Empathy & Wellbeing for Educators
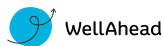
Wasan Island, July 19-22 2018

Summary Report

About the organizers

McConnell Foundation & WellAhead:

The McConnell Foundation is a pan-Canadian foundation that works toward building a society that is inclusive, reconciled, sustainable and resilient—and that advances progress toward the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

WellAhead is McConnell's strategic initiative that aims to improve child and youth mental health by integrating social and emotional wellbeing into K-12 education.

Breuninger Foundation:

The Breuninger Foundation was established in 1968 by employer Heinz Breuninger and his daughter, Dr Helga Breuninger. They shared the conviction that interaction between the general public and political leaders is crucial when tackling social problems – and that a formative role in this process should be played by foundations. Since 1980, the foundation has been managed by Helga Breuninger. With her innovative mindset, focus on reaching solutions and practical approach to cooperation, she is an embodiment of the philosophy behind the Breuninger Foundation.

About Wasan Island:

Wasan Island is situated on Lake Rosseau in the heart of the Muskoka Lakes, Ontario, Canada. It is privately owned by the German-based Breuninger Foundation and operated in collaboration with the McConnell Foundation, the BMW Foundation, Community Foundations of Canada and the Robert Bosch Stiftung.

Participant List

First name	Last name	Organization
Shandy	Reed	Alberta School Employee Benefit Plan
Helga	Breuninger	Breuninger Foundation
Willie	Schley	Breuninger Foundation
Laurie	Birnie	Coquitlam School District
Kerri	Murray	Ever Active Schools
Lisa	Baylis	Greater Victoria School District
Paul	McArthur	McConnell Foundation
Mali	Bain	McConnell Foundation
Jim	Hughes	McConnell Foundation
Stephen	Huddart	McConnell Foundation
Lyn	Baptist	McConnell Foundation
Jill	Baptist	McConnell Foundation
Byron	Robbie	Mental Wellbeing Coach, BC
Charlie	Naylor	Mental Wellbeing Coach, BC
Gail	Lalonde	Thames Valley District School Board
Carol	Kent	Trillium Lakelands District School Board
Christine	Moore	Trillium Lakelands District School Board
Trent	Willett	Trillium Lakelands District School Board
Daryl	Underwood	Trillium Lakelands District School Board
Kim	Williams	Trillium Lakelands District School Board
Sabre	Cherkowski	UBC Okanagan
Nancy	Reynolds	WellAhead Advisor

Introduction

On July 19-22, the Breuninger and McConnell Foundations partnered to host a gathering focused on empathy and wellbeing for K-12 educators. The gathering took place over three days on Wasan Island in Lake Rosseau, Ontario.

The objectives of the gathering were to:

- Share and hear insights from work to date around teacher & school staff wellbeing
- Strengthen connections between thought partners and thought leaders working on teacher and school staff wellbeing across Canada and globally
- Contribute to the development of McConnell's approach to supporting teacher & school staff wellbeing

Our group

We were fortunate to have a passionate group of teachers, principals, leaders, researchers and support organizations from across the globe attend the gathering.

What needs to shift?

Throughout the gathering, some key needs emerged regarding what needs to shift for teacher and school staff wellbeing to be consistently supported in Canadian schools. Here is what our participants suggested:

Needs

- **Walking the talk:** wellbeing has been identified as a priority but has not been followed by significant investment.

- **Culture change:** culture is about people - wellbeing needs to be seen by all as critical and foundational to learning.

- **Structural change:** current hierarchies do not allow the potential of all students to be realised, and do not serve our best interests as a system.

- **Wellbeing agency:** Putting the onus on individual teacher and staff is not helpful. We need to shift to understanding wellbeing as the responsibility of both the system and the individual.

- **Leadership:** How do we train principals and system leaders to lead cultures of wellbeing?

Several burning questions related to the issue surfaced from our discussion

We asked participants "What 'burning question' would you like to engage with by the end of these few days?"

What we heard

- How do we move beyond only promoting self-care strategies for staff to recognizing the broader contexts of work and life?

- How do we make it safe from the humanistic perspective to embrace vulnerability in leadership?

- How can we move from self-care as a time limited event in our day (45 min yoga class) to self-care as a lifestyle?

- How do we navigate our work within the competing interests and 'mine fields' that exist in the current system?

- How do we shift the focus on student wellbeing to be inclusive of the adults in the building and system (without this feeling like an add-on)?

- How can we shift assessment practices to be more holistic AND reduce the burden and workload on teachers?

- How can we celebrate a ritual of letting something go before we add something new?

Magic Wands

Participants were asked "If you had a magic wand and could do 1 thing to improve teacher and school staff wellbeing right now, it would be…

The Immunity Wand
Makes the education system immune to the political and budgetary cycles. This could encourage continuity and progress on the agenda.

The Intention Wand
Sets a collective intention to see the opportunity for change, and invest time and resources in teacher and staff wellbeing.

The Abundance Wand
Supports educators at all levels to carry an abundance mindset and to not let fear and financial limitations drive our decision-making.

The Deep Acceptance Wand
Celebrates the complexity of of our culture and politics around education, and acknowledges the givens of life.

The Time Wand
Adds hours into the day so we can get more done.

The Public Buy-in Wand
Supports all members of the public to respect and value the role of educators and the education system in advancing community-wide wellbeing.

The Shape Shifting Wand
Transforms judging into enjoying diversity.

The Mindset Wand
Transforms wellbeing from an add-on to a lens on all of our work in education.

The Self-Care Wand
Creates space and time for deep and reflection and restoration of every adult in the school system.

Naming the Moment

Participants were asked "what are current trends and developments locally, nationally and internationally that are important context to note"

Level of the System	Trends
International	Increased polarization in politics, climate change, diversity of cultures in the classroom, shift to learning as process rather than content, role of technology in personal and professional lives, increased recognition of student mental health need, decline in reach and power of religious institutions, urbanization, increased impact of chronic disease, extended lifespans, precarity/changing nature of work
National	Reconciliation, cultural disconnection, cuts to arts and electives
Communities	Crisis in care of children, trauma and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)
Classrooms	Teachers increasingly recognized as facilitators of learning, not experts, increased role of education/schools in students' lives
Students	Later onset of maturity, delayed social and emotional development

Appreciative Inquiry

Participants were asked "What does it look like when systems & leaders have shifted the paradigm to value and support teacher and staff wellbeing?"

Open Discourse
Safe spaces for conflict resolution and discussion are nurtured among educators and admin.

Flourishing in the Workplace
Members of school communities are regularly asking themselves "Am I seen, am I learning and growing in my profession, am I contributing my strengths, am I getting feedback?"

Openness to Compromise
Diverging opinions are respected, and different factions have willingness to compromise for the collective good.

Community Buy-in
Broad community support exists for teacher and staff wellbeing, and there is no stigma for taking time for self-care when it's needed.

Creating Opportunities for Connection
There are staff meetings over food, physical spaces (like staff rooms) designed for connection.

Organizational Conditions for Wellbeing
Trustees, leadership believe wellbeing is a priority and act on it. Policies in place to support staff wellbeing. Staff feel sense of autonomy in their roles.

The Costs and Benefits of Change

Our group reflected on the question: "What are the costs and benefits of system change towards an education system that values wellbeing, vs. the status quo we experience today?"

TEACHERS

	Costs	Benefits
Status Quo	- Perceived liability and risk - Burnout and stress - Teacher attrition - Lower income - Job retraining (if you drop out of profession) - Not feeling valued by public - Early career instability (less desirable roles, locations, isolation in rural/new communities) - Compassion fatigue (put students first always) - Carry expectation as new teacher that you will burnout - Exhaustion - Being undervalued not seen	- Feeling of safety (supports are there if you burn out)... - Pension/benefits - Comfort with current system - Suitability / predictability - Time off/ family time alignment - Teacher as experts - Altruistic nature of work (making an impact on students) - Maintain authority - Identify as part of teacher collective - Part of union "Problem is not me, it is my students"
Change	- Suspicion it won't last - Change fatigue - Uncertainty/ instability leads to anxiety - Fear of loss - Have I been doing this wrong the whole time? Guilt, shame. - Exhausting to completely change approach - Need to converse with colleagues in a different paradigm - A project... Which means more work "Constantly striving" - Wellness as surveillance of teacher attendance	- Improved wellbeing - Improved satisfaction with results of work (students succeed) - Improved student wellbeing, success - Increased autonomy - Being an agent of change - Connected with community of like minds in cohort of change makers - Stronger relationships with principals

PRINCIPALS/ SUPERINTENDENTS

	Costs	Benefits
Status Quo	- Isolating, lack of connection with peers - Union job action - Us vs them: teachers vs principals separation "You're management but it's not your fault" - Isolation	Support seeing teachers thrive
Change	- Parent response/ frustration/ questions - Risk of being 'out on a limb' - Takes work	- Stronger relationships between administration and teachers - Building relationships across the system - Wellbeing is a safe area for change

	Costs	Benefits
Status Quo	• Gap between teacher education and 'how it is in schools' • Competition	• New educators don't have to work hard for change • Can still believe in their illusions • Maintain autonomy and identify as change-makers • Not taking a risk
Change	• More work • Taking a risk • Fear of inequality • Lose the competition • It may not work: risk of failure	• Being the change, inspiration/ motivation • Leaders in education learning model • Seeing ripple effects

UNIONS

	Costs	Benefits
Status Quo	• Cost of benefits, legal hearings, staffing, release time for disputes, staffing • Poor health, social outcomes for membership	• Consistency, predictability • Strong role for unions to play
Change	• Identity crisis - redefining role of union (e.g. from bargaining to professional learning focus)	• Decreased cost of benefits • Increased ability to focus on constructive work • (rather than reactive work) • Increased health and wellbeing of membership • Decreased conflict with other stakeholders (improved relationships, improved context of work)

What's Holding this Issue in Place?

Our dialogue throughout our time together touched on many elements that contribute (either positively or negatively) to teacher and staff wellbeing. We've mapped these on to the 'Systems Thinking Iceberg' model below to illustrate the different layers of thinking about the issue.

Events
- Educator stress/burnout
- Student stress
- Students arrive at school unregulated, unready to learn

Patterns/trends
- Teachers are burning out and leaving the profession
- Lack of student and educator wellbeing
- Increasing complexity of student needs, increased cost to meet them
- Educator-student dialogues contribute to stress and negative feelings
- Pilots in education don't last and contribute to workload
- Inconsistency in professional learning for educators in different roles
- Schools, school partners don't have common language

Structures
- Educator and admin roles are isolating
- New teachers teach a full-time workload with limited mentorship opportunities
- Collaboration between school wellbeing stakeholders is not often in organizational mandate
- Educator wellbeing is seen as responsibility of "employer"/benefits/insurance
- School days and year based on outdated societal context

Mindsets
- Challenging moments as "misbehaviour" rather than "unmet needs"
- Teachers as workers completing a professional task (rather than collaborators whose practice is enriched by collaboration)
- Public perception that "Educators have cushy jobs with lots of vacation time"
- Teacher preparation as "pre-service training" (rather than a process of mentorship/lifelong learning)
- Tendency to push for "change" (rather than create conditions to develop/evolve a new mindset)
- Schools and learning as separate from communities

Developing Prototypes for Change

Towards the end of our time together, participants were asked to spend a short period of time in groups identifying potential areas for action. These ideas were not meant to be implemented as-is, rather they were intended to spark insight, creativity, and crystallize our understanding of the types of issues we need to pay attention to in supporting teacher and staff wellbeing.

What if we were to try: A Cohort-based Learning Framework

A cohort-based learning framework would be an inquiry-based learning program for both pre-service and in-service educators. The cohort would aim to foster mentorship and community. This approach would be funded and occur within teachers' regular professional learning time.

Addresses patterns/structures/mindsets by working toward:
- Building a community-based approach so that educators can be seen and heard by their peers and community
- Strengthened relationships among educators

What if we were to try: A Networking Collaborative

A cross-sector networking collaborative would connect partners focused on wellbeing in K-12 education. Partners would take advantage of in-person time to share what they do, share resources, and discuss synergies in their work.

Addresses patterns/structures/mindsets by working toward:
- Better collaborative relationships between schools and school health partners
- Decreased overlap/competition, increased synergies and collective impact
- Common language in approaching health in schools

What if we were to try: intus³ Canada

A series of very short videos supported by a facilitated experience would show archetypes of interaction in school, and guide students and educators to critically reflect and 'let go' of unhelpful ways they approach situations in the school. Having started in Germany, intus3 would continue to translate its approach into the context of education in Canada.

Addresses patterns/structures/mindsets by working toward:
- Reduced unproductive behaviours and patterns in classroom
- Improved culture/ climate of schools
- Improved student and educator wellbeing

What if we were to try: A School Protocalendar

The School Protocalendar would provide a platform for prototyping innovations in how the school calendar works throughout the year. A call for proposals would be put out to school communities who would like to try a new approach to the school calendar (i.e. hours in a day, way we organize the school year), and schools would propose different calendars.

Addresses patterns/structures/mindsets by working toward:
- Improved learning retention for students and teachers
- Reduction in stigma associated with teachers getting "the whole summer off"

What if we were to try: Principal Video Challenge

A principal produces a video "challenge" targeted at other principals across Canada to meet with their staff to discuss what makes them flourish in their roles. A central platform would provide the space for principals access tools and resources, upload their own, and upload their videos.

Addresses patterns/structures/mindsets by working toward:
- Increased cohesion and wellbeing of staff teams in schools

What if we were to try: Teacher and Staff Wellbeing Issue Framing

We could conduct research on how to best frame the issue of teacher and school staff wellbeing (and its relationship to student wellbeing and success), and test framing approaches to successfully communicate the context of the issue.

Addresses patterns/structures/mindsets by working toward:
- Increased understanding of the perspectives of stakeholders
- Effective narratives for moving forward awareness and progress on improving teacher and staff wellbeing
- Deepened understanding of 'what's beneath the iceberg' of teacher & staff wellbeing

When we reflect on all of our learnings from these three days, a few core insights emerge:

Framing the Issue Matters:

Our current cultural understandings (and misunderstandings) about teachers prevent us from being able to scale approaches that enhance teacher and staff wellbeing

Solutions need to go beyond individual teachers and staff:

Supporting wellbeing in education needs to become a system (principal/district leadership) priority, not just the responsibility of individual teachers and staff.

Individual educators can have system-level ripple effects:

Whether through action within one school, leadership at a district/regional level, or innovative approaches to change: educators can find ways, within their own context, to build a culture that supports teacher and staff wellbeing.

Next steps

In three days on Wasan Island, we took the time to "go slow", reflect, and listen deeply to each other. We each left with a deeper undertanding of the issues, opportunities, and potential for each of us to take action in support of educator wellbeing. Some activities resulting from the convening were discussed:

1 WellAhead/ McConnell will take the insights generated from the gathering into consideration as they develop their strategy around teacher and school staff wellbeing

2 Intus will continue to work with Ontario partners in expanding their approach. This may include a formal research/evaluation strategy for the 2018-19 school year.

3 McConnell and Breuninger will continue to explore partnership and synergies internationally to amplify impact. One opportunity may be co-hosting a follow-up gathering on Wasan Island in Spring/Summer 2019.

These are the initial ripples we can begin to see from the gift of these few days. We look forward to hearing from participants and our broader community about the ways that these insights, and your own continuing dialogue, experimentation, and learning shaper your understanding of educator wellbeing in Canada. Our journey has just begun...