

Focus Groups on Staff Wellbeing

A



2019

School District 83 North
Okanagan-Shuswap

Introduction

Wellness

Understanding the importance of wellbeing at work is the preferred option for all organisations. In reality, employees may at some point in time suffer from illnesses, feel unsatisfied, or not see their job as meaningful and rewarding. However, organizations need to be aware of the impact that employee wellbeing has in that it improves areas such as physical and mental health and self-esteem (Vaughan-Jones & Barham, 2009). However, the workplace environment could have adverse effects on the aforementioned aspects (Schulte, 2012). These include unhappiness, increased sickness, and absenteeism at all levels of organisations (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2013). Wellbeing within the workplace improves an organisation's long-term performance through increased productivity, the commitment and higher resilience of its employees, and a reduction in sickness absence levels and number of accidents (Chou, 2012). Employees who are thriving are motivated to achieve their goals, have supportive relationships, do not anguish over financial security, are proud members of their communities, and enjoy good physical, mental and emotional health.

“According to WHO ([World Health Organization](#)), all aspects of health is central to human happiness and wellbeing”

Focus Groups were conducted on March 4 and 5, 2019 to gauge the perspective of the following six groups of school district staff:

- School District Senior Leadership
- District Management
- School-Based Administrators
- Operations
- Support Staff
- Teachers, Counsellors, Itinerant Teachers

The Focus Groups were facilitated, documented and the subsequent data analyzed by Dr. Stephen Berg and reviewed by Dr. Byron Robbie. Each Focus Group discussion was recorded and notes were also taken. The focus groups were small-group discussion guided by a trained leader; Stephen Berg. The guiding purposes of these discussions were to gathering in-depth information to learn more about opinions on the designated topic of wellbeing. See the Appendix at the end of this document to determine how the Focus Group concept was introduced to each group. The same questions were asked of all four groups. Analysis involved identifying key patterns and themes and at present, the data are simply shared. There is no meta-analysis of the data, but the following reports allow some viewing of perspectives, successes, concerns and possible future directions.

A thank you to all School District personnel who shared their view on wellbeing, and School District 83 in general for the support in providing release time where needed.

The data from these Focus Groups reflects one source of information from which to generate ideas and approaches to support the wellbeing of all school district staff. The report allows for individual, collaborative and potentially collective reflection on views and possibilities, and I suggest a stage of reflection and dialogue regarding the findings rather than any immediate progression to action.

Senior Leadership Team Focus Group SD 83

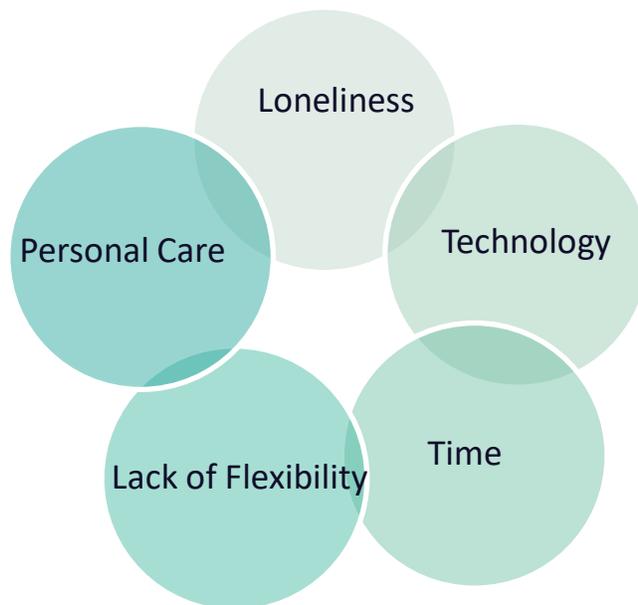
March 4 & 5, 2019

1. What does wellbeing mean to you?

The main theme that emerged around this question was “balance.” Upon further prompting, balance was primarily between work and home or family time. One participant indicated that “we have lives beyond our work” and yet most everyone agreed it was difficult to maintain “balance” and to look after yourself mentally and physically. Striking that perfect balance between the demands of a leadership position and family is a challenge. The notion that their schedules are getting busier than ever before, which often causes their work and/or personal lives to suffer. The consensus was that work-life balance involves juggling workplace stress with the daily pressures of family, friends, and self. Further to this, the idea that you need to be emotionally and physically connected to have wellbeing was brought forward.

2. What lifestyle factors do you feel promote or hinder your wellbeing? (Examples: personal habits, exercise, sleep, work-life balance, etc.)

Hindrances



There was a sense that each individual had contextual circumstances, which impacted wellbeing. What was common was the ‘busy’ context of work with its huge number of interactions, with students, other staff and parents. When prompted further however, some indicated the position was sometimes lonely, where many times they worked in isolation. There was a discussion around loneliness of being in leadership. For example, people felt that they are always the go-to person for everything, and that they did not have people to go to for things, either above them for advice, or below them. Yet another

factor that hindered wellbeing was the use of technology, where cell phones were on “24/7” and that work was never done; never-ending email, interruptions, and trying to do multiple things simultaneously. This unbalance of time also affected personal care such as regular exercise, sleep patterns, and time for oneself. Upon further reflection, a few indicated that a degree of flexibility in work scheduling may be useful, where working outside of the school board office from time to time may be beneficial. The work would still be finished, yet the flexible work environment may help overall wellbeing.

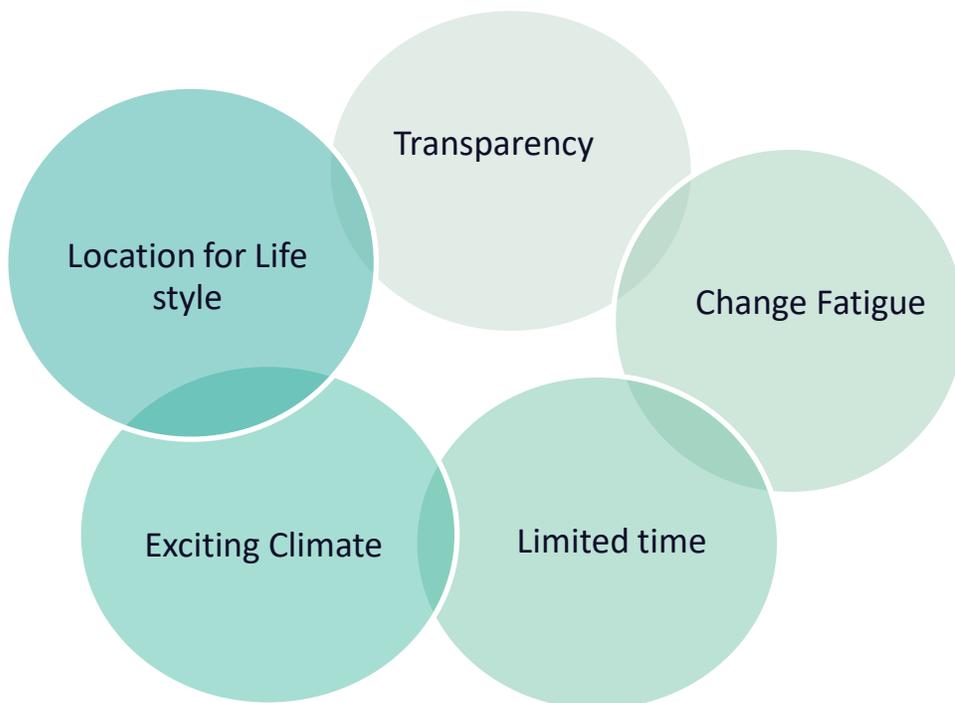
Positives



What resonated throughout the senior leadership team, was the fact that when interacting with one another, there is constant laughter

and a sense of being on a team. Each felt comfortable indicating that they kept one another humble when someone became too confident in a work-related situation. Although some are relatively new to the positions and school district, all agreed that the “team is coming together!”

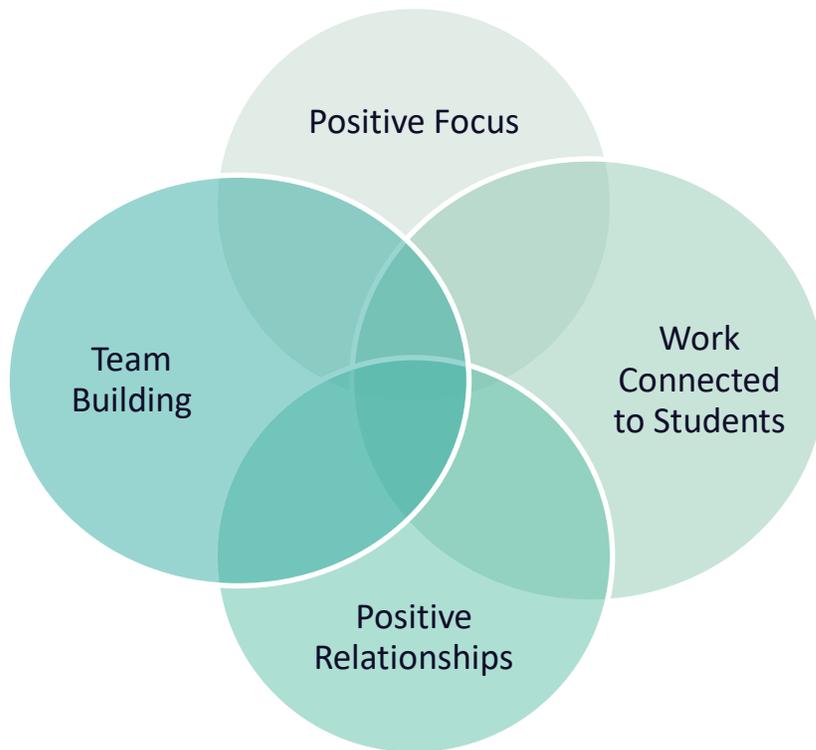
3. What about the system in which you work currently promotes or hinders your well-being?



The North Okanagan region is a world-class location for recreational activities and this was mentioned as a major draw to work in the

School District. It was mentioned that the location and climate are what attracts people to work in the district and not just the job itself. As well, there has been a tremendous amount of change at all levels within district personnel and while this can create tension, it also allows for “tremendous opportunity” and an “exciting climate to be part of” as one participant indicated. However, even though the climate appears to be exciting there is a sense of “change fatigue” as one participant indicated due to the constant “revolving door” of new employees in various positions throughout the district. As a result of this, time becomes limited to complete the “never ending list of projects.” One of the most consistent themes throughout the report, and indicated with senior leadership, is to ensure there is transparency in decision-making and processes so employees understand any changes taking place.

4. What would you like to see happen within your school and/or district in the future to best support your well-being?



To support overall wellbeing, a majority of the responses focussed on students. Several of the senior leadership team indicated that any work that is done “needs to be connected to the students.” Another major focus was to ensure that educational leaders were supported and that the current Board Members and any partnerships focus on important issues within the schools and district. Perhaps the greatest support for wellbeing that was commented on was to support relationship building. The notion of “teambuilding activities” was noted several times. Further to this, one participant indicated that “we

have good relationships already...we just need to be and remain attentive to relationships.”

Overall, the senior leadership team appeared fairly positive moving forward with district direction, as well as their own and others’ wellbeing. At times, a lack of ‘balance’ between work and personal life was not equal, and the fact that work was always on the minds of some, created a lack of sleep and exercise. However, all indicated they felt supported by their colleagues and “laughed a lot of the time” when together. Students were at the forefront of what they viewed as important and relationship building was deemed very important for wellbeing.

District Management Focus Group

SD 83

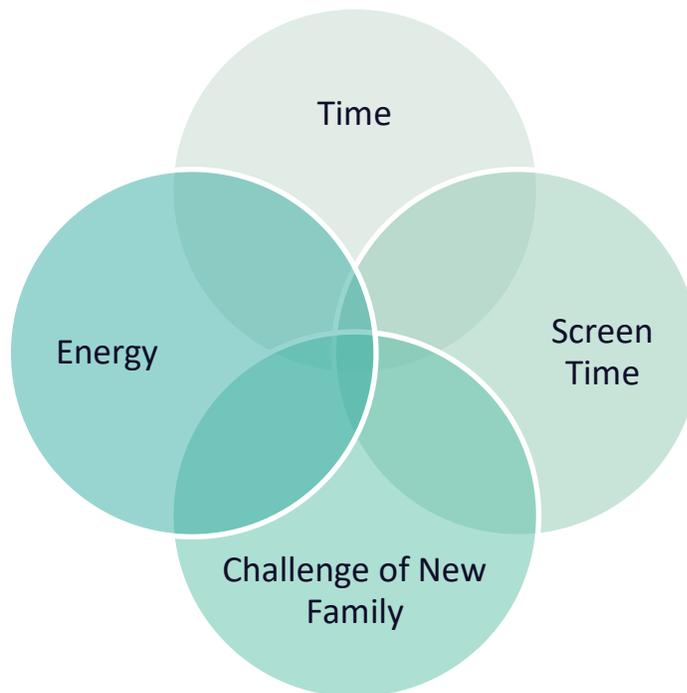
March 4 & 5, 2019

1. What does wellbeing mean to you?

Focus group participants had a view of wellbeing around being physically and mentally fit. Although, being fit or having fitness is a broad term that means something different to each person, overall it refers to your own optimal health and overall well-being. This understanding led to conversations and comments around what being 'fit' means. Responses included "feeling accomplished," "rested and energized," "not anxious or stressed" and talked about balance – ensuring there was a balance of spending time at work, with family and friends. Some participants shared that wellbeing means having adequate and restful sleep, while others indicated you need to be mindful of your wellbeing and perceived amounts of stress.

2. *What lifestyle factors do you feel promote or hinder your wellbeing? (examples: personal habits, exercise, sleep, work-life balance, etc.)*

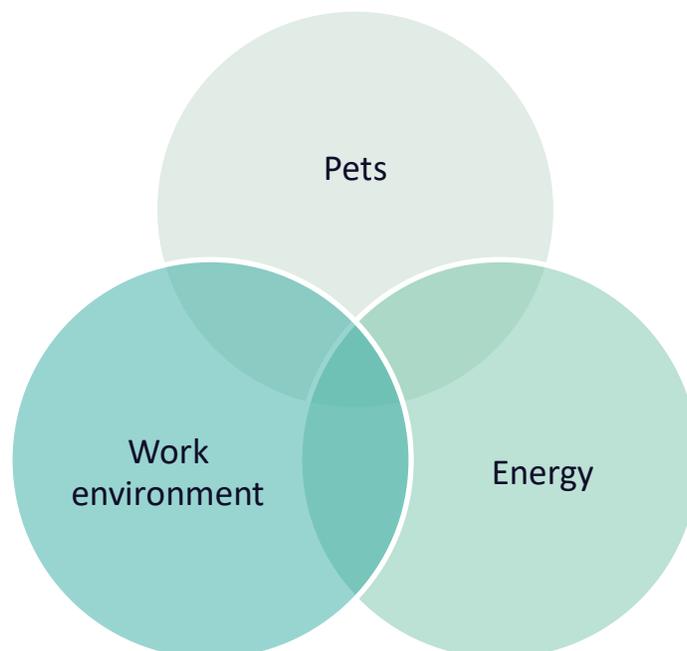
Hindrances



Many participants spoke about the excessive amount of screen time throughout the day has an effect on wellbeing. One participant noted that “I spend all day staring at a screen, go home and turn on Netflix until I go to bed.” Many parents have their phone numbers and send them texts or call them at home at night. This seems to have impacts on their families, who either don’t fully understand the demands of the job, or are feeling they are not giving enough time to their families.

Others indicated that at the end of a work day, their energy levels are low and don't have the energy to exercise. Indicating 'after a long day at work, sitting on the couch watching TV or surfing the Net can sound A LOT more appealing than exercising'. Challenges of raising a family can affect wellbeing and although the feeling that they value being warm and responsive to their children, but have difficulty attending to this as a result of work-life balance. Finally the majority of the participants agreed that time to do activities, which promote wellbeing, is lacking.

Positives

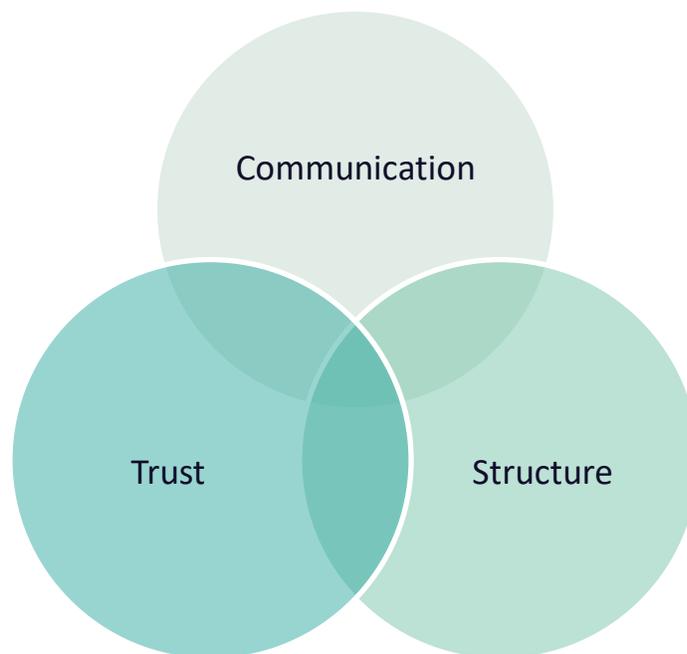


Overall, the work environment was positive in relation to wellbeing. Natural lighting due to lots of windows, ergonomic desks or even

standing desks were deemed very important and helped with wellbeing at work. One participant commented that living out of town, their commute, allowed for reflection and de-stressing and “by the time I get home, work is done!”

Participants also spoke to the notion of having a pet. Speaking to the fact that owning a pet, in particular a dog”, helps with wellbeing as it ‘made’ them exercise. Another aspect that they spoke to is to how pets can provide support and a sense of calm for our daily emotional and psychological stresses.

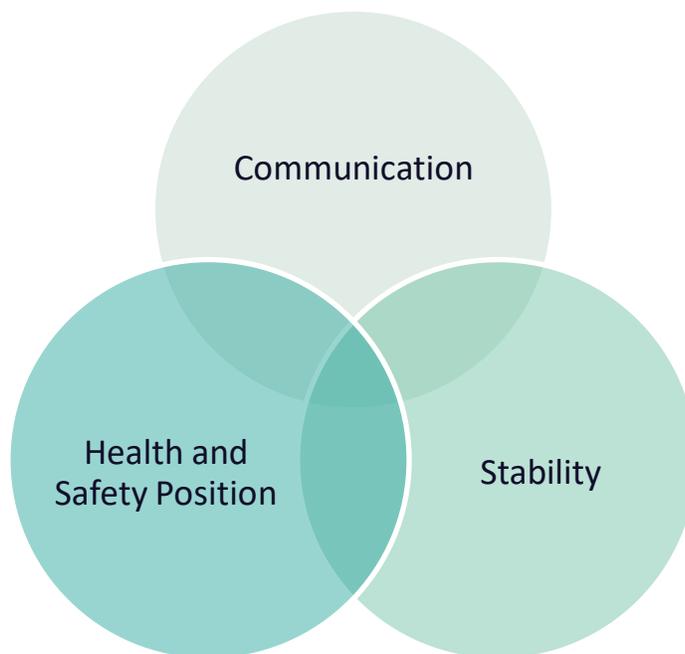
3. What about the system in which you work currently promotes or hinders your well-being?



Communication was a primary theme from this focus group, which was both seen as favorable and negative on their wellbeing. Some

participants spoke of how human resources within the district is very capable and open to communication. However, it was also noted that there was a lack of communication from district leadership. For example, the messages sent from district leadership was “choppy” in that some messages were clear, while others were not. This leads to a certain lack of trust with the current structure of the school district and also brings an underlying tension with staff. At times, it appears no one really knows what is happening as there are “process gaps” and a lack of transparency due to mis-communication. As a result, participant wellbeing is unbalanced.

4. What would you like to see happen within your school and/or district in the future to best support your well-being?



Participants suggested that having more open lines of communication between all staff would be important for wellbeing. This openness

would help alleviate some of the underlying tensions that some staff are feeling in the workplace. One major item to support wellbeing from the district would be stability. Over the past few years many staff have felt unsettled as changes have occurred, especially at the board office. Retaining staff, having clear organizational structures in place, and a balanced workload where staff do not feel like they have other work to do “off the sides of their desks” are important considerations for wellbeing. Further, almost all participants spoke of the need for a full-time health and safety staff position who would oversee disability management and the general wellbeing portfolio for the district, ensuring cases were managed in a timely and appropriate manner.

Administrators' Focus Group

SD 83

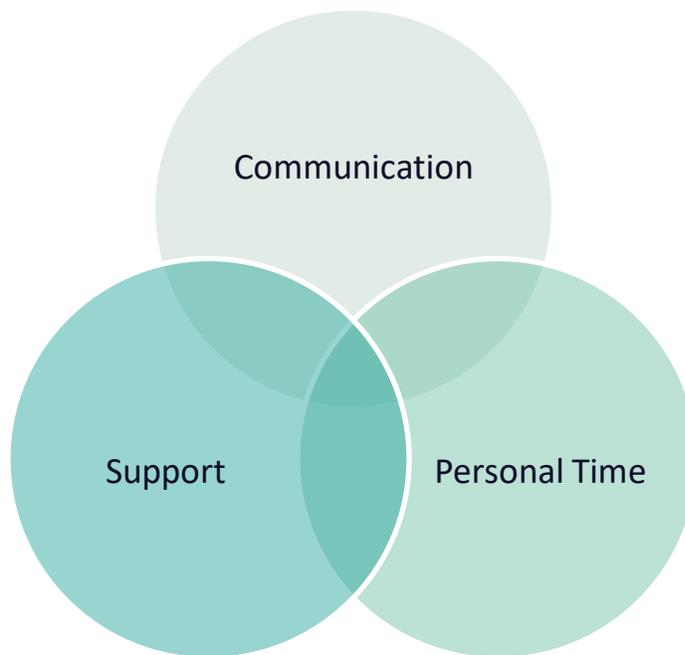
March 4 & 5, 2019

1. What does well being mean to you?

There was a sense of agreement that balance is at the forefront. For many, balance was simply not “work-life.” Rather it entailed different domains, such as social/emotional, mental, physical, and intellectual. Building off this concept of balance, a few of the administrators spoke to the importance of ensuring that family and friends “are not getting the leftovers” after a busy day of work. Wellbeing for them also included “being with students,” “kindness” and having a “happy...cohesive staff” to work with. All of these create happy and healthy people in terms of wellbeing. As one administrator put it, these areas of wellbeing can create a “sense of optimism and hopefulness.”

2. What lifestyle factors do you feel promote or hinder your wellbeing? (examples: personal habits, exercise, sleep, work-life balance, etc.)

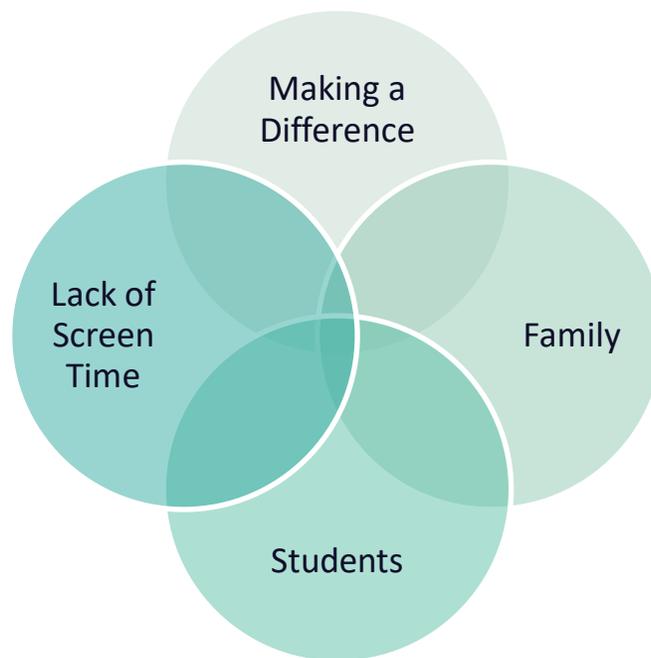
Hindrances



Many administrators shared that at times they are challenged separating their work and home life, which has an effect on their wellbeing. One administrator commented that they when they leave work they “need to shut it down” in order to spend more quality time with family. Others also reiterated this need to connect with family and friends outside of school. Often, communication was brought up as a hindrance to wellbeing within the workplace environment. Several commented that clearer means of communication and support within

the district needs to occur so “everyone knows what’s going on!” as one administrator put it. Some also indicated that there are too many meetings which affects the amount of movement/exercise for some during the day. “Sitting all day is not good for wellbeing” one administrator indicated, while others noted the importance of getting out of the office to move around is good for their health.

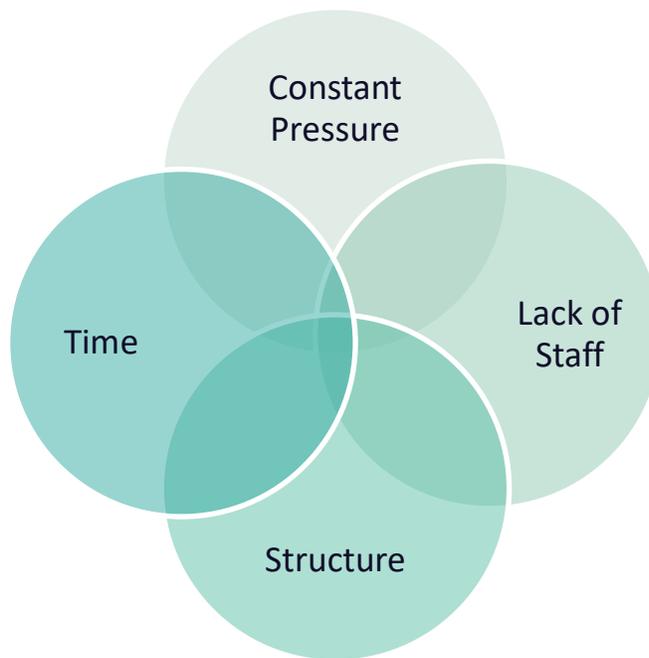
Positives



There was a feeling that when they did have opportunities to reflect on their jobs and the value they provide, this had positive impacts on their wellbeing. For example, around the table, it was agreed that “to be with the kids (students)” had a positive impact on their wellbeing. Staying in the office all day was not why they wanted to become an

administrator. One person said if they were having a bad day, they would “go into the Kindergarten class and that would bring it all back as to why I do this job.” Knowing they are making a difference in the school and community was another positive factor for wellbeing. Ensuring that when they leave work, they really concentrate on “me time” as one indicated also helps with wellbeing. As well, trying to limit the amount of time spent in front of a screen “checking emails at night” or answering the “80 emails I get during a day all at once” is important for wellbeing.

3. What about the system in which you work currently promotes or hinders your well-being?



The constant pressure of being an administrator was brought up throughout the focus group session. This pressure to work “all of the

time” as one administrator put it, takes its toll after a while. Further to this, it was noted around the table that it is really difficult for administrators to take time off, regardless of the circumstances. It was noted that there is a general lack of staff throughout the district to support administrators if they need time away from work. This was reiterated throughout the focus group session, and one that hinders the wellbeing of admin, staff, and students. The structure of the “school district needs to acknowledge this shortage” one person said and “this has been ongoing for at least two years” another indicated. Despite this lack of acknowledgement for staffing shortages, the positive support from the school and surrounding community was brought up several times. For example, one school “has a lunch program put on by the church” while another said that the community provides “equipment for students for self-regulatory behaviour.” Breakfast programs supported by communities were also brought up by administrators. As one administrator put it “look at all of the people who care.” People “cheer each other on” within the school and administrators generally support one another.

4. What would you like to see happen within your school and/or district in the future to best support your well-being?



Over the past few years within the School district, there has been a tremendous amount of turnover, which has caused some unrest and taken its toll on the wellbeing of some district personnell. Over the past two years however, some commented that “it has gotten better” and yet many would like to see more appreciation from senior leadership. For example, “we used to get Christmas cards from district staff and school board members...not anymore.” Further to this, it was said that “it is the little things that we would like to see...to make us feel more appreciated. We don’t feel that appreciation as much anymore.” Others commented that as a result of this, many administrators are “withdrawing into their schools” and that they are

worried that new administrators are not getting enough support. The call for more professional development opportunities was also brought up to support not only new administrators, but for everyone. Since there are a lot of new people, supporting activities to “build relationships” should be a priority. Examples of this include a summer retreat, utilizing Covey’s seven habits, and mentoring. Many focus group participants would like to see more enjoyment in the workplace. One noted, “work used to be fun...we took time to do that.” Another indicated that the “social part of school and learning is undervalued and needs to be a priority again.” A final “wish list” item from administrators is a policy on harassment. When prompted further, many indicated that there needs to be firm rules and boundaries for students, parents, and community members regarding communication (social media) about teachers and administration. Several were concerned about the lack of “safety” regarding the comments and social media postings regarding staff. They believe that if you do not feel safe in the workplace, you cannot truly have wellbeing. However, with all of the new district leadership in place, they do feel a sense of hope that the culture within the district will change to a more positive place to live and work.

Operations' Focus Group

SD 83

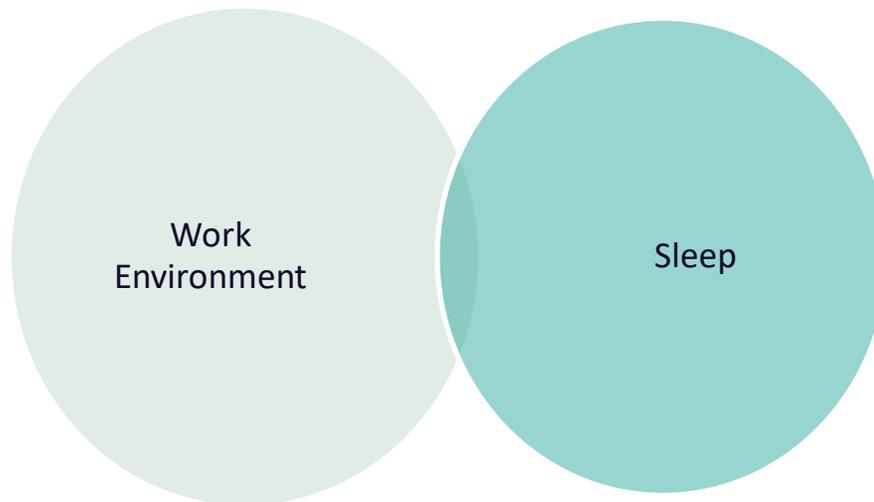
March 4 & 5, 2019

1. What does wellbeing mean to you?

Focus Group participants stressed that wellbeing is the “whole person” and that having a sense of “balance...work/life/family” contributed to wellbeing. Having enough energy after a day’s work to “feel good and to “stay active to stay healthy” was important for wellbeing. For others, wellbeing meant “working together” and being “comfortable to deal with stress.” Being in a “neutral space” where there is “stability with work, finances, and family” also contributed to wellbeing.

2. What lifestyle factors do you feel promote or hinder your wellbeing? (Examples: personal habits, exercise, sleep, work-life balance, etc.)

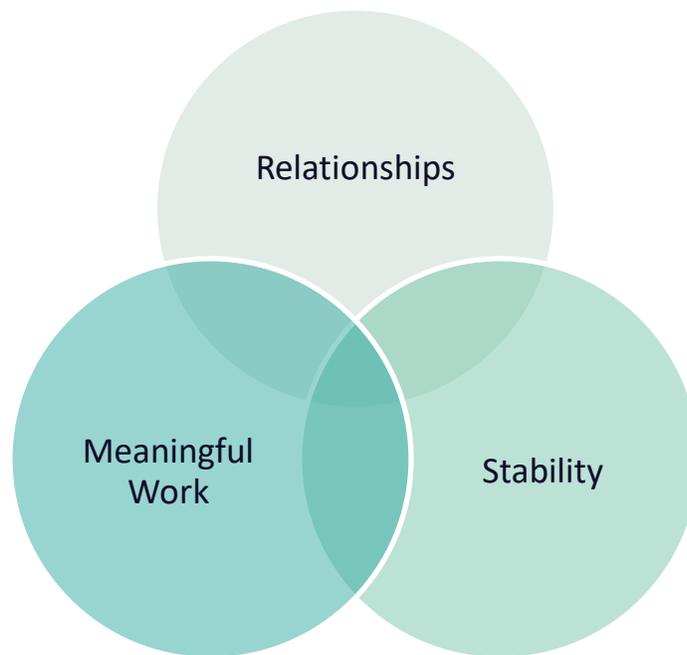
Hindrances



Two main factors hindered participant wellbeing; the workplace environment and lack of sleep. The workplace environment included such things as workload, relationships, time of work. When participants were asked to provide further comment, many felt “overwhelmed” with the amount of work they had to do during the day. Some thought that they held many jobs and were unable to cope with the constant pressure and demands placed on them. Some commented that the relationships with management were “toxic” and they felt unappreciated and siloed in the workplace. When prompted, some indicated it was “frowned upon to socialize with people in other departments.” Others felt that the time of work, such as being an after-school custodian, hindered the wellbeing of some as there was a loss of “connection with others” in the workplace. As a result of the

workplace pressures, a lack of sleep becomes a factor. But these are all connected. As one participant put it “there are lots of aspects to a person’s health and all are interrelated.”

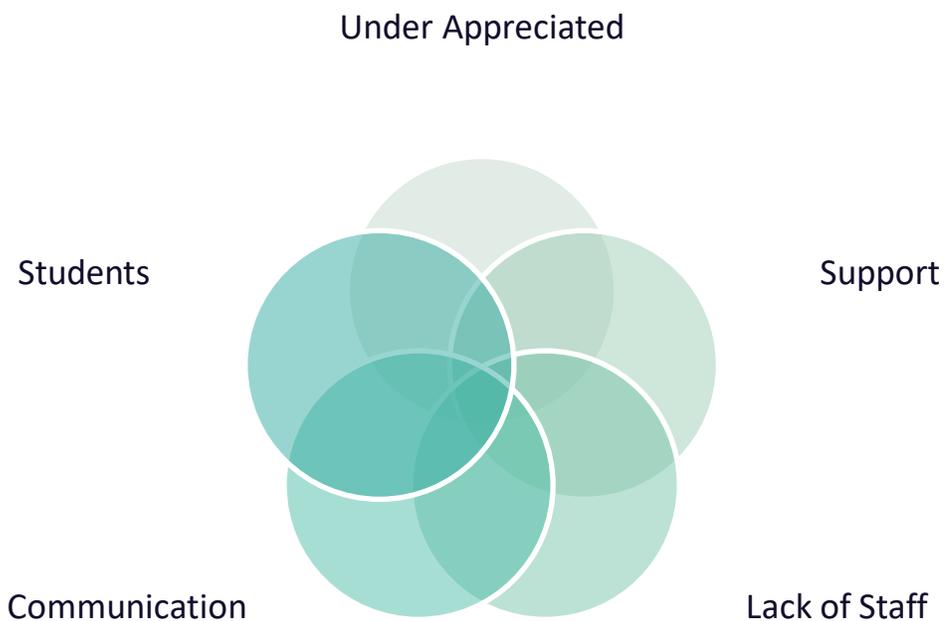
Positives



Relationships with family, friends, and some co-workers all impacted wellbeing in a positive way. Participants commented that they “really enjoy spending time with colleagues” and “laugh and joke with a lot of people.” Having supportive family members was important as well to help take the stress off of workplace pressures. When asked about other positive supports for wellbeing, several indicated that they felt like their work mattered to the students, even though a majority of

them do not interact with students. Financial security and knowing you have a job to go to were important for wellbeing. “Every second Friday is a good day” due to payday for participants. This sense of stability was favourable for wellbeing.

3. What about the system in which you work currently promotes or hinders your well-being?



From the focus group, all agreed that there is a severe shortage of people in operations for the amount of work to be done. Some have indicated that several days or weeks go by “where there are only 1 or 2 people working in the department.” For example, currently there is

only 1 painter for the entire school district. This adds to a lack of wellbeing, “piles on the work” and adds stress to the individual(s). Another hindrance is a lack of communication and support from senior management. Several indicated that “they (senior management) don’t even know what we do,” “we are never heard,” and “they don’t see us unless we are needed!” There appears to be a “disconnect between downtown and operations.” Several reasons included lots of turnover, and lack of clear communication with district staff not having a clear understanding of what operations does. One example is retirement parties for staff. Operations have theirs “in a bus” and while it ends up being a nice event, “how many other people would actually have a retirement party in a bus?” Since there has been “turmoil” as one participant indicated, there needs to be professional development but all agreed they should be asked what this professional development should focus on and not be told. One person said that there are “so many wounds that if one interaction goes bad, it takes years to get over it.” However, all focus group participants noted that the students make their work meaningful. “We have kids in the schools and we are able to see our kids for events.”

4. What would you like to see happen within your school and/or district in the future to best support your well-being?



Overwhelmingly, participants in the focus group support the need for a full-time health and safety officer. Several noted the dangers of their respective professions and are concerned with how processes and procedures are in place. One person noted that “a person came out in heels and a skirt to check on an issue in the ground...no disrespect to the person, but they have no idea what we do. We need someone, male or female, who knows the environments in which we work.” There is legislation for health and safety and it needs to be adhered to. Further to this, some participants indicated that the health and safety officer also needs to focus on wellness and not just the safety aspect of the workplace. Increased communication from senior

leadership and management would help with wellbeing in the workplace. Communication has been an issue for several years and one participant noted “this has a direct connection to wellbeing.” Another wish from this group is to have consistent policies and/or procedures on hiring. Sometimes it is felt like “management just hires their buddies” who not only are not as qualified as others, but creates tension within the work place. Other policies should focus on staff safety. For example, clear procedures need to be done on things such as “school bus incidents for students AND staff.” Perhaps the biggest need that would help with wellbeing is hiring more employees. Over the years, there have been job cuts and no replacements. “Having more to do than you have time for creates a spiral of poorer quality work.” Again the example of only having one painter for the entire district was used. Budget cuts in custodial hours and maintenance are taking a toll on the wellbeing and staff would welcome more colleagues. They “feel a sense of pride” in the work they do, but would like more appreciation for their efforts.

Support Staff Focus Group

SD 83

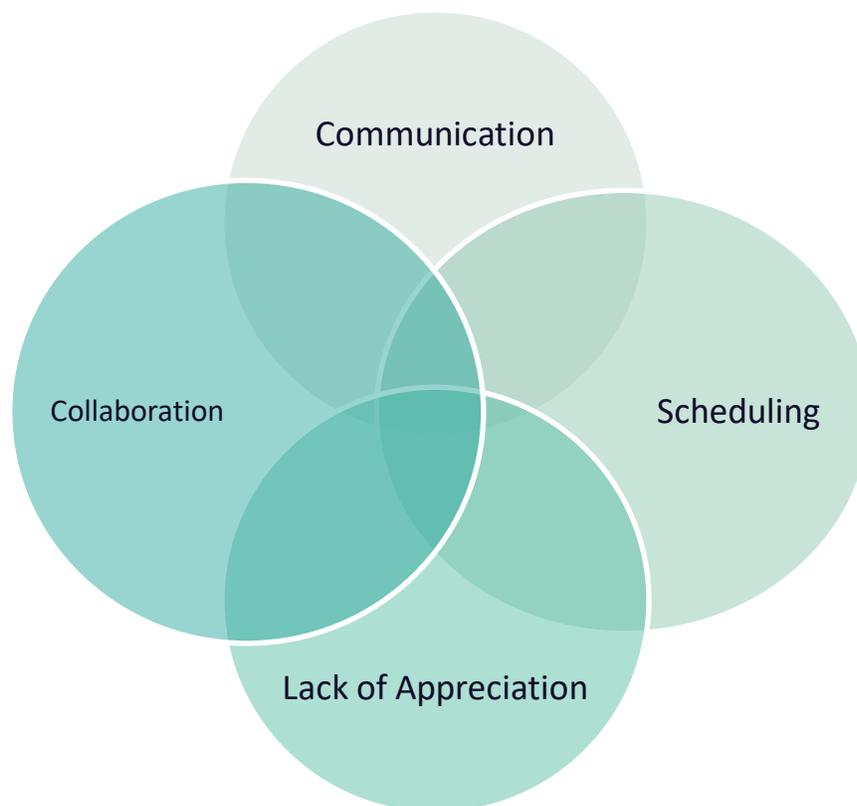
March 4 & 5, 2019

1. What does well being mean to you?

For a lot of the participants in this focus group, wellbeing meant the “ability to do your job with confidence and empathy,” in addition to this, the idea of “balance” and “resiliency” were indicated. Education assistants (EAs) made up the vast majority of this focus group. Understanding that the very core of their job is directly supporting children with particular needs or helping them with learning difficulties. These professionals may work with individuals or groups of children. Education assistants are responsible for performing duties like supervision, class preparation, behavioural monitoring, taking attendance, paperwork management, and more when helping teachers. It is through this lens that led participants to feel that wellbeing meant being “good to yourself” and “yourself needs to be at the centre.” Further, taking care of oneself, and “recreation, rest, and sleep” contributed positively to wellbeing.

2. What lifestyle factors do you feel promote or hinder your well-being? (examples: personal habits, exercise, sleep, work-life balance, etc.)

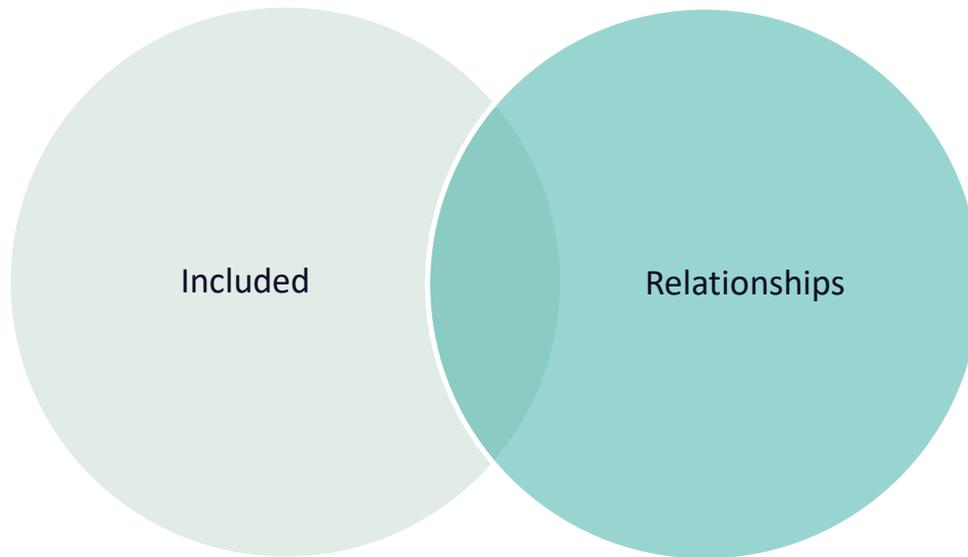
Hindrances



All focus group participants agreed that there is a clear lack of communication. There are very few, if any, opportunities for support staff to “get together and share ideas that would help their work.” This lack of opportunity to collaborate was brought forward. Limited to no collective work with fellow EAs or other teaching staff assigned

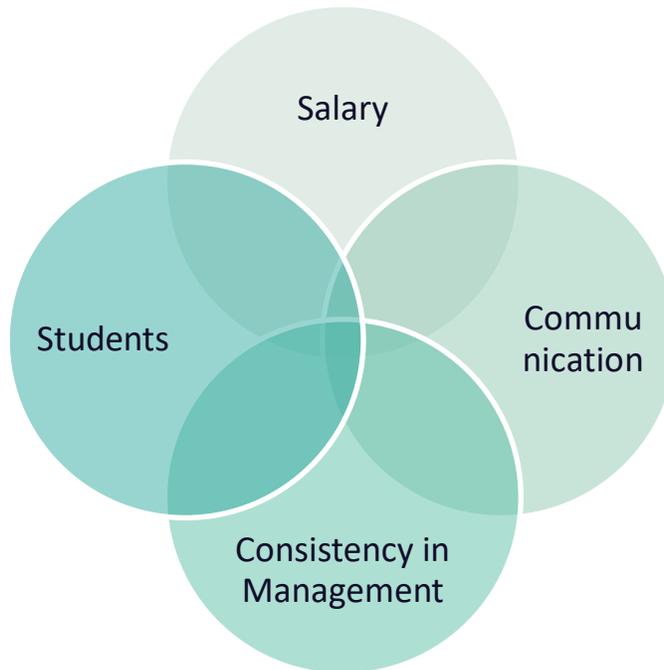
to the same students, but working in other classrooms. As well, at times during the workday, some of the staff feel “isolated” and don’t feel part of the staff.” As one participant indicated, “I don’t see anyone sometimes all day and really have no sense of what is happening in the school until it is too late!” Some have said they have expressed concern over some issues but are “virtually ignored.” They feel a “culture of fear” and “lack of trust” if they have a complaint, so many simply don’t. “Why bother?” was a repeated response when asked if they continue to voice their concerns. Scheduling is a huge hindrance for this group. Many participants have indicated the hours are “all over the place” and that some shifts are 5 hours, while others more or less. One constant around scheduling that really hindered wellbeing was a lack of pay. “It is tough to make ends meet” said one participant. Several educational assistants in the district do lunchtime supervision to help financially. Yet, lunchtime supervision does not pay the same as an educational assistant salary, even though many feel it is “essentially the same type of work.” There is also a sense of feeling undervalued in the work they do at the school. “We don’t feel respected” said one participant, while others spoke of not feeling valued in the work being done. “Teachers would not know what to do without us” indicated a few around the table, and yet “we feel like we are not respected.”

Positives



Positive relationships with students, staff, and parents was a big factor in workplace wellbeing. These focus group participants enjoyed working with students and get a sense of joy and value in the work they provide each school. Some noted that taking time “to eat with staff” is an enjoyable experience and makes them “feel part of the school.” This notion of feeling included was positive for wellbeing. A sense of being “part of something bigger in the school” and a feeling that when they did have opportunities to reflect on their jobs and the value they provide, this had positive impacts on their wellbeing.

3. What about the system in which you work currently promotes or hinders your well-being?



As previously mentioned, increase in salary throughout the district would help with wellbeing. Several in the focus group indicated they work more than one job just to pay the bills. Lunchtime supervision and unequal pay was brought up again and this “could be a system-wide fix” to make pay equitable as those of EA’s. The angst over financial security was at the forefront of their thoughts around this question. One focus group participant wanted a “consistent, system-wide student management system” for administrative support personnel. This would help new staff with training and provide support staff with consistency so they could help one another, regardless of

the school they are employed at. More open lines of communication throughout the district would also help with wellbeing, so staff wouldn't feel "in the dark about a lot of things going on in the district." The one consistency that all agreed helps with wellbeing are the students. "Students are amazing and this is why we do the work we do" said one participant. "We know there is a lot of things to fix, but the students are what keeps us coming back" said another.

4. What would you like to see happen within your school and/or district in the future to best support your well-being?



Being appreciated was one area staff would like to see more of. Things such as “being part of staff meetings” would go a long way in helping with the wellbeing of some. Others noted that “it would be appreciated if people walking into the school would actually say hello.” One noted that the “superintendent walked into the school and didn’t even acknowledge I was there.” An increase in the amount of and consistent training in parts of the job were also mentioned. They put forward the ideas that learning more about computer programs, or student support programs for such areas as autism training would be of benefit. Further to this, focus group participants would like to have more professional development where they could attend, but also ensure they are getting a salary when doing so. Others noted that we should celebrate success and achievement and “have more parties for all employee groups together” for staff wellbeing. As a result, a sense of trust and respect would become entrenched in the school district climate, creating a greater sense of wellbeing.

Teachers Focus Group

SD 83

March 4 & 5, 2019

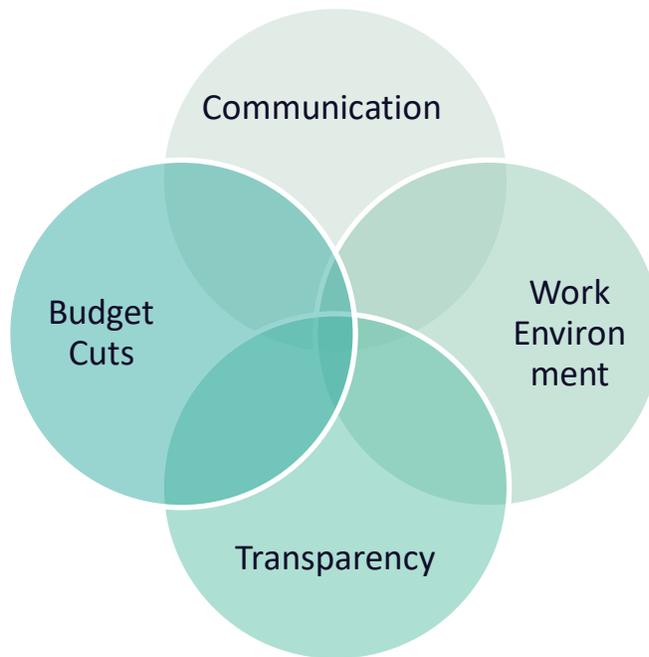
1. What does well being mean to you?

There was an overwhelming sense of agreement that balance is at the forefront. All aspects of balance (physical, mental, emotional etc.) and being present in each one was deemed important. One participant noted that “It can be easy to rush through life without stopping to notice much. Paying more attention to the present moment – to your own thoughts and feelings, and to the world around you – can improve your wellbeing.”

Building off this concept of balance, a few of the teachers spoke to the importance of having the coping skills or resilience necessary to support yourself when that balance is off, and that “it’s ok even when you’re not balanced.”

2. What lifestyle factors do you feel promote or hinder your well-being? (Examples: personal habits, exercise, sleep, work-life balance, etc.)

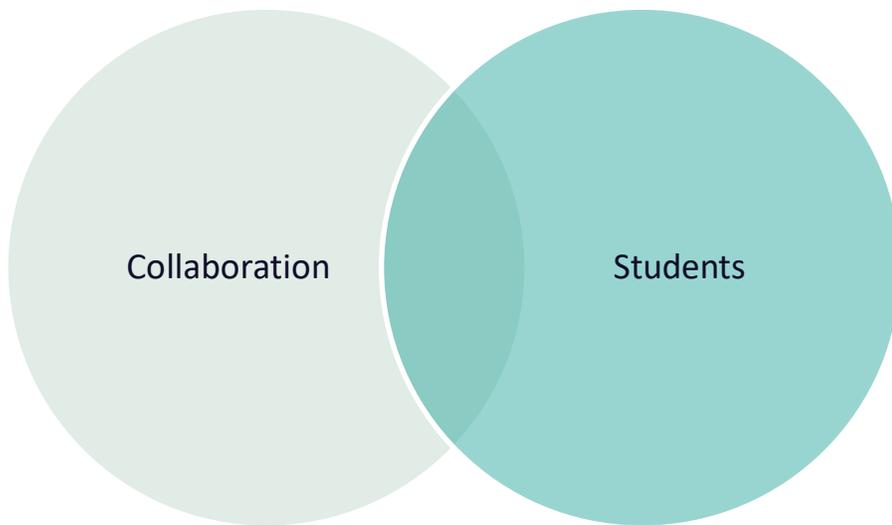
Hindrances



Participants spoke about how schools throughout the district are not equal in grade levels. For example, some schools are configured K-5, 6-8, 9 and 10 etc. These configurations can make it difficult for communication and collaboration amongst staff. As well, there appears to be a lack of communication from senior administration to schools. For example, meetings have been conducted in the past where “it was asked what we wanted or needed...and then we were virtually ignored.” Many said there “needs to be more transparency to ease tensions throughout the district.” Budget cuts have had an

impact on wellbeing. Some teachers indicated that as a result of budget cuts there are “feelings of guilt taking a day off” or that “we simply can’t do it all!” Another factor hindering wellbeing is “not being able to find the time to exercise.” The work environment is stressful and “never ends...I go home and work just keeps piling up.”

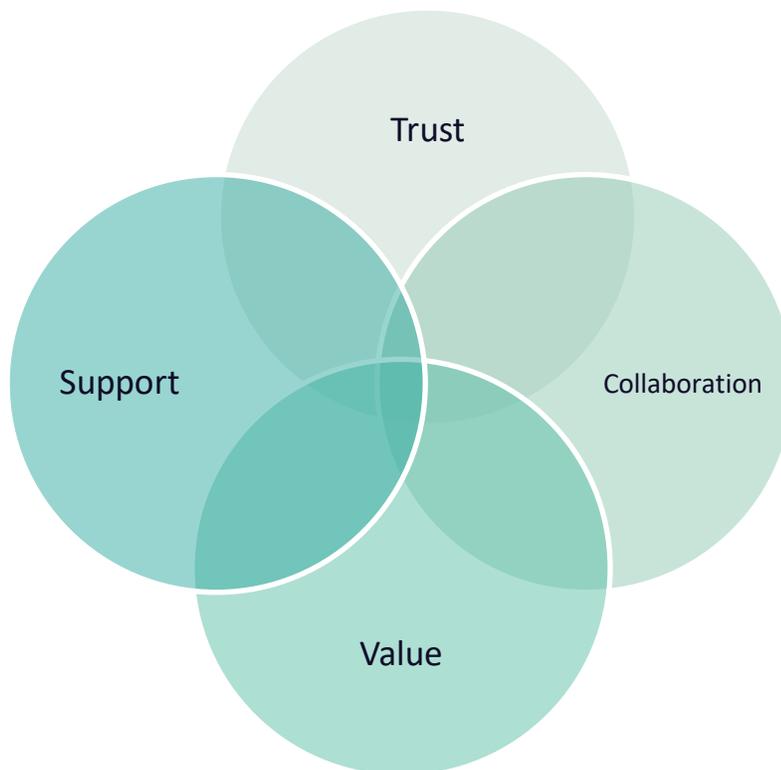
Positives



Several focus group participants spoke of the collaborative environment and support for one another within their jobs. Some itinerant teachers were in the group and several work in isolation, going from school to school. They “enjoy working with one another when we can” and also “love interacting with teachers and administrators within each school.” As well, teachers often commented how they enjoy working in a collaborative school that

supports student learning. Another positive on wellbeing are the students themselves. Several commented that “when having a bad day, the students energize us.” Despite the pressure and stress of teaching, generally it is the students who help with the wellbeing of teachers.

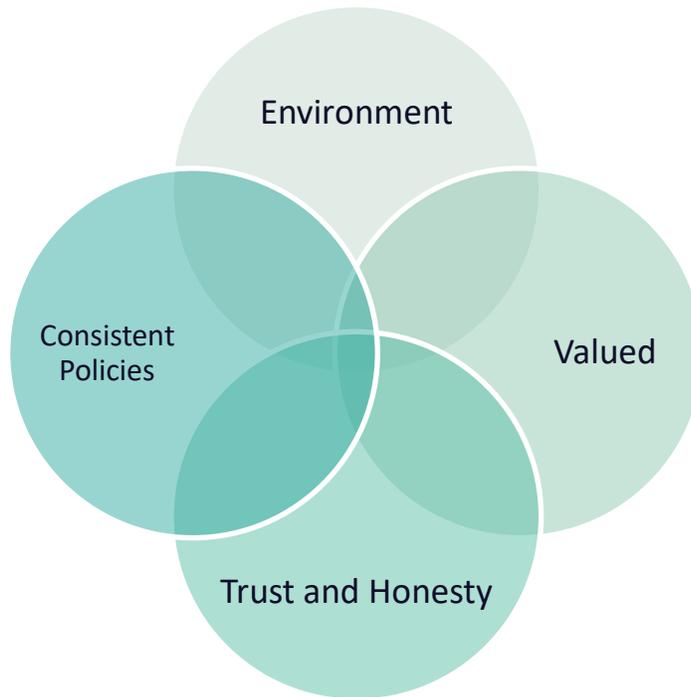
3. What about the system in which you work currently promotes or hinders your well-being?



A number of participants spoke to the feeling of having a “lack of trust and appreciation” from school district administration that hindered and impacted their wellbeing. For example, some felt that nobody in

the schools gets enough validation or appreciation for the work they do. There was a sense that there is an issue with trust within the district at all levels. As some participants noted “this [trust] is a big issue.” Along with trust, many teachers felt that district administration “kept their distance” from schools. Several teachers indicated that they “would love to see senior administration visit them in the classroom.” Other focus group participants feel that the school district is moving away from the humanistic side of education. It was mentioned that the superintendent is now called the “CEO of the School District.” All felt that the district “feels like a factory just pushing students through to keep the numbers going” and the “social/emotional side of education is not there” and this has very negative impacts on wellbeing. As well, several teachers felt they need “more support” and the “students need more supports” and yet getting support is exhausting and generally does not happen. When promoted about the kinds of support both teachers and students need, several mentioned “supports for our wellbeing.” Further discussions around this included a health and safety person for wellbeing initiatives. One teacher commented that the “weekly wellness memo does not work in the vast amount of email received.” Further there was mention of a need to have sustained wellness initiatives within the district.

4. What would you like to see happen within your school and/or district in the future to best support your well-being?



Participants suggested opportunities for the administration to connect with their classroom would have positive impacts on their wellbeing. As well, it was noted that clear lines of communication between teachers and administration need to take place. For example, a few participants noted that “job sharing and prep time need to be consistent throughout and they are not.” This has a very negative impact on their wellbeing. Further, many teachers feel that there is an underlying “sexist environment throughout the district” where males are treated better, get promoted more and have more privileges in schools. One participant called it the “old boys club.” While they did

not ask for gender equity, what they do wish for is policies that make things such as promotion, prep time, and job sharing equal throughout the district. However, what was noted was that they felt “unsafe to talk to district staff” about such things, feeling scared and in a culture of constant worry. What the focus group indicated was that they want to be “trusted and heard.” Other items that the focus group would like to see in schools to support wellbeing is to ensure schools are safe and caring places for students and staff. Some felt unsafe as a result of violent outbursts from students and felt like “nothing ever happened because of it...and district staff needs to have our backs.” Again, this stems from feeling supported and trusted.

Conclusion

Past events within SD #83 have hampered the thoughts and feelings around wellbeing of many throughout the district. However, it appears as though the district is on the cusp of change. The concept of 'balance' related to wellbeing was shown through all focus groups, with the understanding that finding balance is a lifetime project. It is ongoing. It is not a finite goal at the end of which you will have a peaceful, calm and meaningful life. As Bacharach (2015) indicates, "Balance is the process of holding something(s) steady during change." Several leadership positions within the district have been filled and many in the focus groups are "cautiously optimistic" that changes are going to happen. Change takes time and will not happen overnight. The focus group discussions and findings have identified key areas to help create a culture of wellbeing regardless of which department or place of the School District an employee is part of. Clear communication, honesty and trust, professional development around collaboration and relationships, and health and safety regarding staff and student wellness, are key items that can begin to be implemented almost immediately. Staff shortages, equity in relation to workload and hiring, and consistency in management may take time. Yet, if all stakeholders are on board and are open and trusting with one another, School district #83 could be at the forefront of an exciting and vibrant place to live, work, and be well. While each individual remains responsible for his or her own personal health,

creating the conditions in which people can reach their full potential is essential.

To overcome these challenges, here are some suggested areas to focus on while building a happy, healthy workplace culture:

- *Appreciation and Recognition*
- *Communication*
- *Respect, fairness*
- *Trust, purpose*
- *Empowerment*
- *Positive life balance*

There is strong evidence that feeling healthy and balanced drives the ability to perform at the best level possible in both our private and business lives.