

Leading the Focus on Wellness

SESSION DESCRIPTION & OUTLINE

Wellness is a top-down concept. Research indicates that organizations that overlook the mental health of their employees suffer higher levels of turnover, burnout, and employee dissatisfaction. So much necessary emphasis has been put on supporting students' mental health, yet educators have endured higher demands on their skills, time, and responsibilities over the past few years. Conceptualizing healthier school systems should include a focus on the mental health of educators as well as students.

We will outline the needs for and benefits of building a focus around educators' mental wellbeing. Participants will have the opportunity to learn and experience tangible, practical tools that can be implemented throughout their day, exemplifying how small actions can have a large impact. Our future generations need mentally aware and healthy educators, so let's do our part by creating a workspace that facilitates this crucial component.

OBJECTIVES

- Understand what mental health is & what factors impact it
- Understand what stress is & the importance of managing our stress
- Outline the research surrounding the emphasis on mental health in schools/ the workplace
- Discuss the implications of poor mental health in educators
- Create frame of reference for organizational hierarchical wellness
- Discuss potential action items to improve on educator mental wellness
- Facilitate experience with practical exercises

DEFINITIONS

Mental Health

- The health of our mental state – existing on a spectrum of unhealthy to healthy

Why is it important? When we neglect our mental health, it puts stress on all aspects of functioning

Considering the mental health of individuals in positions of leadership/ power can directly impact the mental health of those in the care of the individuals.

Stress

- A physiological response to challenges or demands
- The degree to which you feel overwhelmed or unable to cope as a result of pressures that are (real or perceived) unmanageable

In a 2022 study 58% of adults polled expressed their stress as a 5 or higher on a 1-10 scale.

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RESEARCH

- 1 in 5 adults suffers from a diagnosable mental illness
- Recent study by Mental Health First Aid (2023) indicates youth mental health is a top priority for school boards nationally
- Employees in unhealthy workplaces are 56% more likely to look for other employment (Adams & Nguyen, 2022)
- Stress exacerbates mental & physical health issues

FACTS

- Your body can struggle to decipher how significant a current stressor is. Until we become more mindful of our stress responses, our body tends to have a (normal!) automatic reaction.
- Stress can make us react in ways we wouldn't normally. Understanding and reducing our stress helps us operate at peak performance mentally, emotionally and physically.
- We can become numb to our stress. Don't confuse numb with unaffected – stress is still impacting your health even if you don't realize it!
- We can control how we respond to stress. When we learn to how stress impacts us, we can become more aware of and attuned to stressful situations, thereby decreasing the impact.
- The best strategy is to handle stress in the moment. When we put off attending to our inner balance, our bodies have already activated the stress response and our health suffers.

IMPACT OF DISTRESS



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RECENT YEARS

The problem:

Educators have been tasked - inadvertently - with providing emotional and mental support of students. The focus has been on student mental health, creating a gap between the resources students and educators receive to keep their mental health in good standing.

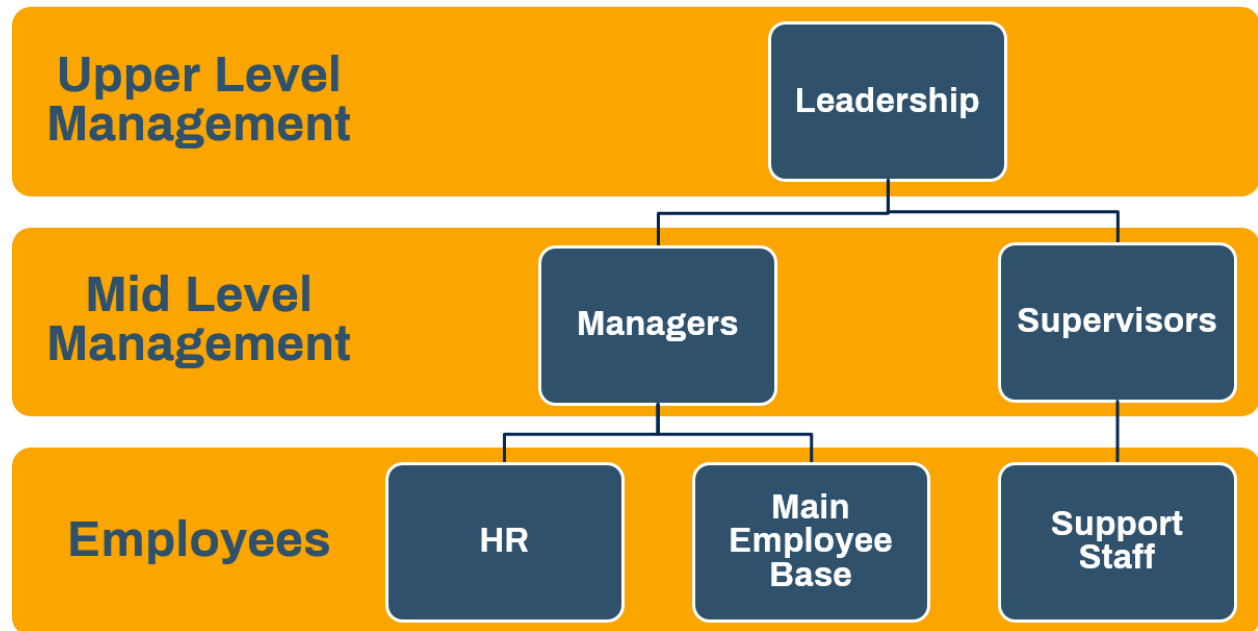
Educators are not typically trained to provide this type of support, and when they aren't receiving this support themselves it can be very challenging, if not impossible, to provide adequate support.

This compounds additional stress carried by the educator.

ORGANIZATIONAL HIERARCHY

Organizations who have healthy and well-functioning upper levels of leadership run more efficiently overall.

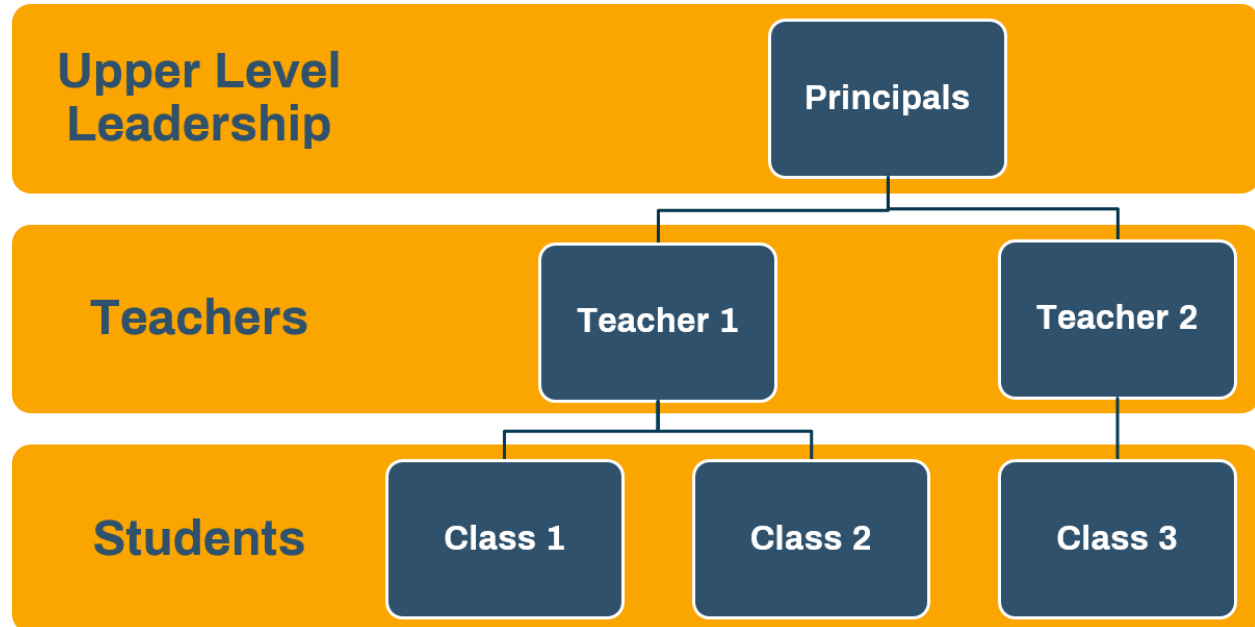
Conversely, organizations with unhealthy leadership (or those that have a narrow focus) tend to be less successful long-term.



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EDUCATION SYSTEM PARALLEL

If we transpose that organizational model over the school system, the same concept applies. If school board members and educators are the leadership, lacking knowledge of positive mental health principles will create a disparity for modeling good mental health practices to students.



POTENTIAL ACTION ITEMS

- Prioritize more education around mental health at the upper levels of the education system
- Audit daily schedules to determine viability of time spent on addressing stress awareness & reduction
- Provide support, and encourage resource sharing of applicable resources for mental health care

EXPECTED POSITIVE OUTCOMES

Educators having access to and information surrounding the same mental health resources students do can lower stress and ensure:

- A shared language and emphasis on health and wellness
- A more efficacious support of students
- A mutually trustworthy and respectful bi-directional conversation
- (Most important!) educators that feel stability, security, and safety within the organization

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PRACTICAL MENTAL HEALTH EXERCISES

- Body Scan
- Mindful Eating
- Journaling
- Box Breathing
- Senses Focus



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References

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Mental Health First Aid. 2023. Student Mental Health is Top Concern of School Board Members According to a New National Survey. [Press Release]. Retrieved from <https://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/2023/01/school-board-survey/>