healthy Minds Program (HMP)

Healthy Minds Program (HMP) is a free smartphone-based meditation app that was built on the principles of awareness, connection, insight, and purpose to improve well-being. The app includes lessons and activities on each of the principles. Goldberg et al. (2020) compared participants who used the app to a no-treatment control group. Results showed participants in the treatment group lowered levels of distress, increased feelings of connection, increased mindfulness, and developed insight when compared to the control group. Specifically, when participants' use of the app increased, their level of distress decreased.

Hirshberg et al. (2022) also studied the HMP with public educators. This study focused on a four-week version of the program. Each week focused on one pillar: (1) awareness, (2) connection, (3) insight, or (4) purpose. It included guided meditation, psychoeducational podcasts, and practical examples for everyday living. Results showed success in reducing psychological distress, and an increase in well-being skills with reductions in precursors to anxiety and depression. Educators experienced an overall increase in well-being which was maintained for the three months following the program. The mobile mode of delivery offers greater access and fewer barriers for educators following the HMP (Hirshberg et al., 2022).

#5 Adult Resilience Curriculum for Educators (ARC)

The Adult Resilience Curriculum for Educators (ARC) is focused on wellness at the individual and systems level. It includes effective practices from cognitive behavior therapy, dialectical behavior therapy, acceptance and commitment therapy, and positive psychology. The six required modules include content on (1) the psychobiology of stress, (2) creating environments supportive of wellness, (3) mindfulness, (4) social connections, (5) values, and (6) developing a wellness plan. Additionally, there are four optional modules that focus on (1) positive emotions; (2) coping with difficult emotions, experiences, and thoughts; (3) physical well-being; and (4) the importance of recreation, leisure, and relaxation activities (Mid-American Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network, 2022).

Cook and colleagues (2017) evaluated the effectiveness of ARC with secondary teachers. Results showed participants experienced increased job satisfaction, decreased perceived stress, and improved self-efficacy. Participants were very positive about ARC, indicating it is a reasonable, acceptable, and effective intervention (Cook et al., 2017).

ARC is available through the Mid-American Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network (MTTCN). The free self-paced version includes videos for all 10 modules. Videos are approximately 20 to 30-minutes in length and include activities for participants. The website also includes a free workbook. The effectiveness of the video-based ARC program is unknown. Clopton and Davis-Gage are currently facilitating ARC in several schools as a part of a research grant funded by the Scanlan Center for School Mental Health. Each module is delivered in a one-hour session.

Key Implications for Practice

There are effective programs for increasing the SEBH and well-being of teachers.

Supporting the SEBH and well-being of educators involves a time commitment of both educators and administrators. Many of the research-supported interventions and programs involve teaching aspects of well-being and time to practice such interventions. To obtain the results found in research, administrators need to do more than just choose a program or curriculum; they also need to commit the necessary time and resources to complete the program.

There are several measures of aspects of SEBH and teacher wellness. Administrators (and others) should define SEBH and wellness for their building or districts and seek assessments that align with these definitions.

Administrators may consider pursuing grants or alternative funding sources to fund the implementation of the programs requiring face-to-face training (e.g., CARE, SMART-in-Education, MBEB, and CALM). Multiple districts may want to partner in supporting a team of staff in becoming trainers in one or more of these programs. These professionals could then provide the training as a part of their professional responsibilities.

Participants in the studies reviewed were volunteers. It is likely these volunteers are motivated to learn skills to increase their social-emotional skills and wellness. Administrators should therefore consider first implementing a program with volunteers, so they can later build on the success of the program.

In addition to time commitment, educators and administrators need to be conscious of the barriers to participation in programs. Assessing existing barriers for educators would be helpful before choosing a plan. Consider using technology as it can reduce barriers to access and provide alternatives if someone misses a session of the program or curriculum.

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Related Resources

- **Adult Resilience Curriculum for Educators (ARC)** - https://mhttcnetwork.org/centers/mid-america-mhttc/adult-resilience-curriculum-arc-educators-0
- **Community Approach to Learning Mindfully (CALM)** - https://createforeducation.org/calm-research/
- **Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education (CARE)** - https://createforeducation.org/care/care-program/
- **Healthy Minds Innovations and Programs -** https://hminnovations.org/meditation-app
- **Mindfulness-Based Emotional Balance** - https://www.margaretcullen.com/
- **Stress Management and Relaxation Techniques in Education (SMART in Education)** - https://www.glowmundo.org/programming

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Appendix A

Assessment	Competency Area	# of Items	Source
Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS)	Educator-child interactions (relationship skills, social awareness)	NA	*Teachstone*
Emotion Regulation Questionnaire	Emotional regulation strategies (self-awareness, self-management)	10	*Gross & John (2003)*
Emotional Self Efficacy Scale	Emotional intelligence (self-awareness, self-management, social awareness)	32	*Kirk et al. (2008)*
Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire	Mindfulness (self-management, self-awareness)	39	*Baer et al. (2006)*
Self-Compassion Scale	Self compassion (self-management, self-awareness)	26	*Neff (2003)*
Teachers' Self Efficacy Belief System-Self (TEBS-Self)	Self-efficacy (self-awareness)	30	*Dellinger et al. (2008)*
Teacher Subjective Wellbeing Questionnaire	Teaching efficacy and school connectedness (self-awareness)	8	*Renshaw et al. (2015)*
Teacher Well-Being Scale	Workload well-being, organizational well-being, student-interaction well-being		*Collie et al. (2015)*
Test of Regulation in and Understanding for Social Situations in Teaching (TRUST)	Knowledge of emotional regulation and relationship management strategies (self-management, social awareness, relationship skills)	68	*Aldrup et al. (2020)*

Table 1. Examples of Assessment Tools