School Leaders' and Other School Staff Wellbeing: What's the Master Plan?

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Defining wellbeing

- Feeling well
- Functioning well
- Well connected

Best predictor of wellbeing?

Not smoking

Healthy weight

Low consumption of alcohol

Good sleep

Physical activity

Positive Relationships

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Discover. Prevent. Cure.

Longitudinal studies…

http://www.ted.com/talks/robert_waldinger_what_makes_a_good_life_lessons_from_the_longest_study_on_happiness?language=en

Waldinger messages

- A happy childhood has very, very long-lasting effects
- But… people with difficult childhoods can make up for them in midlife
- Learning how to cope well with stress has a lifetime payoff
- Time with others protects us from the bruises of life's ups and downs

Positive relationships

148 studies - mortality data

People with stronger social relationships* have

50% increased likelihood of survival

than those with weaker relationships…

*(not just marital status)

(Holt-Lunstad et al, 2010)

Influence of poor social relationships – on risk of death...

Similar mortality risk

- smoking

- alcohol consumption

More risky than

- physical activity

- obesity

Social isolation increases risk of death by 30+% (loneliness = 15 cigarettes/day)

1) Psychological (e.g.: suicidal ideation, dementia)

2) Practical (e.g.: falls, sudden illness, health behaviours)

3) Physical ("gets under your skin" - all cause mortality, cortisol - immune function)

"Loneliness is as real as pain, thirst and hunger"

...so why focus on wellbeing?

✓ High mental wellbeing associated with:

- Better learning, creativity and productivity
- Better relationships, prosocial behaviours
- Better adoption of healthy behaviours, physical health, longevity

✓ Lower mental health conditions, improved recovery

...but wait there's more

✓ Strong evidence <u>mental health conditions are not inevitable</u> – can be prevented or delayed by focus on prevention
- Morally right to reduce suffering
- Scientifically sensible
- Economically pragmatic

Five steps to wellbeing

1. Connect
2. Be active
3. Take notice
4. Keep learning
5. Give

Covid – 'Triple squeeze'

- Rising costs
- Declining revenue
- Greater student and staff needs

Principal wellbeing

- Number of principals wanting to retire early or quit has tripled since 2019. (ACU,2020)

- 75% reported elevated stress (Cross et al, 2020)
  - Managing workload and job intensification
  - Adapting to the educational environment
  - Managing increased administration workload – staff shortages
  - Supporting safety and behavioural concerns of staff and students (and their own families)

Mental health continuum
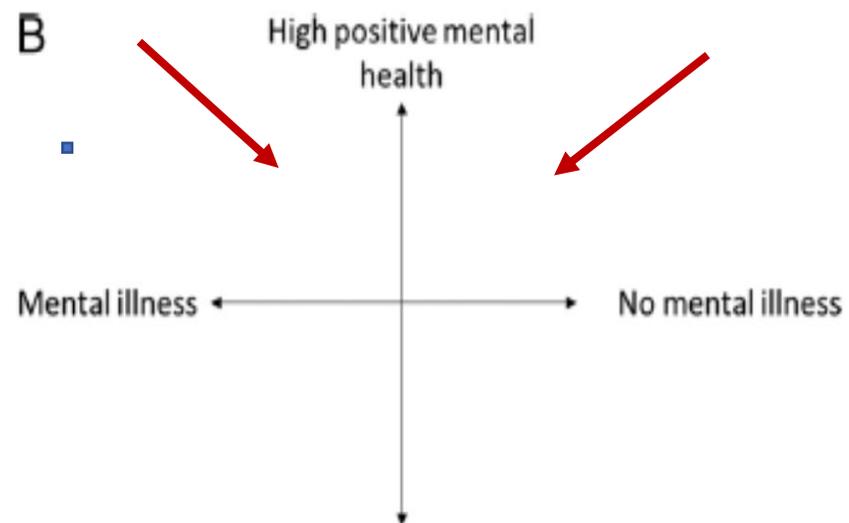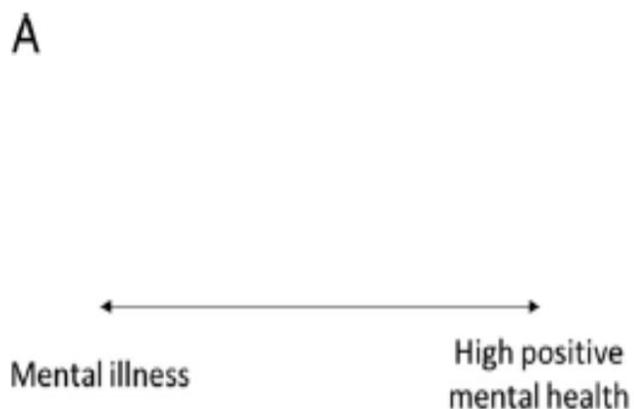
Source: Iasiello, M. van Agteren, J., & Muir-Cochrane, E.M. (2020). Mental Health and/or Mental Illness: A Scoping Review of the Evidence and Implications of the Dual-Continua Model of Mental Health, Evidence Base, 1, 1-45.

What does the evidence suggest is needed to support school executive and staff wellbeing?

ISQ | School Leaders' and Staff Wellbeing Research Report

Embedded

- School wellbeing actions - often well-intentioned and **typically focused on boosting morale**.

- Wellbeing strategies must be embedded in school culture and prioritized, funded and resourced to be successful.

Nine whole-school wellbeing actions...

1. **Wellbeing is business as usual** - built into policies, procedures and governance

2. **Visible wellbeing leadership**

3. **Staff wellbeing committee**

4. **Use evidence** – evolving health and wellbeing needs and priorities (benchmark, monitor)

Nine whole-school wellbeing actions

5. Establish a clear policy and practice **whole-school framework** for wellbeing

6. Staff voice to ensure wellbeing actions are contextualised/**tailored**

7. **Allocate time** for self-care skills and practice

8. **Embed systems** to facilitate staff support

9. **Prioritise equitable** allocation of resources

Report recommendations… Leaders

- Effective **induction, coaching and mentoring, regular (monthly) professional 'supervision'** that is sustained and authentic to build work-life balance
- Professional association connection - active role in **pastoral support**
- **Distribute leadership**
- Regular **sabbaticals** / school visits
- Paid access to qualified **counselling support for leaders**
- Access to **flexible work options**

More Report recommendations… structure

- **Strengthen** the **whole-school culture**
- **Focus on relationships** eg: environment nurtures meaningful connection
- **Tailored evidence-based actions –** contextual not off-shelf programs
- **Multi-level**
  - Organisational
  - Environmental
  - Social
  - Individual

More Report recommendations... Support

- Highly skilled admin / exec staff to **reduce admin tasks**
- Access to EAP and qualified **counselling support eg:** [Ombpoint](#) independent, and confidential space to discuss workplace issues (use of EAP <2%)
- Care and **support x point in career** e.g.: new staff, new parents, peer-to-peer support program, cross-school
- Processes to enable staff to **debrief distressing** and traumatic experiences
- **Hypercare** – staff experiencing serious personal/health issues
- Mental health first aid for staff

Example whole-school wellbeing actions

Embedded – not frivolous…

- Tracking the good
- Joint boundary setting
- Cross-school mentoring
- Social events
- Wellbeing classes / onsite preventive health checks
- Service e.g.: Hands for the Community Day - volunteering
- Recognition e.g.: "Staff Appreciation Lunch"
- Special events: e.g.: Department picnic baskets, retreats
- Wellbeing needs matched to different stages of careers

To improve your staff wellbeing masterplan what do you think needs to be:

- Maintained (what's gold)?
- Stopped (what's not working)?
- Enhanced (what promising)?

- Started (what's missing)?