



Be Well. Teach Well.

A Guidebook to Support Adult SEL
and Educator Well-being



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Executive Summary

*If you are planning for a year, sow rice;
if you are planning for a decade,
plant trees; if you are planning for a lifetime,
educate people.*

— Chinese Proverb

The Project

San Mateo County Office of Education (SMCOE) and San Mateo County Health (SMC Health) partnered with [TeachWell](#), a local service provider focused on educator well-being and teacher retention, to create this guidebook for adult social and emotional learning (SEL) and educator well-being. The goal of our partnership is to bring greater awareness to the role of adult SEL in educator professional development and to enhance educators' social-emotional well-being and resilience, generate thriving school communities, and drive greater educator job satisfaction and retention.

Social and emotional learning is 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.
- [Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning \(CASEL\)](#)

When adults are intentional about their own social-emotional well-being, they co-regulate their students' emotions, outlook, and behavior. When adults model personal SEL competency, they harness day-to-day teachable moments and create lifelong learning opportunities for student social development and academic success.

While the need to develop systems of care and support for adults dates long before the COVID-19 pandemic, best practices for educator well-being and adult SEL are relatively nascent. Effective strategies stem from evidence-based practices and are then adjusted to meet adult learning theories and the constraints of time, resources, and bandwidth for educators.

This guidebook examines various approaches for adult SEL and educators' responses to the experience of several approaches. The purpose of this guidebook is to support schools and/or districts in San Mateo County that aim to increase the social-emotional competency and well-being of their educators. We reviewed current research, collected data from a local needs assessment, conducted focus groups and interviews, and facilitated several pilot programs to support adult SEL in order to generate recommendations and identify resources for adult SEL educator well-being efforts.

Well-being is nuanced. It must meet the cultural and specific needs of both individuals and school systems. There is no one-size-fits-all approach. The intention of this project is to hone in on strategic approaches and inspire schools across the county in their efforts. This guidebook is a starting point. Research and the lived experiences of educators in the field highlight that the values of curiosity, inclusion, and connection drive greater well-being. These values set the context for the creation of this guidebook and are requisite to support and retain the esteemed educators of San Mateo County.

The Need for Adult SEL and Educator Well-Being

The social-emotional well-being of educators is a critical aspect of effective educator retention. The field of education is in a precarious place. A study by [Rand Corporation](#) in 2021 predicted that the number of teachers considering leaving the profession increased from one in six to one in four teachers with the pandemic. We are seeing this now. Educator [turnover costs districts](#) millions of dollars a year. Educators name stress, anxiety, and other mental health concerns as primary reasons for leaving the profession.

In concert with what we already know about [mental health disparities](#), the impact of stress, anxiety, burnout, and teacher turnover impacts Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) educators—who are largely teaching BIPOC students—at much higher levels. Students learn best when they are in an emotionally regulated, connected environment. This is even more significant for BIPOC students for whom belonging and an emotionally safe classroom can mitigate the impact of [systemic racism](#). Even before the pandemic, educators had experiences of personal trauma and/or toxic stress. This is significant for BIPOC educators who are navigating the stressor of institutional racism as well as educators who come from trauma-impacted communities or have had high levels of toxic stress in their lives. The pandemic increased the experience of trauma in the lives of many of our students as well as educators, further exacerbating the impact of toxic stress and trauma across school campuses.

National Education Association President Becky Pringle says, “Designing and implementing school structures and policies that combat burnout and demoralization should be every district’s focus.” She calls the current teacher crisis a “five-alarm fire.” We must look at the overall teaching profession through this sobering lens if we are to have sustainable change.

The field of education largely accepts [research](#) that demonstrates the value of social-emotional learning for student well-being and academic achievement. However, the field has neglected to recognize that social-emotional learning for adults on campus is critical for authentic modeling and teaching student SEL and to greater well-being and efficacy of our educators. Social-emotional learning is a cornerstone of the relational aspects of teaching and must be integrated into professional development and training for educators.

Teachers cannot solve this for themselves. Teachers experiencing the impact of burnout, vicarious trauma, or direct trauma, rarely have the capacity to take initiative and time for their mental health. Social-emotional learning skills for school-based adults is a proactive and responsive strategy to address educators’ mental health, increase resiliency, strengthen professional efficacy, increase educator retention, and create stable, effective learning environments for students.

Methodology

The process of the project spans nearly twelve months and began in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Our commitment was to deliver a document that represented the issue we were addressing with integrity. It was essential to be data-driven and human-centered. We gathered research, statistics, and best practices from reports across the United States and honed in on the experience of educators throughout San Mateo County. To more effectively inform our research

with the lived experiences of educators, TeachWell served approximately 175 educators through 10 educational series on adult SEL and educator well-being, interviewed approximately 10 school leaders and service providers in the field, and surveyed close to 275 educators. We hold the tension of an issue to which strategy and best practices can be applied, and to which the nuances of the relational nature of education must be considered. The recommendations below are to be considered in their totality and then applied to the specific setting in which the work will be done.

Recommendations

Be intentional in your efforts:

- Make explicit a long-term vision for adult social-emotional literacy and well-being.
- Focus attention on BIPOC educators and other marginalized populations.
- Work with a voluntary leadership team of educators from various roles to devise your approach.
- Use regular qualitative and quantitative data to understand staff experience.

Integrate into existing initiatives, structures, and systems:

- Deliver content during contract hours and existing meeting times. When programming falls outside of contract hours, offer compensation.
- Weave practices into structures, systems, and teams such as Multi-tiered Systems of Support (MTSS), Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS), Equity initiatives, Trauma-informed Initiatives, and Restorative Practices.

Focus on educator needs and systemic conditions:

- Create opportunities that facilitate experiences of resilience: connection, self-regulation, belonging, and purpose.
- Develop long-term experiential and practical adult learning experiences that can be applied to their work with students.
- Include all adults who engage with students throughout the school day. Consider that all adults on campus “teach” through modeling their own social-emotional competencies.
- Examine the conditions that mitigate well-being: demands on time, not being seen or valued, isolation, the impact of trauma, and increased demands on work without compensation.



Section Two: Research in the Field of Education

*A great teacher is someone who can learn from their students,
who can learn with them, and learns for them.*

— Maxine Greene

Education Is an Academic and Human Endeavor

Educators must be well to teach well. Education is an equally tactical (academic) and relational (human) endeavor. When education systems neglect the relational aspects of education, they neglect a critical piece of student achievement: educator efficacy and staff retention. Adult social and emotional learning is an intentional process to support adults on campus to deepen their tactical knowledge and relational application of social competencies. School communities will choose from a variety of approaches to SEL. SEL content generally identifies a set of competencies that support the development of social-emotional literacy for adults and students. For example, [Collaborative for Academic Social and Emotional Learning](#) (CASEL) addresses “five broad and interrelated areas of competence and highlights examples for each: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.” Additionally, we look for cultural competency strategies that apply adult SEL skills to understand the experiences of one’s self and others through a compassionate, strengths-based lens. The combination of adult SEL and cultural competency is increasingly needed for healthy, vibrant, and thriving school systems.

Using CASEL’s five competencies as an example, educators gain self-awareness to recognize their own emotional responses to the needs or behaviors of their students. Adults practice social awareness to be sensitive to the experiences of their students and the potential trauma within them. With this awareness, educators learn self-management to maintain personal regulation in the midst of stressful situations. If adults remain emotionally regulated when student behavior escalates, they provide steady nervous systems against which the student can find their way back to a regulated state.

Equipped with greater knowledge and skills to help adults navigate the relational aspects of the teaching profession, educators gain greater agency to be more responsive and less reactive in their relationships, to the demands of their workload, and the stressors that come from a human-centered, caring profession. This recognition of agency helps educators increase their sense of efficacy, mitigate the impact of stress, and stay connected to their purpose (inspiration) for working in education. The desired outcome for educators who have access to adult SEL goes beyond resilience to personal vibrance and brilliance. This sense of well-being in educators directly impacts the overall well-being and academic success of the students they teach.

Highlight on Educators of Color

Educators of color or BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) educators report compounding factors that contribute to their burnout. In addition to the heavy workloads carried by all instructors, educators of color are often required to carry uncompensated “identity-based labor,” such as mentoring and counseling students of color. A study from February 2021 by Toya Frank published in Educational Research found that often systemic racism or racialized systems contribute most significantly to educators of color leaving the profession.

“Ultimately, what we found was that even when we account for salary, age, gender—all of those other things that people have accounted for before in previous studies—racist microaggressions had a lot of explanatory power in our model,” said Frank. “And it was statistically significant. It was one of those things that really weighed on teachers and their thoughts of leaving.”

Addressing the specific needs of educators of color is an important consideration in effective strategies. Authors Doris Santoro and Olga Acosta Price in a [policy brief](#) published by Brown University identify key burnout prevention strategies for all educators, and Santoro specifically states: “Addressing the personal and professional well-being of educators of color is vital to recruitment and retention.” The brief urges districts to neutralize the forces that contribute to the high turnover of educators of color by making racial and social justice a priority in schools. Schools must address race-based stresses in schools “which have a significant effect on [educators of color] professional self-efficacy and sense of belonging.”

Effective Strategies for Adult SEL Implementation

SEL for adults on school campuses is most effective when integrated into educator contact hours, professional development, and caring school community systems. Implementation of adult SEL, can draw on lessons from the field of student SEL implementation. [Policy Analysis for California Education](#) research on school improvement highlights successful strategies as well as challenges to navigate.

Successful implementation includes:

1. Building on existing assets - both programs and individuals.
2. Intentional implementation with clear roles for staff, specific training, and purposeful rules and incentives. Appropriate levels of staffing and financial investment are important to success.
3. Promotion of agency and leadership where staff is engaged and able to promote learning and positive strategies on campus.

Effective strategies must also navigate these common challenges:

1. Finding a common and clear definition of adult SEL.
2. Creating a cohesive approach that is also nimble enough to align with the complex needs and relational needs of school staff.
3. Integrating adult SEL measures with other school initiatives for support and improvement.

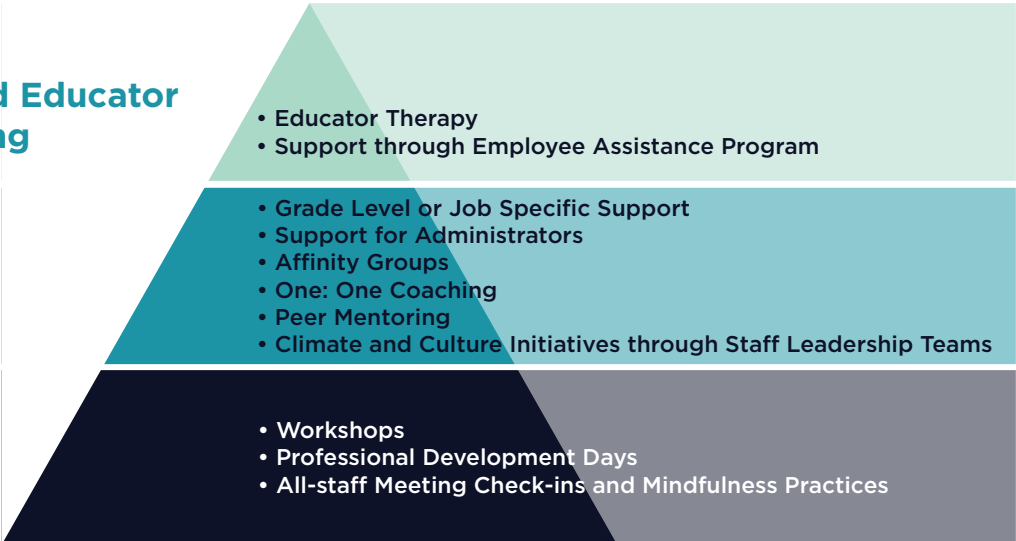
Multi-Tiered Systems of Support

Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) are data-driven systems used by schools to address student behavior and learning, and overall organizational health. Systems like Behavior Response to Intervention (BRTI) and Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS), and Response to Intervention (RTI), all follow MTSS. MTSS approaches offer a Tier-One base of schoolwide training, support, and resources that create a common understanding, language, and set of expectations around desired outcomes. For higher needs, the level of support and interventions

increase (Tier-Two), and the most acute needs are addressed at the highest tier of intervention (Tier-Three). The MTSS strategy includes ongoing assessment of needs, efficient use of resources, and clearly defines roles and responsibilities across a school organization. Addressing educator well-being and overall organizational health with the MTSS model means school systems already employing this familiar approach to interventions can effectively integrate adult SEL and staff wellness into this systemic approach.

[The Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports](#) recommends, “Teams addressing the mental health and Social Emotional Behavior (SEB) needs of their students might also address and support the needs of their staff by adjusting the core features of their MTSS/PBIS framework to promote wellness through key shifts in strategy, collaboration, and data.”

MTSS and Educator Well-being



This guidebook evaluates various approaches to adult SEL and educator well-being through the lens of MTSS, identifying effective Tier-One, Tier-Two, and Tier-Three approaches. This framework generates better understanding of the level of need for educators on any given campus. An MTSS approach allows for a strategic process that is structured systemically and nimbly to address the variety of needs of educators. The most successful approaches are those that fit into an MTSS model.

Tier-One: Focus on all staff to provide common language, shared vision, basic techniques and practices that can apply to work with students across disciplines, from security guards, to support staff, to classroom teachers and administrators.

Tier-Two: Select staff serving higher need students, BIPOC educators and/or other affinity groups based on educator identity, grade-level or content-specific staff, leadership teams, or voluntary educators seeking more immersion in SEL and well-being efforts.

Tier-Three: Highest need staff who manage trauma or who have experienced grief/loss or staff who are showing signs of burnout or compassion fatigue.

Use of Data and Assessment

Data and assessment are critical components for effective adult SEL and educator well-being efforts. In order for efforts to be strategic and responsive, regular feedback is needed to gauge overall staff needs or general staff morale, and critical issues of concern for individuals. Several assessment and evaluation methods are useful and many evidence-based tools exist. The process of gathering feedback reinforces many social-emotional learning competencies by encouraging self-reflection, considering one's surrounding circumstances, identifying the resources needed for support, and maintaining healthy relationships, even when needs are not being met. Administrators or school leaders who regularly invite staff feedback communicate care and an openness to growth and improvement.

Qualitative data can be gathered through various methods, including, but not limited to, administrator check-ins, mentor or coach check-ins, and staff circles. Quantitative data can be collected through surveys, assessments, and evaluations. Various evidence-based tools exist for schools and districts. Assessment tools from [Panorama](#) and [CASEL](#), as well as the [ARTIC Scale](#) and the [Kaiser RISE Index](#), measure overall school climate and culture. While tools like the [Perceived Stress Scale](#) or ProQOL (compassion satisfaction tool) gauge an individual experience. [TeachWell](#) offers an assessment which can be tailored to specific school/district inquiries.

Trauma-Informed Practices

Trauma-Sensitive Schools (TSS) is an innovation in which schools infuse the core values of safety, trust, choice, collaboration, and empowerment into their Multi-level System of Support's practices, assessments, and program adjustments.

- [Kaiser RISE](#)

Trauma-informed practices include assessment of discipline practices, classroom management practices, response to crisis, and integration of cultural competencies that recognize differences in backgrounds and experiences of all members of a school campus. Trauma-informed schools are those that recognize the prevalence of trauma in the lives of students and adults and create systems that meet the needs of students and educators in ways that mitigate the impact of trauma.

When there's a distressed child in your classroom, you can follow that child into dysregulation — if they're yelling, you'd react to them by yelling. But if you do that, then the child feels more threatened and their behavior gets more dysregulated as you get more dysregulated alongside them. Or, you can remain calm and non-reactive, and you can use the mirror neuron system to guide the child back to an optimally regulated, calm state.

- [Julie Nicholson Interview with WestEd: Healing Our Children](#)

Restorative Practices to Support Adult SEL

Restorative Practices (RP) is a multi-tiered approach to educator well-being that emphasizes relationship building and peer-to-peer engagement as a proactive and responsive approach to adult SEL. Research points to the value of trusting relationships and connection with colleagues as a leading factor in both educator retention and resilience. “The creation of time and spaces for the education workforce to connect with their colleagues, receive support, and celebrate success is essential for maintaining well-being and is often minimized due to time pressures.”

[Application of a Model of Workforce Resilience to the Education Workforce](#)

Tier-One staff circles provide a safe environment in which educators can learn about SEL theory and personally reflect on how they relate to these SEL competencies. This personal reflection with the support of their colleagues leads to an authentic and effective integration of SEL into their teaching practice and a greater sense of overall well-being. Tier-Two circles can offer space for staff based on racial affinity or students served to further unpack specific issues and topics that affect them most. Tier-Three circles are responsive circles to address greater challenges or impactful events in school communities. Tier-Three can also provide space for peer to peer conflict resolution among adults on campus.

The **CASEL School Guide for RP and SEL Alignment** outlines specific strategies to “strengthen staff skills and mindsets that mutually reinforce RP and SEL so they can model practices and support students” that include, but are not limited to:

- Reflecting on and unpacking beliefs, mindsets, and attitudes around student behavior and discipline, and connecting these to teaching practices and SEL goals.
- Practicing and modeling SEL skills such as listening and respecting others in order to support students in effectively navigating restorative processes.
- Using affective language (“I statements,” empathetic listening, restorative questions).

This white paper by [The Prevention Research Center of Colorado State University](#) recommends “prioritizing staff professional development” as a key strategy for improving school climate and culture. The research shows that working with adult mindsets, offering coaching, and direct application of skills are critical to developing a positive school climate and culture.

Mindfulness-based Interventions

Mindfulness is defined as “maintaining a moment-by-moment awareness of our thoughts, emotions, bodily sensations, and surrounding environment with openness and curiosity.” [Mindful Schools](#) Mindfulness-based practices directly align with adult SEL skills of self-awareness and self-management. (CASEL)

A brief by [WestEd: Mindfulness-Based Practices for Schools](#) reports that “equipping teachers with mindfulness and other stress management skills may be linked to significant gains in educators’ job satisfaction, as well as in self-regulation, self-compassion, and skills such as observation, non-judgment, and the ability to be non-reactive.” Research has linked mindfulness-based practices with outcomes indicative of a positive school climate, including:

- Cultivation of compassion and empathy, which can impact how comfortable and welcome students feel at school
- Increased well-being, positive emotion, and friendship
- Improved self-regulation

Mindfulness strategies reduce stress and mitigate the impact of anxiety and depression. These impacts are directly aligned with the leading mental health indicator of burnout and are more widely used when addressing adult SEL and educator wellness. Stress management strategies work on various levels to address the intensity of stress, the perception of the stress, or coping with the stress. Mindfulness practices work on the latter two, but some evidence suggests that working on stress perception and coping with stress can mitigate the intensity of the stress.

[National Center for Biotechnology Information](#)

Mindfulness practices can be applied directly to classroom management whereby educators learn to recognize stimuli of stress and the manifestation of stress in their bodies. With this recognition, adults can then regulate their nervous systems through mindfulness practices (breath, observation of thoughts, emotional identification) such that they remain in the full agency of their own behavior and are responsive, rather than reactive, to classroom stimuli. A young person's nervous system is, in turn, able to regulate against the fully developed nervous system of an adult.



Section Three: Stories and Best Practices from the Field of Education

*Don't ask yourself what the world needs.
Ask yourself what makes you come alive, and then go do that,
because what the world needs is people who have come alive.*

— Howard Thurman

Best Practices: Personal Stories and Quotes from Educators

To elevate the voice of educators who participated in programs that address adult SEL and educator well-being, TeachWell conducted several focus groups. Quotes were selected from individuals that represent a trend across various participant groups. Focus groups were conducted with the following educator cohorts:

Sequoia Union High School District SEL Pilot Cohort: Adults across various disciplines were recommended to attend this group or self-selected to participate in the group. Participants met outside of contract hours and were paid for their extra hours. The initial focus of the group was to determine the most effective strategies to roll out a districtwide initiative for students. Our focus group also revealed the personal impact this experience had on participants. The district actively uses a Multi-Tiered System of Support framework and uses this framework to roll out its SEL efforts.

Belmont Redwood Shores School District Adult SEL Academy: Educators were recommended or self-selected to participate in this group. Participants met outside of contract hours and were paid for their extra hours. The goal of the Academy was to immerse adults in a relational SEL experience to strengthen their understanding of SEL. This cohort vetted student SEL curricula and determined the best strategies for implementation. Their process included best practices for educators to model and deliver SEL content. The two-part series began with four sessions in the fall to examine the five SEL competencies by CASEL through the lens of adult SEL. Following this series, participants were matched with an individual coach to support a personal goal for the implementation of a specific SEL competency. All coaching sessions included practices in mindfulness, self-regulation, and personal check-ins regarding well-being.

Thornton High School: All staff members at this continuation high school attended an immersive kickoff workshop and yearlong series on adult SEL to create space for peer-to-peer connection and more deeply integrate adult SEL into their student SEL work. The series for adults largely applied the five SEL competencies by CASEL and aligned with Wayfinder SEL for students. In addition, these sessions complimented the work of a Professional Learning Community that was focused on the student-facing SEL. All sessions included mindfulness practices, peer-to-peer engagement and learning, personal reflection on the SEL competencies, and strategies for applying these strategies with students.

Baden High School: All staff members at this continuation high school attended a yearlong series on adult SEL to create space for peer-to-peer connection and more deeply integrate adult SEL into their student SEL work. The impetus for this series was to strengthen peer-to-peer relationships and connections with students and to mitigate burnout and compassion fatigue. All sessions included mindfulness practices, peer-to-peer engagement and learning, personal reflection on the SEL competencies, and strategies for applying these strategies with students.

Jefferson Union High School District: Under this district's wellness program, educators were offered several professional development opportunities. One four-part series was offered in the spring for educators who opted in and were paid a stipend for completing the series. As part of the district's back-to-school professional development days, a concise 45-minute workshop was delivered to educators who chose the workshop from a catalog of other PD offerings.

An additional workshop was delivered to a specific school site seeking social-emotional support for staff. Generally, the content was based on the five SEL competencies by CASEL through the lens of adult SEL. All sessions included mindfulness practices, peer-to-peer engagement and learning, personal reflection on the SEL competencies, and strategies for applying these strategies with students.

Expert Interviews: Best Practices in the Field

To support research in the previous section, we conducted the following interviews with practitioners in the field. In these expert interviews, we include educator stories and outline productive, tested methods and strategies in the following areas:

- Work with BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) Educators
- Educator Wellness Coaching
- Community Resilience Model
- Educator Therapy
- Restorative Practices
- Mindfulness Practices
- Adult SEL Cohorts in Districtwide SEL Initiatives

Work with BIPOC Educators

Working with BIPOC educators requires awareness of the racialized world educators of color navigate in and out of the workplace. Racism, systemic and personal, is a day-to-day reality for people of color. Resilience and perseverance are understood by educators of color in the fabric of their person. Many BIPOC educators also work with students of color and by virtue of that are close to the needs these students face in a racialized world. Social-emotional wellness is critical for all educators. It is a skill to be leveraged and taught when needed. It is critical that approaches to wellness and social-emotional strength take into account that the challenges faced by all educators are amplified when it comes to the experience of BIPOC educators under the same systems. In our interview with Dr. Wenimo Okoya, we highlight the specific conditions experienced by BIPOC educators, the importance of strengths-based approaches to wellness that examine these systemic conditions, and the value of approaches to schoolwide social-emotional well-being that are centered on educators of color.

When folks talk about SEL it does not focus attention on BIPOC students or adults. The needs of BIPOC folks must be identified and cared for. Through that lens, in my community, we've always practiced self-care (which is part of SEL) we take time for self, for survival. It's been important for me to elevate it and take time to highlight it [in this SEL pilot cohort].

- Participant in the SUHSD SEL Pilot Cohort

Dr. Wenimo Okoya began her career as a middle school Math and Science teacher. While she had personal experiences of compassion fatigue and the onset of burnout, she also recognized that addressing both education and health disparities was necessary to meet the needs of the students she served. With this purpose and steadfast commitment to education, she received her Master of Public Health and her Doctorate of Education with a focus on developing trauma-sensitive practices for schools. Through that work, she became clear that in order to take care of our students we have to take care of our educators. It was during the pandemic that she began to hold healing circles for educators who worked with students of color. She expounds on this, “It was clear to us before the pandemic that we needed to focus on educator care. The pandemic created the opportunity to reach educators by highlighting the issue in a way that was more easily understood and received.”

Her approach to healing circles began as spaces for educators who worked with students of color to find support, peer connection, and shared experience. With the explicit purpose of creating communities of care and leveraging the trauma-sensitive approach of [Healing-Centered Engagement](#), these healing circles focus on the resilience factors of individuals who experienced trauma and the root causes of the trauma they had been exposed to. The circles evolved to center on educators of color and to include affinity circles as well as schoolwide systems of change.

Dr. Okoya and her colleagues now go to school campuses to address the greater conditions that need to change in order to create more sustainable cultures of care and support. Aligned with the research in our first section, Okoya cites some of the conditions experienced by educators of color as discrimination, narrow or pigeonholed roles (such as male educators of color in a large percentage of discipline roles), microaggressions, and additional responsibilities for which extra time and workload are not compensated (such as translation, home visits, and mentoring). Her work with educators of color has moved beyond healing circles to help schools create systems of care and cultures of belonging with meaningful engagement that benefit all members of the school community. Strategically centering the healing and systemic work for educators of color, Dr. Okoya refers to the greater “curb-cut effect” that targets support where it is needed most. “Addressing disadvantages or exclusions experienced by one group of people creates an environment that enables everyone to participate and contribute fully.” [Stanford Social Innovation Review](#)

For school leaders, Dr. Okoya emphasizes the importance of making well-being an explicit priority on a school campus. She calls wellness a compulsory and adaptive skill that sustains the professional work of teachers. She highlights that it is a meaningful and impactful role that school leaders play in shaping and driving school culture. Beyond centers of learning, schools are workplaces where staff need to feel seen, safe, and supported, and where they can grow and feel valued. With these qualities, all educators are more likely to be able to bear the rigor and demands of being an educator. For educators of color in particular, the need for belonging and meaningful contribution mitigate the day-to-day experiences of institutionalized racism they encounter.

To educators, Dr. Okoya communicates, “Your well-being matters in order for you to show up for your students. You are human and you need to be well. You are not alone in what you are feeling and your greatest tool is the connection you can have with your peers with whom you have shared experiences.”

It was really helpful to learn more about SEL and to experience having someone care about how I felt or really listen to me and hear me. It's been a long time since someone really listened to me or heard and been able to talk to me about what I said, as an adult. We may do it with the kids, hear them, and listen to them, but how often do other adults really listen to each other and really care about what is being said?

- Participant in BRSSD Adult SEL Academy

Wellness Coaching

Coaching is a term broadly used in the field of education. When considering implementing a coaching model for educator well-being and adult SEL, consider what framework works best for staff and be clear with your provider about how they approach their coaching model. In her 2020 book, *Coaching for Equity* Elena Aguilar articulates themes aligned with the components of adult SEL and overall well-being. She describes transformational coaching with a keen focus on equity to include coaching to an educator's behaviors, beliefs, and ways of being with the goals of resilience, reflection, and new skills.

TeachWell and EdWell are two organizations offering coaching for educators.

TeachWell's model for coaching is established around SEL competencies. Educators choose their area of focus for growth and integration of SEL competencies into their professional practice as well as self-care to facilitate resilience. For administrators, TeachWell uses our Responsive Leadership frameworks to help administrators support the social-emotional needs of their staff. [TeachWell, 2018](#)

EdWell offers educators individual and group coaching. Individual coaching facilitates adult SEL growth by exploring themes of self-awareness, self-understanding, and self-compassion. EdWell defines their coaching as "an action-oriented and co-created relationship centered on identifying a path towards more holistic wellbeing." Group coaching encourages reflection and sharing. In EdWell group sessions participants both connect and reflect with other educators while gaining valuable practical skills to implement in their own wellness practice. [EdWell, 2020](#)

Nicola Fleisher is the founder of EdWell. Her focus on educator well-being comes from her experience as a K3 educator and instructional coach. She faced similar challenges as a classroom teacher and a coach. Before she could get to strengthening instructional strategies, she had to dedicate time to the human experience of teaching. Fleisher says, "Educators need coaches who can focus on self-awareness, self-compassion, and personal agency" in order to teach well. To that end, coaches at EdWell "listen deeply to help [educators] find the tools, path, and resources" to reach their own wellness. Fleisher reminds educators that "wellness is not being happy all day every day or changing your mood for the better every day. Life can be messy and hard. Understanding that and how to ride those waves is the support that EdWell can offer. It is possible to be well and teach well."

It's ok to have those feelings. It's ok for me to feel upset...I can be upset and then come back from it.

It's good for students to see when we're not having the best day...in their background, when people have a bad day, they're not treated well. [It is] good learning for them to see that adults can have a bad day and still treat them well. They are in a safe space.

- Participants in Baden High School All Staff Adult SEL Series

Stephanie Moore is the Program Director at EdWell. She is a licensed clinical social worker who has worked in urban education her entire career. As a social worker, she notices patterns of her becoming the “wellness person” not just for students but for staff as well. She sees schools as a place where people (all people) can show up as their “best selves.” She is passionate about wellness as a right that all people have and an issue of equity whereby all people deserve access to wellness. She believes that school systems can communicate care through equitable pay, realistic expectations of teacher time, and opportunities for support and connection. At an individual level, staff need to feel a sense of respect for boundaries, for mental and physical safety, and for a sense of belonging. Educators need to know, “There is a place for me here.” The message she offers to educators is, “The work you do is invaluable. You are significant and valuable. Who you are as a person matters.”

With one-on-one I could talk more about personal things, things maybe you won't feel as comfortable opening up about with the whole group; we talked a lot about my culture, being the only teacher of color at school, and the hardship with that. I felt vulnerable about talking in the whole group, but with [the one-on-one], I felt better about it, [my coach] made me feel so much better. [I felt] validated and seen.

- Participant in BRSSD Adult SEL Academy

Community Resilience Model

The Community Resiliency Model (CRM®) trains community members to not only help themselves but to help others within their wider social network. The primary focus of this skills-based, stabilization program is to reset the natural balance of the nervous system.

CRM's goal is to help to create “trauma-informed” and “resiliency-focused” communities that share a common understanding of the impact of trauma and chronic stress on the nervous system and how resiliency can be restored or increased using this skills-based approach. Training provides six wellness skills, biologically based to bring the body back to its resilient state. The Teacher Training Program helps both community members and professionals learn how to teach CRM skills to those in their own community thereby providing resiliency training to a wider net of the populace and creating capacity in local communities. Communities throughout the world are encouraged to infuse their unique cultural lens in order to increase the efficacy of CRM Skills.

[Trauma Resource Institute](#)

Caroline DelCastillo Morton, Marriage and Family Therapist, is the Specialized Programs Coordinator for Mental Health Services at Cabrillo Unified School District. She is also a clinical supervisor. She has been focused on educator well-being and mental health since 2017 when she saw the domino effect of educator burnout and prolonged stress on the ability of educators to connect with students. She laid the foundation of wellness through facilitated educator wellness groups based on TeachWell’s curriculum, and training in trauma-informed practices. Currently, through funding from the [Mental Health Services Act](#) revision during the Coronavirus Pandemic and through support from the San Mateo County Office of Education, she has been trained in the Community Resilience Model (CRM) in both English and Spanish. Morton is training district and school staff as well as parents throughout the district in the model.

The strength of this model, according to Morton, is that it is simple, evidence-based, trauma-informed, and applicable. The CRM model is accessible to all age groups and levels of education. The focus on resilience moves away from a deficit approach to well-being and emphasizes that “your adversity does not define your destiny.” Unlike many trauma-informed practices, CRM offers practical tools to move beyond the story of trauma and adversity to recognize sensations in order to regulate the body. CRM uses the science of biology to educate people about their nervous systems, the role of memory, and the impact of trauma. CRM offers skills such as *grounding, resources, and tracking* in order to recognize body sensations when we get “bumped out of the resilient zone” so that one can still manage their own nervous system and return to a more pleasant or neutral state.

There is a need for the safe space and support to unpack some of this. Where is the space to not be well and unpack this to come back to our resilience? Everyone has that resilience inside of us. The challenge is that this is very relational work with all these social contexts around it. A one-off isn’t going to work. This is relational work. The long term allows us to embrace and embody these SEL skills as humans.

- Participant in the SUHSD SEL Pilot Cohort

The CRM Teacher Training Model immerses a group of leaders in the model and then teaches them to bring the model to others through “CRM guides.” Morton highlights the relevance of CRM in each person’s day-to-day life, noting that most of the training is in one’s own story and that it can be applied practically in day-to-day life. This application creates authentic modeling of the skills in one’s personal and professional practices.

The most effective trainings have been ones where I’m experientially learning in the moment. Not talked at—lectured or learning by taking notes, but actually doing it myself. If it’s modeled even in small pieces that would be helpful, experientially for adults. Because then once you see it, then I was like, “Oh, yeah that works! Now I get it, and now I can do it. But theory feels like it’s still in theory and not in our bodies or experiences as adults.”

- Participant in the SUHSD SEL Pilot Cohort

Educator Therapy

Many symptoms of burnout, compassion fatigue, and vicarious trauma significantly impact educators and warrant more intensive support or intervention. Clinical therapy is often a resource out of reach for many educators. Educators needing support at this level have to dig into their own resources of time and money to access individual clinical therapy.

Anna Jessman, a Licensed Independent Clinical Social Worker, works with Georgetown University's Wellness in School Environments (WISE), a project based on the research that chronic stress and trauma-impacted school environments mitigate the full functioning of the brain and limit educators' ability to teach well. The WISE model is a MTSS for educator well-being offering Tier-Two support where teachers can access affinity groups based on shared identities, psychoeducational groups for mental health education and processing, and open-processing groups where educators to check in about their day-to-day wellness. WISE also offers Tier-Three individual clinical therapy for educators on-site and during school hours.

The WISE program was originally created to meet the mental health needs of students. During the pandemic, the program took what Jessman calls a creative and strategic turn. "There are not enough clinicians in our schools to meet the needs of our students right now. A more creative way to meet those needs is to invest in the mental health of your educators and equip them with the skills and resources they need to meet the emotional needs of the kids." Because of the principles of co-regulation, a teacher with strong mental health can more effectively regulate a classroom and provide a safe, effective learning environment for students.

Jessman explains that educators are a special group to work with clinically because they come through the door with professional skills that can be directly applied to support their own well-being. An educator's practice in unit and lesson planning and backward planning from a big goal or vision can be applied to one's personal well-being. Teachers can:

1. Diagnose = *Where am I?*
2. Establish vision = *Where do I want to go?*
3. Set goals = *How do I create a plan to do that?*
4. Assess = *How am I tracking toward my goal?*

One-on-one was (like therapy). I could really open up more about my identity as a teacher, I could work on "what am I going to do to get through this day/year and focus more on myself?"

- Participant in BRSSD Adult SEL Academy

The WISE project recognizes that time, money, stigma, and access have always been barriers in the field of education. Jessman is finding that education leaders who prioritize the mental health of their educators are removing significant barriers that can directly impact educator retention and effectively and efficiently serve many of the mental health needs of students. Where educators and students have stronger mental health, we pave the way to higher brain function and more effective academic achievement.

I feel like we have begun shifting our lens from “These are discipline issues” to “These are mental health issues.” There is a lot of work you need to do before you step into a situation and I don’t think I was ever talked to about that in my credential program and we all should have. So I’m really appreciating this focus on the whole person, the whole teacher. If students are dysregulated they cannot even learn and so we have to start there.

- Participant in the SUHSD SEL Pilot Cohort

Restorative Practices

Restorative Practices circles for adults on school campuses help educators recognize that despite their history or struggles, we can still be in a community together. Circles are directly applicable to the craft of education, where information is shared, deep listening is practiced, and collective learning takes place.

Alejandro Vilchez of AV Consulting is a graduate of the International Institute for Restorative Practices and facilitates community-building circles for staff across San Mateo County. Alejandro was born and raised in San Mateo County and has always had a passion for serving young people, social justice, and strengthening communities.

His work in conflict resolution and violence prevention evolved into facilitating Restorative Practices. Vilchez describes circles for educators as creating an environment where adults experience emotional safety and connection. Because of the relational nature of circle, adults often tell him they feel liberated to be honest and share more authentically their experience. As a facilitator, Vilchez models deep listening, suspended judgment, and inclusion for all participants. This experience of circle equips adults with the ability to provide the same social emotional safety and belonging for their students in their classrooms.

Group meetings were so nice to be able to share what we are all really going through in our collective struggles and also celebrate the good things. Also, it made it less isolating. I am not the only one going through these problems—as a career, we are all struggling through certain things. It was really great to commiserate and celebrate together.

- Participant in BRSSD Adult SEL Academy

Circles can be a game changer when there is a need for improvements on a school campus. For example, when the toll of the school year sets in and educators begin to experience apathy, lethargy, or compassion fatigue, circles refresh energy through peer-to-peer connections. Through connection with and support from colleagues, educators stay close to their professional purpose (or their “why”) and are more resilient to compassion fatigue, toxic stress, and burnout.

Circles are an approach to how we work with our colleagues and engage with our peers. With sustained efforts or simply the regular use of Circle Practices school climate and culture can improve and be sustained. Vilchez cites specific conditions to be met in order for these improvements to take place, “There must be awareness, willingness, and skill-building, and finally support to inspire and sustain changes to improve school climate and culture.” Vilchez makes known that circles through Restorative Practices are not a program or a one-time offering.

“When we are working with young people, this is not a 60-yard dash, this is a marathon. Keep going! You have people behind you to be your tailwind to help keep you going.”

Lizeth Bendana, educator at Pilarcitos Continuation School, spoke to us about the integration of Restorative Justice Practices and adult SEL programming for staff. The school had a strong base in Restorative Practices for staff and students before working with Adult SEL specialist, Matt Rodham, to deepen interpersonal skills with staff and with students. Trauma-informed and deeply relational, the Adult SEL programming was tailored to the staff at Pilarcitos with a focus on building trusting relationships, communication skills, and knowledge to inform the day-to-day engagements with staff and students. Ms. Bendana cites the RJP foundation, shared leadership and accountability, common language, authenticity, and a well-informed relevant knowledge base by Rodham as key factors in the success of their work.

The team worked intensively with Rodham for a year and continues to work with him as needed. While it is sometimes a challenge to bring new staff into the work who do not have that same base, the work has integrated into the school culture so that staff are able to mirror the work he did with them. “His ability to be super authentic with you is something that I model for the students, listening authenticity to you talk. There’s a savvy. There’s a wisdom. There’s a real knowledge base that he draws from. The way I teach is completely transformed.” The authentic work with Rodham gave the Pilarcitos team greater capacity to engage with students and parents around difficult or complex topics and feel supported by each other to do so. Ms. Bendana explains, “We weren’t going to shy away from the hard conversations with the kids. When we had to bring up things that we normally would have felt uncomfortable to bring up, we now had each other to talk it out with. It was never one of us working alone. That empowered us in the hard times.”

Based on the RJP work and the adult SEL Pilarcitos staff are in the process of leading a districtwide effort to increase the use Restorative Practices to improve school climate and culture.

Mindfulness Practices

Through mindfulness practices, educators learn to recognize stimuli of stress and the manifestation of stress in their bodies. With this recognition, adults can then regulate their nervous systems through mindfulness practices (breath, observation of thoughts, emotional identification) such that they remain in full agency of their own behavior. They are responsive, rather than reactive, to classroom stimuli. A young person’s nervous system is, in turn, able to regulate against the fully developed nervous system of an adult.

If we’re working on ourselves and we’re coming and we’re showing up at school ready to be there mindfully in our teaching, we’re going to help those kiddos so much more. I notice those days when I’m feeling good, checking in with myself and my emotions/how I’m doing. Then I’m more aware and able to be a better teacher for the kids...I’m more patient, and I can calm myself down.

- Participant in BRSSD Adult SEL Academy

Mindfulness-based practices can be applied as a Tier-One, school-wide strategy for students and adults on campus. Learning stress management, understanding compassion and empathy, and practicing gratitude build positive classroom and campus cultures. Strategies for self-regulation and non-reactive conflict management mitigate more acute behavior issues including trauma, attention differences, and highly sensory-impacted individuals.

Anne Hipskind Roberts is the founder of TeachWell and has decades of experience as a social worker in schools. Working primarily in public schools with underserved and trauma-impacted communities, she focuses on helping young people and adults find personal agency to address the social issues that impact them most. Despite years of finding purpose and inspiration in her work, she found her own well-being deteriorating. She experienced fatigue, anxiety, and a lack of efficacy that left her to consider leaving education. As she talked to colleagues around her, she discovered a very similar experience—dysregulated educators swept up in the chaos of dysregulated classrooms and hallways, losing motivation and purpose and untethered from the joy of working with young people.

To support her own well-being, Roberts focused on mindfulness practices to understand and regulate her own emotions, sleep better, and reconnect with her own self-awareness and compassion for the students and families she served. She started bringing these practices to staff meetings and helped teachers integrate mindfulness into their classrooms. “With just a few minutes of intentional breath, I observed staff settle into states of relaxation that were visible and palpable. The room would settle, and a calm quiet would come over the group. The shift was notable.” Roberts strongly believes that mindfulness practices are an effective and efficient way to facilitate self-regulation to reach higher brain function and learning. Training educators in mindfulness and creating space for classroom or school-wide mindful minutes can move the needle to address trauma, mitigate burnout, develop responsive classrooms, and strengthen positive learning environments across school campuses.

Kristen Sevilla is the Wellness Coordinator at Belmont Redwood Shores School District, funded by Sequoia Health Care District. Sixty-five percent of her position is work aligned with wellness efforts that fall under the Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child guidelines from the Center for Disease Control.

Sevilla started her career in education as an elementary teacher during the years of No Child Left Behind. At this time, she recalls, “no one was talking about relationships or the link between relationships and learning.” But for Sevilla, this was how she taught. “It just seemed normal to me.”

Sevilla went on to get her administration credential and worked with adults as an instructional coach. In this role, she recognized the difference in efficacy and impact for teachers who were open to a thought partner to facilitate their own personal growth, and with that growth, she saw greater efficacy in the way they were able to impact their students. In her work at San Mateo County Office of Education, where she developed and delivered professional development for educators, she recognized the constraints on educators to access and engage in deeper professional development, even when there is expressed interest and need. Sevilla returned to a school site because she missed the relational aspects of engagement and the energy of being on campus. As an Assistant Principal Sevilla was reminded of the importance of all relationships on school campuses—with principals, educators, and students.

Currently, as a Wellness Coordinator, her experiences have converged. She recognizes the downward spirals of division that can become entrenched at school sites among adults when they become dysregulated and feel their needs are not being met. The collective is lost, walls are built up, and the “us” versus “them” mentality can take hold. This has a ripple effect that impacts other parts of their life and their work. Sevilla recognizes the need just under the surface of this behavior. She says, “All educators want to feel valued, to enjoy their students, and their colleagues. Everyone wants the same thing.”

Sevilla is excited about this time in education when people are beginning to understand the link between emotions and behavior and how they impact learning. “We can no longer lead with content. We can’t just care about test scores or pacing guides or how far you got this year in a textbook.”

We’re modeling behaviors as much as relaying content, so it’s important!

- Participant in Baden High School All Staff Adult SEL Series

Sevilla has been building a vision for the authentic implementation of SEL for Belmont Redwood Shores SD. “For two years, I wanted to go full force with SEL but it wasn’t the right time. This was hard to understand. But I knew, if I’m going to do it and do it well, I needed to understand the conditions and see what conditions were and were not being met.” Based on her years of experience, she identifies some key factors for effective implementation.

- **Timing:** Maintain a vision for what can be accomplished, build relationships with stakeholders, and engage in conversations that move the vision forward. Collect stories that support the vision.
- **Data:** Anecdotal data can be powerful, but it does not always speak to all audiences. Belmont Redwood Shores School District also identified new data sources. In addition to California Healthy Kids, the district also did an SEL screener, used the Youth Truth survey, and collected student behavior data.
- **Training:** All staff on school campuses need to have training and need to know the expectations. SEL cannot be done in a vacuum, nor can it sit in the domain of counselors only. Adults on campus are not teaching SEL because they are not comfortable with it. Educators across school campuses need to be comfortable enough with content that they feel safe to deliver it. As people have what they need to teach SEL they will branch and find other entry points to build relationships in their classroom.
- **Relationships:** There are many ways to do SEL and explicit lessons are one way. Educators need to be equipped with the knowledge to teach the lessons. For some, this will be enough. There will always be those who want to learn more, and those educators need to have the space to figure out what SEL means for themselves and be reflective of each competency within themselves. We need to create opportunities for adults to “be” together, rather than just colleagues. Personal growth and reflection can happen in these spaces and opportunities.

Some teachers feel any time they have to teach something new or learn a new curriculum or teach something new...when am I going to learn this or prep something new? Because we worked so much on ourselves last year, I know there is no reason to push back. This is something that is going to benefit everyone. I'm going to put as much effort in as I would any core curriculum and then I encourage colleagues to do that too.

- Participant in BRSSD Adult SEL Academy





Section Four: Pilot Programs and Needs Assessment for Adult SEL and Educator Well-being

*Sometimes the most important thing in a whole day
is the rest we take between two deep breaths.*

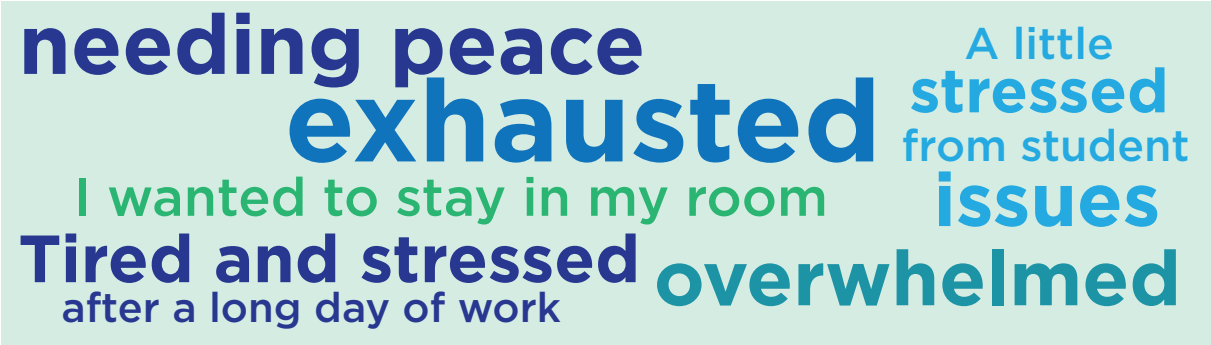
- Etty Hillesum

To ground this guidebook in the authentic experience of educators in San Mateo County, TeachWell engaged educators in several adult SEL professional development series and conducted a needs assessment.

TeachWell’s adult SEL and educator well-being series was offered to about 10 schools or districts. Two continuation high schools, the court and community schools, one comprehensive high school district, and one comprehensive high school participated in the series. Court and Community schools did not complete the series due to issues that arose with staff that were deemed high priority so the SEL series was put on hold. Sites who declined to participate had a variety of reasons. Some of those reasons include: the staff already had adult SEL support and programs, PD and staff time were already dedicated to other priorities, the needs of staff or students were deemed too escalated and other efforts to triage those needs were put into place.

The series generally followed the same format. Each session included mindfulness practices for self-regulation, definitions and theories for each of the CASEL SEL competencies, a framework or practice to apply to each competency in order to highlight the day-to-day practical application of each competency, opportunities for self-reflection and peer-to-peer sharing about each CASEL competency, and mindfulness practices to align with each competency. Staff were surveyed at the beginning and end of each session to gauge the impact of each session. The following section summarizes the trends across these groups.

How did you feel before this session?



How did you feel after this session?



What did you like most about this session?

The most common responses to this question were the resonance of breathing and mindfulness exercises as well as time to connect with peers. We also see a lot of comments about the value of self-awareness and self-regulation in their work with students. We receive the most positive feedback to frameworks that allow for practical application in work with students or self-reflection on the SEL competencies.

I value the opportunity to discuss with peers on the subjects you present. It validates the importance of self-care.

The mountain breath, the “it’s good to be seen” at the end.

The shareouts as a small and large group helped me learn from others. Thank you, thank you!

This is my first time in a school community to focus on SEL. I love the consciousness, I love hearing everyone’s perspective, I look forward to these and to hearing everyone’s perspectives. Previously, it was voluntary, but it’s nice to have it embedded and everyone is here.

- Thornton High School Participant

What would you change about this session?

Across the board, the most frequent response is a request for more strategies to apply these skills and techniques with students. We also have mixed feedback for either more or less time to discuss these topics with their peers. The format for TeachWell sessions is highly relational and less didactic teaching than is found in traditional staff trainings and professional development days. This shift in paradigm does not resonate with all staff members. It is common for us to receive a handful of comments that do not feel these sessions are a good use of time. Typically, in these comments staff are reporting feelings of stress and overwhelm, the need for more prep and grading time, and/or their ability to manage their own social-emotional well-being on their own. They do not agree that using staff time or PD time is appropriate. Additionally, staff pushback comes from a lack of clarity on the purpose of the training session.

More activities for us to do for ourselves and with the kids.

Not that excited, wasn’t told what it was about.

Less sharing out. Not everyone is comfortable in such a big group.

I like the ideas shared, still a general overwhelmed feeling.

Wanting more tangible things to do in the classroom v. self-awareness.

While these tend to be vocal participants, this is generally a small group of staff. Our recommendations address this feedback with some strategies that can mitigate these concerns, such as addressing some baseline needs of staff first—protection of time, extra work demands without compensation, or higher personal needs such as burnout or compassion fatigue which may be more effectively addressed with Tier-Two strategies.

I like the time to go slow, but I would like more best practices—what to do more in the moment when things are chaotic in the classrooms.

- Thornton High School Participant

Needs Assessment

In Spring 2023, approximately 275 educators took a needs assessment about their well-being and experiences with adult SEL, Restorative and Mindfulness practices. The survey also included a section of job satisfaction indicators. The survey was given to staff across various disciplines at 13 different school sites. This data is a snapshot of the experience of educators in San Mateo County. It does not represent the experience of all educators in the county. However, it gives voice to the experiences of those who participated in the survey, and helps inform the recommendations in this guidebook.

Challenges to distribute and collect responses from educators speak to the need to determine the most effective way to gather data on the experience of educators, their perspective on adult SEL, job satisfaction, and experience of well-being. Methodology, the type of assessment tool, and timing should all be considered moving forward. In the future, there would be a benefit to enabling the capacity to disaggregate data in order to look at factors from various demographic perspectives. Educator ethnicity, role in the school, and years of experience in education would be valuable to understand. Dedicated resources of time and personnel to do outreach to foster buy-in, deliver the survey to staff with time to explain the context and value of educator feedback, analyze the data for identifiable trends and nuances, and conduct follow-up surveys will make the effort more effective.

In addition, Spring is a difficult time to ask educators to participate in a survey. At the time of this survey, many schools or districts had already initiated surveys for their staff, and the pressure on time in the final months of school did not allow for time during contract hours to distribute the survey. Because school sites and school districts seem to have the most influence on the factors that matter to educators, countywide surveys that are aligned in content and methodology but can be implemented and analyzed locally to school sites and/or districts appear to be the most effective strategies. We appreciate the time taken for those who participated in this needs assessment and we value their voice in this process.

Overall Educator Wellbeing

In this sample respondents rate their overall well-being as “good.” In this same sample, educators also score largely positive for the following job satisfaction indicators:

- Issues of social justice are supported at my school (99% agree or strongly agree).
- I feel I have the resources to do my job (66% agree or strongly agree).
- I feel supported by the administration at my school (77% agree or strongly agree).
- The administration cares about my well-being and mental health (66% agree or strongly agree).
- I experience open communication with my colleagues (88% agree or strongly agree).

These contributing factors align with the cited research and are reinforced by the feedback from focus group participants. Support from administrators, issues of belonging, inclusion, and connection with peers may contribute to an educator's sense of positive well-being. From the additional written responses, there seems to be a desire for more structured support around inclusivity and belonging.

When specifically asked about factors that contribute to or hinder overall well-being, most of the concerns center around pay and benefits, not programs or practices. Respondents name lack of meaningful salary and time for prep and grading as the greatest hindrances to well-being. While health benefits, collaboration time, and flexibility with time off are named as the greatest contributors to well-being.

Responses to the questions about Restorative Practices, SEL, and Mindfulness suggest that the following practices are not in place but would be helpful:

- affinity groups and conflict resolution practices between staff,
- more integration of SEL for adults, and time for educator reflection on SEL practices.

Practices that are in place and are helpful are:

- opportunities to share successes and social gatherings outside of school,
- content for student SEL.

Overall, participants rate adult SEL as an effective approach to support their well-being and also rate mindfulness highly. However, respondents don't seem to know much about mindfulness or have any strong opinions one way or another about any of the listed practices.

The extent to which educators feel their school or district is responsible for their well-being land right in the middle of the scale, with about 46% saying the school/district is a little responsible and about 42% saying that the school/district is quite responsible. In our focus groups with participants who had been immersed in an adult SEL program, that number goes up significantly to over 90% responding positively that their school or district is responsible for their well-being. We see more buy-in and value for adult SEL programming from educators who have experienced these programs.

This may be underscored by the fact that educators largely attribute pay and benefit, which is determined at a district level, to their well-being, not programs or practices, which for the most part are determined at a school level. This is more explicitly addressed in the recommendation section, but these factors (pay/benefits & programs/practices) should be considered together as a comprehensive approach to educator well-being rather than an either-or-approach. Basic needs of educators must be met. Programs and practices enhance the relational aspects of purpose, belonging, and connection that make this profession nuanced and complex. When approaching the issue of educator well-being, retention and resilience, systems must be innovative and courageous to take a more comprehensive approach if effective change is going to take place.



Section Five: Recommendations

*I did then what I knew how to do.
Now that I know better, I do better.*

- Maya Angelou

Wellness is not a point at which one arrives or a prescription to be filled. Wellness is a journey specific to you, your community, and the context within which you work. This is transformational work that requires a new lens on an old institution. This work, when done well and effectively, will take time, will integrate into school climate and culture, and will require a continuous loop of implementation, feedback, adjustment, innovation, and implementation to begin the cycle again. A thriving education environment is not a perfect one. It is one that is able to hold the human experience with integrity. It provides space for struggle and success. It is a place where each individual feels a sense of unique belonging. It is a place where curiosity and learning are far more valuable than being right. It is a culture of compassion that moves each of us to create a better human experience for all members of our school community.

Be intentional in your efforts:

- Create and make explicit for staff a long-term vision for adult social-emotional literacy and well-being.
- Focus attention on BIPOC educators and other marginalized populations. Provide affinity spaces for shared experiences. Consider the systemic conditions that impact marginalized staff most. Focusing efforts on the most impacted staff will elevate the experiences of all staff.
- Work with a voluntary leadership team of educators from various roles to devise your approach.
- Use regular qualitative and quantitative data to understand staff experience.

Integrate into existing initiatives, structures, and systems:

- Deliver content during contract hours and existing meeting times. When programming falls outside of contract hours, offer compensation.
- Weave practices into Multi-tiered Systems of Support, Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS), Equity initiatives, Trauma-informed Initiatives, and Restorative Practices. These efforts should elevate and bring more meaning to existing initiatives, rather than be one more thing to do. This is a paradigm shift, not a trend.
- Use all points of engagement to bring a long term vision into a day to-day practice. Begin meetings with a few mindful breaths. Offer peer-to-peer connectors and reflection questions at all staff meetings. Allow staff to “check-in,” to share a success or a challenge at grade level or department meetings.

Focus on educator needs and systemic conditions:

- Create opportunities that facilitate experiences of resilience—connection, self-regulation, belonging, and purpose.
- Create long-term experiential and practical adult learning experiences that can be applied to their work with students.
- Include all adults who engage with students throughout the school day. Consider that all adults on campus “teach” through modeling their own social-emotional competencies.

When Caring Is Not Enough

Creating programs and systems that facilitate educator well-being and social-emotional resilience of adults on school campuses is a complex endeavor. It is a valuable endeavor in that educator well-being and the social-emotional capacity of educators make a difference in the academic achievement of students. Research demonstrates the importance of the relational aspects of teaching, the impact of adults with regulated nervous systems in a classroom [WestEd: Mindfulness-Based Practices for Schools](#), and the basic needs of students to feel safe and connected in order for higher learning to take place. [Institute of Education Sciences](#)

Initiatives to address adult SEL can be a difficult endeavor because social-emotional well-being is so nuanced, so personal, and dependent on the individual context. In our interview with Anna Jessman of Georgetown’s WISE project, she closes with a message to educational leaders, “Every effort you make in this space [of educator mental health and well-being] makes a difference.” We believe this to be true, AND we know that efforts are not always well received. Our needs assessment survey tells us that 88% of educators believe that schools/districts are somewhat or quite responsible for educator well-being. This is a compelling percentage. However, those who do not believe that their well-being is the responsibility of their school or district must also be considered. Not all intentions to communicate care and create space to focus on that care will be well received.

88% of educators believe that a school/district is to some extent responsible for educator well-being.

Significant resistance to efforts for educator well-being and adult SEL may also indicate greater systemic changes that need to take place before considering these efforts. Where there is anger, there is often deep pain. Wellness initiatives cannot be a bandaid or placating effort to steer away from harder systemic challenges. When leveraged in this manner, greater harm is done, and social-emotional wellness deteriorates, and educators become weary and disengaged.

Maslow’s hierarchy of needs



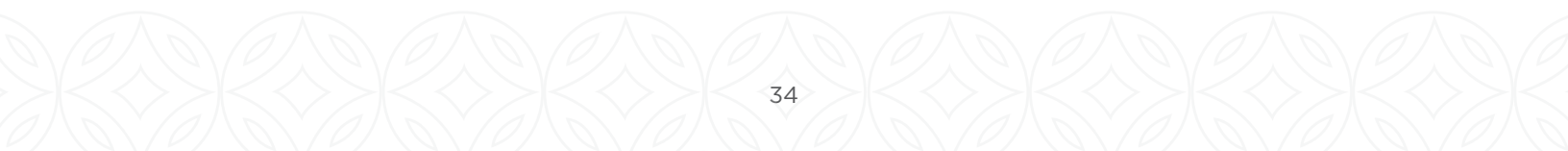
Efforts toward social-emotional well-being will not be impactful when the basic needs of educators are not met. Before launching efforts to address educator social-emotional competencies and well-being, consider Maslow's hierarchy of needs. At the very base, before we move into a framework for adult SEL, we have to consider if teachers' basic needs are met:

- Do our educators have food security?
- Do teachers earn a livable wage?
- Do educators feel safe in their workplace?

We encourage school leaders to consider this as a significant paradigm shift that will require courage, commitment, and a keen awareness of what is most effective for your staff and for the overall climate and culture of your school environment.



Appendix



Terms and Definitions

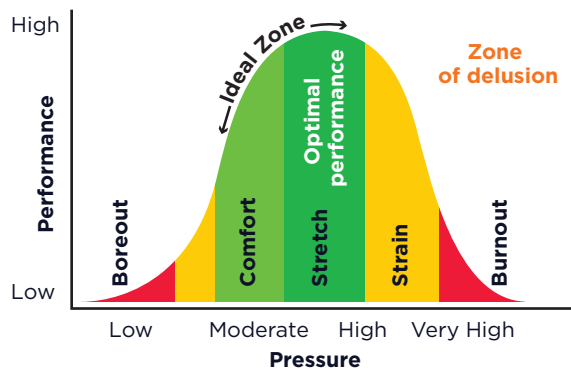
To better understand the concerns around educator mental health we need to define terms related to educator burnout and mental health concerns. While these factors have been present in education for decades, research is showing the amplification of these experiences on educators since the 2020 Coronavirus Pandemic.

Stress

Stress is a normal part of the human experience. Stress at the workplace is familiar to most educators. The pace of bell-to-bell schedules, the demands of managing the unpredictable nature of working with young people, and high expectations to help young people learn, succeed and thrive, are all familiar stressors. For the most part, these expectations are understood as part of the profession and can even be a motivating factor in the workplace.

Stress is defined as the nonspecific reaction to demands placed upon the body but of course, it is more complex than that. Any situation where a person is subjected to change and especially big changes in life is deemed stressful. Stress also arises from the feeling that one has little control over life or daily activities. It can result in the breakdown of a person's mental and physical health, and if left unmanaged, to cardiovascular disease and cancer.

- [American Institute on Stress](#)

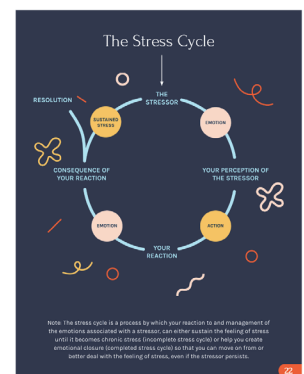


From [Delphi Learning](#).

No one person experiences stress the same. Stress can be physical, emotional, or theoretical. Stress triggers a fight or flight response based on encountered or perceived threat. In most cases, we will experience a physical sensation of stress like increased heart rate, faster breathing, or increased blood pressure, which will pass when the stressor is removed. When we refer to stress as a factor in educator turnover, we are referring to high to very high levels of stress that lead to a sense of strain and burnout. The image below shows the manner in which stress moves from moderate where job performance is ideal to very high where burnout sets in.

Stress Cycle and Understanding Educator Stress

The stress cycle demonstrates how stress moves from normal, tolerable stress to burnout. Within a normal stress cycle there is an opportunity to identify mindsets, coping mechanisms, and professional practices to mitigate the stressors. When these resources are accessible and integrated into teaching practices, the stress cycle can be resolved. When these resources are not understood or accessible, the stress continues to cycle through the day-to-day experience of the educator becoming more impactful, and



From [EdWell.org](#)

less manageable. With this unresolved stress, an educator begins to feel a lack of self-efficacy and control of one's environment. This sustained stress leads to educator exhaustion, disenchantment, and burnout.

Burnout

The World Health Organization (WHO) was one of the first health institutions to recognize the impact of stress as a syndrome specific to the workplace.

Burn-out is a syndrome conceptualized as resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed. It is characterized by three dimensions:

- feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion;
- increased mental distance from one's job, or feelings of negativism or cynicism related to one's job; and
- reduced professional efficacy.

Burn-out refers specifically to phenomena in the occupational context and should not be applied to describe experiences in other areas of life.

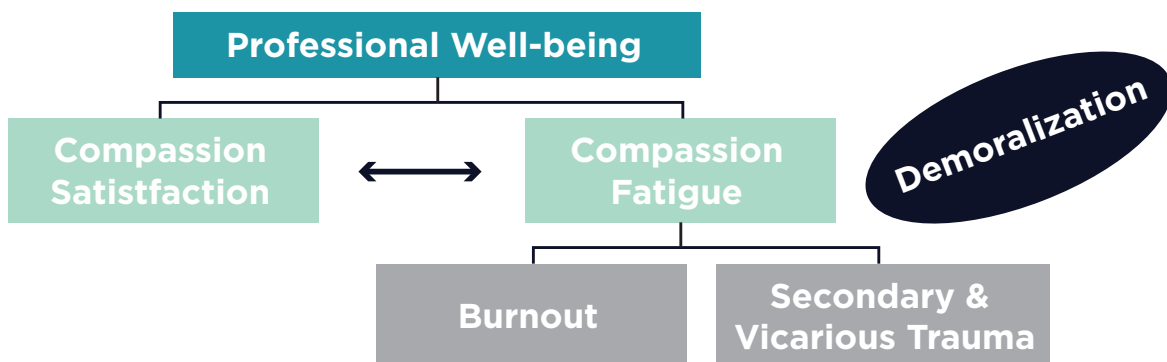
[World Health Organization](#)

The American Institute on Stress emphasize that burnout is not trauma-related and encompasses stressors on the person (workload, personal engagements) and institutional stress (ie. staff turnover, staff absenteeism or staff morale). [The American Institute on Stress](#)

Compassion Satisfaction versus Compassion Fatigue/Vicarious Trauma

Educators as well as other helping professionals are familiar with the positive experiences of being in service and the benefits of deeply relational, human work. Compassion satisfaction is the positive consequence of helping behavior. Compassion satisfaction is the pleasure you derive from helping, the positive feelings one has for colleagues, and a good feeling resulting from the ability to assist others and make a contribution. - [Professional Quality of Life Personal Quality of Life](#)

Professional Quality of Life



Adapted by [The Meaning Makers](#) from [Proqol.org](#)

However, unresolved workplace stress and the impact of trauma diminish the feelings of compassion satisfaction and lead to great behavior and emotional challenges for educators.

Also called “vicarious traumatization” or secondary traumatization (Figley, 1995).
The emotional residue or strain of exposure to working with those suffering from the consequences of traumatic events.

- [The American Institute on Stress](#)

Burnout is characterized by the impact of day-to-day stressors of the workplace, however, burnout does not include the impact of trauma. Compassion fatigue can come from exposure to one person’s trauma or can be a result of cumulative exposure to trauma. Compassion fatigue, also sometimes called vicarious traumatization or secondary traumatization is, “the emotional residue or strain of exposure to working with those suffering from the consequences of traumatic events.” - [The American Institute on Stress](#)

Commonalities of Burnout and Compassion Fatigue:

- Emotional exhaustion
- Reduced sense of personal accomplishment or meaning in work
- Mental exhaustion
- Decreased interactions with others (isolation)
- Depersonalization (symptoms disconnected from real causes)
- Physical exhaustion

Symptoms of Compassion Fatigue:

- Affects many dimensions of your well-being
- Nervous system arousal (Sleep disturbance)
- Emotional intensity increases
- Cognitive ability decreases
- Behavior and judgment impaired
- Isolation and loss of morale
- Loss of self-worth and emotional modulation
- Identity, worldview, and spirituality impacted
- Beliefs and psychological needs: safety, trust, esteem, intimacy, and control
- Loss of hope and meaning = existential despair

Clear difference:

- Compassion fatigue has a more rapid onset while burnout emerges over time.
- Compassion fatigue has a faster recovery (less severe, if recognized and managed early).

[The American Institute on Stress](#)

Toxic Stress and Trauma

Toxic stress, also considered trauma, is either tied to a particular traumatic event or comes from chronic exposure to stressors or threats that trigger a fight, flight, or freeze response. Children are particularly susceptible to toxic stress but it can affect adults as well. Neglect, abuse, lack of care or failure to meet basic needs generates toxic stress.

Toxic stress occurs when there is a chronic perception of threat, even when the stressor is removed. Toxic stress is closely linked to traumatic events and is distinctly different from day-to-day experiences of stress or even serious life stressors, which can be mitigated by relational support and caring relationships. [Franke, 2014](#)

Systemic Racism

Racism can be interpersonal and individualized in actions such as racial slurs, hate crimes, or overtly racist actions. Racism can also be systemic and with that less obvious, but arguably more destructive for the health and well-being of people of color. When systemic racism occurs within a work community or a school community, it impacts the entire school climate and culture, causing harm to all members of that community.

People of color is a term used to refer to African Americans, American Indians/Alaska Natives, Asian Americans, Latinos/Hispanics, and Native Hawaiians/other Pacific Islanders. BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Color) is used interchangeably with people of color in this report. Racism is the relegation of people of color to inferior status and treatment based on unfounded beliefs about innate inferiority, as well as unjust treatment and oppression of people of color, whether intended or not. Racism is not always conscious, intentional, or explicit—often it is systemic and structural. Systemic and structural racism are forms of racism that are pervasively and deeply embedded in and throughout systems, laws, written or unwritten policies, entrenched practices, and established beliefs and attitudes that produce, condone, and perpetuate widespread unfair treatment of people of color. [Health Affairs Journal](#)

Funding Sources

Programs quoted or interviewed in this guidebook cite the following resources for funding:

- Sequoia Healthcare District: Healthy School Initiative
- Mental Health Services Act
- Chan Zuckerberg Foundation
- One-time state funding that addressed pandemic related issues
- Local Control and Accountability Plan
- Get Healthy San Mateo: Restorative Practices
- Comprehensive Coordinated Early Intervening Services (CCEIS) Plan
 - CCEIS plan to address disproportionality that exists in our district. Specifically, we are over-identifying Hispanic/Latinx students under the special education category of Specific Learning Disability and one of the identified root causes of this disproportionality is related to underdeveloped SEL skills

- Marriott Foundation and EdForward
- The New Teacher Project

The following websites list additional funding sources for adult SEL and wellbeing efforts:

<https://www.movethisworld.com/school-leadership-education-policy/sel-funding/>

<https://blog.pathsprogram.com/blog/social-emotional-learning-funding-sources>

Student SEL

- Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning* (CASEL) <https://casel.org/>
- Transformative Social Emotional Learning (T-SEL), California Department of Education* <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/se/tsel.asp>
- Changing Perspectives <https://changingperspectivesnow.org/>
- Wayfinder* <https://www.withwayfinder.com/>
- Character Strong <https://characterstrong.com/>
- UCLA Center for Mental Health in Schools: <https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/>
- Panorama* <https://www.panoramaed.com/blog/introducing-panorama-for-social-emotional-learning>
- Programs include Adult SEL*

Adult SEL Programs and Resources

- TeachWell, LLC www.teachwell.net
- Community Resilience Model <https://www.traumaresourceinstitute.com/crm-trainings>
- MedStar Georgetown Center for Wellbeing in School Environments WISE <https://www.medstarwise.org/>
- EdWell www.edwell.org
- Dr. Wenimo Okoya <https://www.wenimookoya.com/>
- Mission Be www.missionbe.org
- The Teaching Well www.theteachingwell.org
- Heart in Mind <https://loreamartinez.com/>
- Mindful Schools www.mindfulschools.org
- Berkeley Greater Good Science Center https://ggsc.berkeley.edu/who_we_serve/educators/educator_resources

Do Now

Do Now	
Staff Check-ins	<p>Staff Check-ins are a way to offer connections and create a sense of belonging. Using staff check-ins on a regular basis allows staff to create routines and rituals around their shared experiences and unique qualities. Based on the Restorative Practices Circle format these brief check-ins can be used for all staff meetings or just once a month as a unique way to engage. Community-building activities can be brief and should follow agreements for engagement or meeting norms.</p> <p>A sample check-in could be:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. A Mindful Minute2. Review of Group Agreements3. Opening Moves/Check-ins4. Check-in on Goals5. Shout-Outs/Celebrations <p>Resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mindfulness Exercises• Connectors and Opening Moves• Goal Setting• Establish Values and Norms• Connections Activity

Do Now

<p>Climate and Culture Activities</p>	<p><u>Wellness Buddies</u></p> <p>Bulletin Board <i>Shout-Outs/Accomplishments</i></p> <p>Dedicate a space that staff see frequently. Have small pieces of paper and pens available. Invite staff to write shout-outs or accomplishments to each other whenever they are inclined. You may want to have a dedicated group of staff who take the lead on this, making sure that there are frequently new shout-outs and that there is equity in recognition across your staff.</p> <p>Gratitude Jar</p> <p>Gratitude is an effective strategy to help shift mindset and impact positive mental health by mitigating anxiety, stress, and depression. Regular gratitude practices help create new neural pathways in the brain to move from negativity bias and a sense of scarcity triggered in our reptilian brain. Gratitude should not be used to placate or to distract from systemic issues or struggles. When used authentically, it can impact personal perspective and school climate and culture.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dedicate a space that staff use frequently. Have slips of paper and a jar or a basket. Ask staff to write things they are grateful for on a slip of paper and put it in the jar/basket.• Read gratitude slips at staff meetings or all-school gatherings. <p>Friday Potluck Lunch</p> <p>Find a dedicated space for staff to gather. Invite staff to contribute to a monthly potluck lunch. Have a sign-up sheet to ensure you have enough food. You can also include items like compostable plates and utensils in the sign-up sheet. Rotate the organization for sign-ups, set-up, and clean-up between existing school teams (ie grade level, departments, support staff, etc.) or create school teams</p>
<p>Classroom Activities</p>	<p>Mindfulness Breaks</p> <p>Circle Prompts (adapt to be student-friendly)</p> <p>Precepts: Find inspiring quotes tied to SEL competencies. Dedicate a spot for your quote each day/week/month. Whenever you change the quote, take a minute to share it with students. You can share why you chose it and invite students to ask questions or share reflections with the class or in a brief written activity.</p> <p>Hi, Handshake, High Five: greet students at the door with an option of 1) Hi! (ask for eye contact) 2) handshake 3) or high five. Students should be able to opt in or out. This will always give you a sense of how a student is doing when they enter your classroom.</p>

Appreciations

TeachWell ends each session with a gratitude and appreciation practice. Gratitude practices offer benefits to both those receiving the appreciation, to those offering appreciation, and those witnessing the exchange of gratitude. It is in this spirit that we offer our deep gratitude and appreciation for those who have helped shape this guidebook.

Mary McGrath, San Mateo County Office of Education: You have a vision for strong, safe, and inclusive schools. You have the respect of your colleagues and great influence over the programs and systems you lead. Without your tireless effort and commitment to this project, we would have not been able to serve the educators or develop a guidebook with such integrity. Thank you!

Justin Watkins, San Mateo County Health Policy and Planning: You continue to identify critical practices and issues that can elevate the well-being and efficacy of our public institutions. It was an honor to work with you again on such a valuable project. Your steady support and recognition that projects like these help guide policy inspires us to continue the work we do. Thank you!

Melissa Ambrose, Jefferson Union High School District: You are a warrior for wellness and an advocate for the communities you serve. Thank you for trusting us and for allowing us to work with your staff.

Kristina Ireson and Stephen Emmi, Sequoia Union High School District: You are innovative, strategic and thoughtful in your efforts to both elevate SEL and make it effectively accessible to staff and students. We learned so much from your work.

Dennie Marengo, Principal of Thornton High School, Jefferson Union High School District: Your care and thoughtful approach to SEL for your students and staff is visionary and inspiring. Thank you for your trust and the time you allowed for us to work with your staff!

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Kristen Sevilla, Belmont Redwood Shores School District: Your partnership has been a delight and we have learned so much from your comprehensive and intentional approach to SEL. We learned so much through our Adult SEL Cohort and we are confident that your tireless and caring efforts will continue to make a difference for the staff and students at BRSSD.

Caroline DelCastillo Morton, Cabrillo Unified School District: You have been a steady support and advocate for educator well-being since the inception of TeachWell. Your thoughtful approach to well-being and the care you bring to your work have great integrity and impact.

Team TeachWell: Shyla Batliwalla, Jessica Boots, and Alejandro Vilchez: You make a difference every time you engage with school leaders and educators. You lead, listen, and learn to inspire trust, create connections, and bring ease to educators. It is a true honor to call you my team!

All Participants in our TeachWell Sessions: We appreciate the trust and time you put into our sessions together. We have learned so much with you and are inspired to share our learning with school leaders through the Guidebook for Adult SEL and Educator Well-being. We hope this project inspires others and that we continue to learn how to support educators across the country and beyond.