

CREATING A CULTURE AND CLIMATE

Creating a Culture and Climate of Wellness for School Employees



An organization's **culture** represents the collective values, beliefs, and principles of its employees, and it influences how employees interact and approach work. A variety of factors may influence culture, including history, organizational purpose, type of employees, leadership style, national culture, etc. Culture includes an organization's vision, values, norms, systems, assumptions, environment, location, beliefs, and habits.¹

An organization's **climate** is recurring patterns of employee behavior, attitudes, and feelings that characterize work life in an organization. Climate is created by employees' shared perceptions of the psychological impact of their work environment on their own personal well-being.²

This fact sheet will:

- Explain why culture and climate are important for school employee wellness.
- Outline the characteristics of a wellness culture (what it looks like).
- Provide resources for developing an employee wellness policy.
- Provide a checklist to assess your school's or district's progress toward creating a culture and climate of wellness.
- Outline the importance of addressing the emotional well-being of school employees.

The Importance of Culture and Climate in School Employee Wellness

A culture of wellness can be defined as a workplace that places value on and is conducive to employee health and well-being.³ While a healthy company culture includes encouraging the use of facilities and programs to support health, a culture of wellness extends beyond individual programs by incorporating the value of employee wellness into the overall mission and purpose of an organization.⁴ Research shows that the integration of employee wellness into an organization's culture is one of the five key elements of a comprehensive wellness program.⁵ Establishing a workplace culture that values and prioritizes employee wellness and resilience is important to the overall success of school employee wellness and, ultimately, students' education.



Organizational values impact the work climate, well-being of its employees, and in cases of schools, also affect the well-being and success of students. Wellness should be an integral part of the way a school operates, thinks, and acts. This integration requires sustained

effort on several fronts. It involves leaders:

- Practicing healthy behaviors.
- Implementing health-promoting policies.

- Allocating sufficient resources for programs to be sustained.
- Providing support to ensure safe and healthy environments.
- Offering access and opportunities for employees to engage in a variety of wellness efforts.
- Encouraging all employees to participate in sustainable wellness efforts.

Effective employee wellness programs are embedded in an organization's culture, benefit design, compensation practices, disability policies, and physical spaces. See the [*Wellness Culture and Climate Checklist*](#) for more ways to create a culture and climate of wellness.

School Employee Wellness Policies

The CDC describes a wellness policy as “a written document that guides a local educational agency’s or school district’s efforts to create supportive school nutrition and physical activity environments.”⁶ A key to developing a culture and climate of wellness is ensuring the unique needs of each school employee are met within the district/school wellness policies. Many schools have policies on students’ wellness; however, very few address school employee wellness. Implementing a school employee wellness policy is sustainable and builds employee wellness into the fabric of the organization. It shows that employee wellness is *valued!*

SCHOOLS ARE SET-UP FOR WELLNESS!



Most schools have the following:

ACCESS to fitness facilities, gymnasiums, sports courts, outdoor and indoor tracks, exercise equipment, and weight training equipment. Even though they are used mostly by students, these facilities can be made available to school employees.

IN-SERVICE training, mandatory meetings at both the school and district level, summer training, and very strong

education programs for staff. Compared to other worksites, schools spend a lot of time and money teaching and training their employees. Educational training is just part of the education culture. Effective school wellness efforts make wellness training and healthy living integrated parts of professional development.



NURSES, health educators, nutrition/food service experts, and physical education teachers all have specialized training in topics related to wellness and should be part of employee wellness efforts.



Resources for developing a school employee wellness policy include:

- [The Alliance for a Healthier Generation Model School Wellness Policy](#), accessed by creating an account [here](#).
- [Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child Framework](#).
- [Putting Local School Wellness Policies into Action: Stories from School Districts and Schools](#).
- [CDC's Virtual Healthy Schools](#).
- [Healthy School, Healthy Staff, Healthy Students: A Guide to Improving School Employee Wellness](#).
- [Wellness Culture and Climate Checklist](#).
- [→ Taking Action to Improve School Employee Wellness](#).

Wellness Culture and Climate Checklist

To create a culture and climate of wellness at your school, school employee wellness needs to be integrated everywhere! Use the following checklist to assess your district's or school's progress. Once complete, discuss the results of the checklist with your district's or school's wellness committee or team and with your school leadership.

Wellness Culture and Climate Checklist			
(Y = YES, N = NO, IP = In progress)			
	Y	N	IP
Our mission and values reflect input from <i>all</i> school employees.			
School employee wellness is a key component of the district/school strategic plan.			
Creating an inclusive culture and climate for school employee wellness is a strategic priority.			
The annual budget dedicates funds to school employee wellness.			
Most staff and leadership meetings incorporate and discuss school employee wellness (e.g., weekly/monthly meetings and professional development).			
Developing the social-emotional competence of school employees is a priority.			
A two-way communication system (between the school/district and employees) exists and is valued, supported, encouraged, and transparent.			
School leadership demonstrates a commitment to school employee wellness through regular communications about the importance of health and wellness.			
A dedicated staff person is paid (either full-time or part-time) to coordinate employee wellness.			
An employee wellness committee or team exists.			
Needs assessments are conducted frequently with employees to update employee wellness efforts and policies.			
Policies and practices to ensure the health, safety, and well-being of employees are reviewed regularly.			
Employee wellness plans are tailored to the unique needs of employees and involve employees in the design and development of the plan.			
Employees are encouraged to adopt healthy lifestyles.			
Facilities are available to support employee wellness efforts (e.g., fitness facilities, healthy vending options, breakroom).			
Employees are educated about preventive services and the benefits covered by their health insurance plan (more than just promotional materials).			
External partners (e.g., the community, health insurance companies, unions) support school employee wellness efforts. (See → Engaging Key Partners for School Employee Wellness .)			

→ Visit the document with this title in this series of fact sheets.

The Missing Link—Adult Social-Emotional Competence and Employee Wellness

School employees are charged with educating our youth, positively supporting their development, and keeping them safe. Supporting school employees—helping them manage their overall wellness, including social and emotional competence—is critical to ensure they are healthy and able to fulfill the demands of their jobs. (See [Taking Action to Improve School Employee Wellness: Social-Emotional Health and Stress](#) for adult social-emotional activity ideas.)

Providing all school employees with professional development that focuses on building their own social-emotional skills positively affects the wellness culture and climate of schools. This is in addition to professional development that teaches adults how to build skills in children. Promoting student well-being starts with adults. Adults need skills so they can positively model prosocial behaviors, label emotions, and demonstrate empathy, positive relationships, social awareness, and self-awareness for students. When schools cultivate the social and emotional competence and capacity of the adults in the building, employees feel supported and empowered, can collaborate effectively, and build relational trust.

Studies have found that adults who can recognize, understand, label, express, and regulate their own emotions

- Are less likely to report burnout.⁸
- Have higher levels of relational trust with their peers at work, which lays a foundation for productive collaboration.⁹
- Improve their own well-being and the social, emotional, and academic development of students.¹⁰
- Demonstrate higher levels of patience and empathy, encourage healthy communication, and create safe learning environments.¹¹
- Effectively teach and model social-emotional competence for their students.¹²
- Build and maintain stronger relationships with their students, which leads to improved classroom management and fewer disciplinary problems.¹³
- Positively contribute to the school's overall climate.¹⁴
- Report greater principal support, higher job satisfaction, and a sense of personal accomplishment.¹⁵

¹Charles Glisson, "The Role of Organizational Culture and Climate in Innovation and Effectiveness," *Human Service Organizational Management and Leadership* 39, no. 4 (September 2015): 245–250, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23303131.2015.1087770>.

²Glisson, "The Role of Organizational Culture," 245–250.

³American Hospital Association, *A Call to Action: Creating a Culture of Health* (Chicago: American Hospital Association, January 2011), <https://www.aha.org/system/files/2018-02/call-to-action-creating-a-culture-of-health-2011.pdf>.

⁴Ron Z. Goetzel and Ronald J. Ozminkowski, "The Health and Cost of Benefits of Work Site Health-Promotion Programs," *Annual Review of Public Health* 29 (April 2008): 303–323, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.publhealth.29.020907.090930>.

⁵Ron Z. Goetzel et al., "Promising Practices in Employer Health and Productivity Management Efforts: Findings from a Benchmark Study," *Journal of Occupational & Environmental Medicine* 49, no. 2. (February 2007): 111–130, <https://doi.org/10.1097/JOM.0b013e31802ec6a3>.

⁶"Local School Wellness Policy," CDC Healthy Schools, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, last modified August 4, 2022, <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/nutrition/wellness.htm>.



⁷“What Is Social and Emotional Learning?,” Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), accessed October 26, 2022, <https://schoolguide.casel.org/what-is-sel/what-is-sel/>.

⁸“Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence,” Yale School of Medicine, accessed October 26, 2022, <https://medicine.yale.edu/childstudy/services/community-and-schools-programs/center-for-emotional-intelligence/>.

⁹Barbara Schneider, “Trust in Schools: A Core Resource for School Reform,” *ASCD*, vol. 60, no. 6, March 1, 2003, <https://www.ascd.org/el/articles/trust-in-schools-a-core-resource-for-school-reform>.

¹⁰Nick Woolf, “A Comprehensive Guide to Adult SEL,” *Panorama Education* (blog), accessed October 26, 2022, <https://www.panoramaed.com/blog/comprehensive-guide-adult-sel>.

¹¹Raquel Palomera, Pablo Fernández-Berrocal, and Marc A. Brackett, “Emotional Intelligence as a Basic Competency in Pre-Service Teacher Training: Some Evidence,” *Electronic Journal of Research in Educational Psychology* 6, no. 15 (September 2008): 437–454, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/230887042_Emotional_intelligence_as_a_basic_competency_in_pre-service_teacher_training_Some_evidence.

¹²Palomera, Fernandez-Berrocal, and Brackett, “Emotional Intelligence,” 437–454.

¹³Patricia A. Jennings and Mark T. Greenberg, “The Prosocial Classroom: Teacher Social and Emotional Competence in Relation to Student and Classroom Outcomes,” *Review of Educational Research* 79, no. 1 (March 2009): 491–525, <https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543083256>.

¹⁴Michael DiPaola and Megan Tschannen-Moran, “Organizational Citizenship Behavior in Schools and Its Relationship to School Climate,” *Journal of School Leadership* 11, no. 5 (September 2001): 424–447, <https://doi.org/10.1177/105268460101100503>.

¹⁵Mark T. Greenberg, Joshua L. Brown, and Rachel Abenavoli, *Teacher Stress and Health: Effects on Teachers, Students, and Schools*, Edna Bennett Pierce Prevention Research Center, Pennsylvania State University, September 2016, <https://www.prevention.psu.edu/uploads/files/rwjf430428-TeacherStress.pdf>.

